

HEALTHY, SAFE, CLEAN AND GREEN COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Healthy, Safe, Clean and Green Communities Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, the Arc, High Street, Clowne on Friday 30th November 2018 at 1000 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor S. Peake in the Chair

Councillors T. Cannon, Mrs P.A. Cooper, C.R. Moesby, P. Smith and K.F. Walker.

Officers J. Wilson (Scrutiny & Elections Officer), D. Bonsor (Housing Needs Manager) (to Minute No. 0511) and A. Bluff (Governance Officer).

0505. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors J.E. Bennett, J.A. Clifton and T. Munro.

0506. URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent of items to consider.

0507. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

0508. MINUTES – 2ND NOVEMBER 2018

Moved by Councillor P. Smith and seconded by Councillor C.R. Moesby

RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Healthy, Safe, Clean & Green Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 2nd November 2018 be approved as a correct record.

0509. LIST OF KEY DECISIONS & ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

Committee considered the List of Key Decisions and Items to be considered in private document.

A Member advised the meeting that the Facilities Management item was an exempt item and not an open item as stated on the list.

HEALTHY, SAFE, CLEAN AND GREEN COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Scrutiny & Elections Officer reminded Members that Executive reports were available for viewing on the Members Portal.

Moved by Councillor C.R. Moesby and seconded by Councillor P. Smith

RESOLVED that the List of Key Decisions and Items to be considered in private document be noted.

0510. HOMELESSNESS – UPDATE ON THE APPROACH AT BOLSOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL TO MEET THE NEW LEGISLATIVE DUTY

Committee considered a verbal update provided by the Housing Needs Manager in relation to the Council's approach to meeting the new legislative duty with regard to homelessness.

The Homeless Reduction Act came into force in April 2018 and was a new duty to provide housing advice and prevention to all groups regardless of priority need.

Since the Homeless Reduction Act was introduced, the Council had not seen a huge increase in approaches with regard to anyone facing homelessness, however, further to a Member's query, the Housing Needs Manager noted that the roll out of Universal Credit in the District would possibly make an impact on the reasons for approaches in the future. She advised Members that Housing and Benefits Officers were working closely together, along with external support agencies, to identify existing tenants who may be facing difficulty in the future.

Bolsover Housing Officers were part of a Derbyshire Homeless Officers Group (DHOG) which met on a monthly basis. The Group all used the same IT system, 'Locata', to support with the new duty legislation. The Group was strong and had been successful in being awarded Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) homeless bids. These grants helped to enhance the services being delivered by Housing.

There was also a new service for private Landlords; 'Call Before You Serve', to encourage landlords to work with their tenants who were struggling to pay their rent, rather than starting eviction proceedings.

Since 2002, it had been statutory for all local authorities to have a Homeless Strategy. In 2016, Bolsover decided to have a joint Strategy with North East Derbyshire District Council and Chesterfield Borough Council, titled 'the North Derbyshire Homeless Strategy 2016 to 2020'. There were four key strands to the Strategy;

- To develop a robust young person's housing pathway by delivering a range of housing solutions with our partners
- To create strong partnerships with all stakeholders to tackle homelessness for all those at risk, including those most vulnerable households
- Prevent rough sleeping across the area
- Prevent homelessness by tackling and reducing financial deprivation within our communities

HEALTHY, SAFE, CLEAN AND GREEN COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Strategy detailed how the three councils would provide effective access to a range of housing services, support and other opportunities for North Derbyshire residents affected by homelessness to help them rebuild their lives. The Strategy had been shaped by national policy, a thorough review of homelessness and homeless services in North Derbyshire and took account of stakeholder feedback and partner views.

There was also the North Derbyshire Homeless Forum which met around five times per year with all partner agencies being invited to meetings. The Forum took the lead on the action plan from the North Derbyshire Homeless Strategy to ensure that actions were being delivered and monitored. Joint training for officers was also arranged via the Forum. The Forum also provided advice to partner agencies regarding the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act as homelessness was not just a Housing issue; it was linked to ex-offenders, mental health, drugs and alcohol – all these problems led to whether someone could sustain a successful tenancy or not.

A discussion took place regarding rough sleepers gaining access to temporary accommodation and that some were denied this if they were ex-offenders for serious crimes such as arson, drugs and violent behaviour etc. The Housing Needs Manager noted that there were some homeless people who refused to engage with Housing and partner agencies and continued to rough sleep; fortunately there were not many of these people in the District.

The Housing Needs Manager also noted that some people did not want to go directly to the Council for help and referred to some of the services in the area that the Council helped to fund;

- The Freedom Project in Bolsover, which was based at the church worked directly with people out on the streets in the Bolsover area, helping them to access private rented accommodation – they also provided meals in the church.
- Action Housing was a housing provider and a partner of the Council and provided accommodation for young people in Chesterfield with an emphasis on training by helping to get them into college.
- Newbold Court, Chesterfield, (Chesterfield Borough Council owned) placements for single people.
- The Arbor Project was for significant high risk ex-offenders and run by Action Housing, dealt with by the Multiple Agency Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) – these people needed careful monitoring until they were deemed safe to be in the community. It was critical that the Arbor Project continued.
- Derbyshire Law Centre (DLC) – Housing had provided some of the homeless prevention monies to DLC. Two homeless prevention workers from DLC worked with Bolsover Housing staff and provided advice to landlords with tenancy issues etc.
- Call Before You Serve – this was a new service across Derbyshire (as referred to previously in the meeting). The service worked with private landlords regarding issues with tenancies and other matters, for example, form filling etc. This service would be promoted to private landlords across the District via the Landlords Forum by the Joint Empty Properties Officer.

In response to a Member's query regarding direct payment of housing benefit to landlords, the Housing Needs Manager replied that the introduction of Universal Credit had now made this very difficult for tenants to arrange. There were some exceptional

HEALTHY, SAFE, CLEAN AND GREEN COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

circumstances, however, but these were scarce. Members requested the criteria for direct payment of housing benefit to landlords and also an update on Universal Credit roll out in the District to be provided to them at a future meeting of the Committee. The Scrutiny & Elections Officer noted that a presentation on Universal Credit could be arranged via the Member Development Working Group.

A Member queried how the Council dealt with families who were potentially being made homeless due to significant debt. The Housing Needs Manager advised Members that Housing officers would call in other agencies such as the Derbyshire Law Centre to work with the family and help set up debt repayment plans so a landlord could see that they were addressing their debt and hopefully they could stay in the home they had. If families with children were made homeless, the Council had a duty to ensure that they had accommodation, however, not necessarily a Council property. The Homeless Reduction Act put an emphasis on keeping people and families in the home they already had with a lot of support from Housing and outside agencies to keep them there. The Housing Needs Manager noted that this was not always an easy task and involved hours of work from Housing staff and outside agencies.

'Pathways' was another support agency for single people who were rough sleepers. Based in Chesterfield, it was a 'drop in' centre providing showers and meals and also support for people to gain accommodation and medical support for mental health including drugs and alcohol treatment etc.

Night shelters – this was a new service being provided by churches in Chesterfield from December 2018 through to March 2019. This was led by Derby City Mission who successfully run the night shelters in Derby. The Council provided some funding to them and also the MHCLG. There were around 15 bed spaces per night and there