

## **CUSTOMER, COMMUNITY & PARTNERSHIP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Customer, Community & Partnership Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 5 December 2016 at 6.00pm in Meeting Room G4, Addenbrook House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT 7**

**Present:** Councillors J Ashford, N England (Chair), L Murray (part), S J Reynolds, P Scott, J Seymour, B Tillotson. Co-optees P Doherty and D Johnson.

**Also Present:** A Astley, Assistant Director Customer & Neighbourhood Services (CCPSC-18, 19); D Clayton, Research & Intelligence Officer (CCPSC-18); T Guest, Housing, Nuplace & Commercial Services Delivery Manager (CCPSC-17); S Hollins, Group Manager Engineering Services (CCPSC-19); S Jones, Scrutiny Officer; F Mercer, Assistant Director Commercial Services (CCPSC-17); N Minshall, Public Protection Service Delivery Manager (CCPSC-18).

#### **CCPSC-14 Apologies for Absence**

Cllr K Guy

#### **CCPSC-15 Declarations of Interest**

None

#### **CCPSC-16 Minutes**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meetings of the Customer, Community & Partnership Scrutiny Committee held on 4 October 2016 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

#### **CCPSC-17 Housing and Homelessness**

The Chair welcomed everyone and invited introductions. The item had been brought to the Committee following suggestions put forward for the work programme. A report had been requested to update the Committee on the current position.

A report had been circulated as Appendix B and at the invitation of the Chair officers highlighted the following key points:

- Housing and homelessness had recently moved under the Assistant Director for Commercial Services as part of a restructure
- The Council had statutory duties to provide help and temporary accommodation to eligible homeless households in priority need, to provide advice and guidance to all and to prevent homelessness where possible.
- The Housing Options team provided advice and guidance which could be accessed online or face-to-face from an advisor at First Point at Southwater One.
- A telephone triage system was used to assess needs. The first focus was on prevention to help people stay in their home, such as work with landlords or

mediation with families, or where this was not possible to find the best solution for the person. Non-statutory homeless were signposted to partners.

- Work with partners was key. The report highlighted the range of provision offered by voluntary providers. The team also worked with the four main social housing providers and the private rented sector via the landlord accreditation scheme. There were links into Extra Care and sheltered housing including supported accommodation for young people.
- Additional support was provided to specific vulnerable groups: 16-17 year olds, care leavers, people released from prison and people being discharged from hospital. The Emergency Duty Team provided out of hours help and information was shared by Housing Options to help them respond better. KIP and Maninplace provided emergency accommodation.
- Data on homeless applications / outcomes, enquiries, general information and reasons for homelessness was provided for 2015/16 and 2016/17 year to date.
- Looking ahead the Homelessness Strategy was due to be renewed by the end of March 2017 to set the direction for the next three years.
- The Homelessness Reduction Bill was expected amongst other things to change the timescale for working with priority homeless clients from within 28 days of notice to quit to 56 days which would enable earlier prevention work.
- The Landlord Accreditation package was being reviewed to encourage more landlords to join the scheme to help the Council discharge its duties into the private rented sector where there was a greater turnover of properties. The proposed new scheme was set out in Appendix A of the report.

Further information was then provided in response to questions:

- There was a question about the links between Housing Options and the probation service. A member cited a case of an offender being returned to prison because they did not have an address for the court to discharge them back home, which caused some concern with Members. Officers replied that anyone could contact Housing Options for advice and there were meetings with the probation service, CRC and voluntary providers to plan accommodation for prison releases but they would contact the probation service to ensure there were links back into the court system.
- In relation to an article in the Shropshire Star about the number of homeless people in Telford and Wrekin compared to other areas, members were informed that anyone making an application would come onto the register and be recorded as homeless but the numbers would include people who were intentionally homeless or later found not homeless. What mattered more was what was behind the numbers, how people were helped and how those in priority need were supported and placed in temporary accommodation.
- With regard to the use of B&B as temporary accommodation, Members were assured that B&B had not been used for a long time.
- Efforts continued to engage with the Wrekin Landlords Association and encourage the landlords to join the accreditation scheme. The WHA had been resistant and officers were trying to get the message across that the Council was

trying to help, not to interfere, and a few of the landlords had started to come on board. The aim of revising the accreditation scheme was to give landlords more incentives to join and there had been some positive feedback from some members of the WHA. Officers would welcome ideas from scrutiny on the proposals.

- Partnership working was good, including with KIP, Maninplace and STAY. The YMCA were involved with partners.
- A Member asked whether there were many applicants who met the criteria for priority need but did not have a local connection. Officers replied that there were some, for example prison releases, but all local authorities had to provide statutory services and cases would be referred to the relevant authority.
- A Member asked whether current levels of service could continue if funding was cut further. Officers replied that capacity had been stretched as funding had reduced and local authorities had taken on more responsibilities. Statutory duties would be prioritised for core funding but a lot more could be done and they would look for external funding to provide additional services. Bids had been submitted for Innovation / Trailblazer funding and the outcome should be known by Christmas. The bids would fund additional work with partners in key areas e.g.:
  - 24 hour access to shelter for rough sleepers
  - Enhanced triage and prevention work. Government research had identified early triggers which could increase the risk of homelessness later in life. The funding would support earlier prevention work, for example training partners to work with children and young people in schools at key trigger points. There would be an holistic approach – for example using mentors or life coaches - which would look at the wellbeing of the young person, help to raise their aspirations and help them see that they had choices in life.

The Assistant Director said that the team were passionate about helping people and did an excellent job but there was always more that could be done with additional funding.

- There were various comments about rough sleepers who refuse help. Officers replied that the funding bid included support for a peer mentoring group – rough sleepers may relate better to someone who had been in their situation rather than agency workers. They would keep asking people if they wanted help so if their circumstances changed there would be a better chance of bringing services together to help them.
- A Member asked how many 16-17 year olds were currently in temporary accommodation. There were currently three living in a hostel. The numbers fluctuated and there was usually an upturn after Christmas caused by family breakdowns. The trend in the number of 16-17 year old homeless had been an issue in the past.
- The Chair wanted to know how confident the voluntary providers were that they would be able to meet needs this winter. Voluntary providers had increased capacity but were still stretched. If there were no spare beds they would provide shelter, a chair and blankets so that people were not sleeping out. If the bid was

successful it would bring additional funding for accommodation for rough sleepers. Telford and Wrekin was fortunate in having provision for rough sleepers but there was less provision in Shropshire which put more demand on local services as people got to know where to go. In terms of how the Council and voluntary partners were working with Shropshire, a good relationship had been developed through work on empty properties and Maninplace were looking at potential premises in Shropshire subject to funding. Rough sleepers tended to be a transient population but they were trying to build up relationships and links.

- A member commended the worthwhile work of the team and suggested that more should be done to raise awareness about the work that was being done. The Assistant Director welcomed the suggestion and case studies could be used to showcase successes.
- A member recognised the good work of the Telford Christian Council in helping to establish strong partnership working in Telford.

When there were no further questions the Chair sought views from Members and it was agreed that:

- Members were assured by the work reflected in the report and pleased by what they had heard.
- That the Committee would like to comment on the draft Homelessness Strategy at a future meeting. Officers said they would also welcome comments on the Landlord Accreditation proposals.
- The Chair requested data for homelessness data for the last 5 years

### **CCPSC-18 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)**

The Chair reminded members that a suggestion had been put forward for scrutiny to look at the Council's approach to enforcement and HMOs had been suggested as a focus for the work which had been agreed by the Committee to link into work on housing and homelessness. Officers were invited to introduce themselves and present on the topic. The following information was provided:

- Research had been carried out to understand the location of HMOs across the borough, any differences between licensed and unlicensed HMOs and their impact on neighbourhoods and demand for services.
- Current legislation required 3 storey HMOs with five + people to be licensed.
- There were 59 licensed HMOs in the borough. Research had identified a further 410 properties which appeared to be in use, or used previously, as HMOs giving a total of 469 of which 435 were currently being used as HMOs. This equated to approximately 0.6% of properties in the borough.
- Maps were presented to show the location and pattern of dispersal of each type of HMO across five cluster areas. The West showed concentrations around Hadley and Leegomery, Haygate, College and Watling Street. The East had a fairly dispersed pattern with concentrations around Donnington, Oakengates and Ketley Bank. In Newport, HMOs were concentrated around the high street. The Central area showed clusters in Brookside, the Nedge, Hollinswood, Malinslee

and Dawley Bank. In the South there were concentrations in Woodside and Sutton Hill and a scattering around Madeley.

- A breakdown of HMOs by Ward showed the highest numbers in Brookside (61), Madeley & Sutton Hill (61) and The Nedge (65).
- A breakdown by parish showed Madeley had the most (109) followed by Stirchley and Brookside (76) and Hollinswood and Randlay (50).
- There were not many HMOs in rural areas.
- The next step was to understand the impact of HMOs and if there was a correlation with environmental crime. An exercise had been carried out to plot the location of fly tipped domestic items against the location of HMOs. The West area showed a close correlation of fly tips and HMOs in Hadley and Leegomery and around Wellington and College. The East showed a correlation in Donnington but less of a relationship elsewhere. Newport showed little relation. In the Central area there was a very close correlation in Hollinswood, The Nedge, Brookside, Malinslee and Dawley Bank. In the South there was a close correlation in Woodside and Sutton Hill but less so in Madeley. Members requested a breakdown of the number of fly tips.
- Data for Brookside had been drilled down. Within the defined area HMOs accounted for 2.6% of the housing stock (62 of 2400 properties) but accounted for 12% of housing queries, 39% of noise reports and 23% of rubbish accumulation reports in the area in the last 12 months.
- It was observed that HMOs had a significant impact in certain parts of the borough but not all HMOs were the same and there were variations in levels of activity across the borough. Licensed HMOs could create as much impact as unlicensed. A question to address was how far issues were linked to HMOs and whether HMOs were part of a broader problem in certain areas.
- DCLG were currently consulting on changes to the licensing threshold for HMOs to require mandatory licensing of all HMOs with more than 5 people from at least two families. There were also proposals to introduce minimum space standards and a duty on landlords for the removal of waste.
- Local authorities also had discretionary power to introduce Selective Licensing aimed at areas of low housing demand, poor quality housing and high levels of crime and ASB with the aim of improving the overall social and economic conditions in the area. Selective licensing required registration not only of HMOs but of other properties in the private rented sector. There was an opportunity for the Council to look at selective licensing and this had been discussed with Cllr. Overton, Cabinet member for housing and Cllr Rhodes, Cabinet member for enforcement. The team had started to collect data for a business case which could be brought to scrutiny for a view. The scheme would cover smaller zones, not borough wide, with the aspiration of raising standards in those areas.

Cllr Murray left the meeting at the end of the presentation.

Further information was discussed in response to questions:

- The definition of HMO was set out in the Housing Act as three or more people not of the same family. Licensing was currently mandatory for HMOs with three storeys and five or more people from two or more families. DCLG's proposed changes to the licensing threshold would not change the minimum number of occupants from 5 which would leave a large number of HMOs below the

threshold. The team had responded to the consultation that the threshold should be reduced to three or more. HMRC regulations were outside the officers' remit but rental income would be subject to tax regulations.

- A co-optee asked why fly tips had been identified with HMOs when they may not be associated and in some areas there was no correlation between fly tipping and HMOs. Officers replied that HMOs tended to have transient populations and property left behind was sometimes cleared and left in the garden or on the street. However one of the reasons why selective licensing was being considered was that there were a lot of other rental properties in the problem areas and selective licensing would cover all rented properties and not just HMOs. It was also acknowledged that not all HMOs were the same and that HMOs helped to fill a gap in the market for one-bed accommodation, particularly for people in receipt of housing benefit, but there were issues around some HMOs in lower value areas.
- Given the number of fly tips shown in the presentation a Member asked why there had never been any prosecutions. A separate piece of work was being done on an enforcement dashboard to bring together enforcement tools and activity across Public Protection and to raise the profile of the enforcement work that Public Protection carried out. The purpose of the exercise presented had been to identify demand for services in problem areas which would go beyond HMOs. Relating to a further point raised about a recent planning issue involving an HMO, members were informed that the enforcement team had been consolidated under one officer to co-ordinate the approach and focus attention.
- In terms of people living in HMOs other than students it could vary from young single people and professionals to vulnerable people drawn to HMOs in lower rent areas. HMOs could be a solution to homelessness which was part of the work the Housing Options team were doing on the accreditation scheme to drive up standards.
- Inspections were carried out on all mandatory HMOs but the issue was that not all landlords were aware of the need to license which was why other data had been used to identify HMOs. In terms of further work, HMO licensing fees and conditions were being reviewed to make them more robust and to make landlords more accountable for engagement with tenants and the wider community. Enforcement officers were working with housing officers on the accreditation scheme to try to ensure that while landlords had control, there was some protection for tenants.
- There was no national data on HMOs and the data had been collected for Telford and Wrekin from datasets that the Council could access.
- Selective licensing would be applied to specific areas. The data had identified hotspots where selective licensing may be a solution. Within these areas there may be very good HMO landlords and selective licensing was not about penalising them, but about raising standards. Planning legislation could potentially be used to limit the growth of HMOs and further information could be brought back to the committee with the business case. DCLG's proposals would

not affect the case for selective licensing – mandatory licensing was more around housing standards and selective licensing went beyond that to tackling ASB.

- Selective licensing could not be used to deal with noise. The Council had powers under the Environmental Protection Act to deal with noise but it could be difficult to establish a case and potentially noise could be dealt with as ASB which could be enforced by selective licensing.
- It was not known whether Harper Adams have a register of approved properties but this would be checked.

At the end of the discussion the Chair invited comments and it was agreed:

- That the business case for selective licensing would be brought back to a meeting for the Committee to give feedback to Cabinet
- That the report would be circulated electronically to members.

### **CCPSC-19 Drainage and Flood Management**

The Chair reminded Members that there was statutory guidance for scrutiny to look at flood management at least annually and the Committee had requested an update report which had been circulated as Appendix C. He invited officers to highlight key points from the report and the following points were made:

- There had been a significant amount of rainfall in the last 2 years (422mm from October 2015 to March 2016 compared to an average of 256mm for the period, and 643mm so far this year).
- The Ironbridge flood barriers were successfully deployed in February 2016. The barriers were deployed on average once every 2 years.
- Communication with businesses and local residents around the wharf had been improved with positive feedback
- A new flood alert system for the Coalbrookdale Watercourse had been implemented with automated flood warnings which had worked well to prevent flooding.
- Floodsax had been provided to properties vulnerable to flash flooding and were proving a great success.
- Work was being done with the Environment Agency and Regional Flood and Coastal Committee to install products such as sealable doors and airbrick covers to improve resilience of properties not defended by the barrier and to look at flood management in the upper catchment area.
- A new weather forecasting service was being trialled to give early warnings to properties and businesses susceptible to flooding and to enable better management of surface water flooding. The system was dedicated to Telford and Wrekin, 24/7 and was extremely accurate.
- The drainage team were statutory consultees on planning applications to ensure new developments were not at risk of flooding and to promote Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS). Telford & Wrekin was going beyond statutory duties for large developments to encompass all new developments.

- In the absence of national guidance Telford & Wrekin was working with nine other authorities to develop a guidance manual for developers which would be taken to Cabinet in early 2017.
- Highways drainage continued throughout the year. There were 36,000 gullies in the borough. Within current budgets 16,000 gullies were cleaned each year so all gullies were cleaned within 2 years. Gullies that were more susceptible to blocking were cleaned more regularly.

Further information was provided in response to questions:

- Floodsax were supplied to residents in risk areas to store at home ready to use and had been a huge success. They were vacuum packed, super-absorbent packs which could absorb 25 litres of water. They had a 5 year shelf-life, were easy to store and could be stacked to a height of 1.5 meters.
- With regard to the impact of budget reductions on gully cleaning, additional funding and more efficient use of resources had improved the regularity of cleaning by reducing the time taken to clean all gullies in the borough from three years to two. The Assistant Director assured Members that no savings had been put forward in this area for next year's budget.
- A member raised concerns with the rate of gully cleaning. This was a particular problem in rural areas where gullies could regularly become blocked by leaves. She felt that parishes in these areas would not be satisfied with two-yearly cleaning. Officer responded that the budget was split into two pots, one for scheduled cleaning and one for ad hoc maintenance which tended to be used after severe rainfall and at this time of year after leaf falls. There was a list of susceptible areas and Kynnersley was one of the hotspots which would be cleaned more regularly. The Assistant Director added that the government was considering additional funding for flood management and a bid would be made if the funding came forward. Evidence about gullies would also be helpful for the procurement of the Grounds Cleansing and Environmental Services procurement which would be looking at how to deliver more for the money.
- There was a question about flooding at the Donnington roundabout. The drainage system was at full capacity and would be part of the Severn Trent capital programme for 2017.
- In terms of the risk of a mains water burst as had occurred in Birmingham and the Council's relationship with Severn Trent, officers explained that there were some relations with Severn Trent's dirty water division but no real involvement with the clean water division. Severn Trent had resisted attempts to engage.
- In terms of responsibility for water conduits, the local authority had 'riparian ownership' of conduits running under public roads which were the responsibility of the highways team. Silting of the channel under the bridge in Edmond would be the responsibility of the authority.
- In terms of slowing surface water run-off from agricultural land, the Council was on the Slow the Flow committee set up by Shropshire Wildlife Trust with partners

which was working to slow the flow of flood waters. A bid had been made to the committee for a scheme to go into the capital programme.

At the end of the discussion the Chair sought views from the committee and Members agreed that they had been assured by the good work reported but made the following additional points:

- A Member remained concerned about the regularity of gully cleaning
- A Member suggested that more should be done to promote the good work.

**CCPSC-20 Work Programme**

The Chair consulted Members on items for the next meeting and items were agreed as the draft Homeless Strategy and the business case for Selective Licensing. It was noted that the meeting scheduled for 20 February may be too late to feed into the work on selective licensing and if necessary the meeting would be brought forward to the end of January.

**CCPSC-21 Chair's Update**

The Chair informed Members that he had attended the West Midlands Combined Authority Scrutiny Committee workshop facilitated by John Cade from INLOGOV to train and support the committee in developing its work plan. There had been discussions about how the committee would hold the elected Mayor to account and effective pre-decision scrutiny.

The meeting ended at 7.50pm

**Chairman:** .....

**Date:** .....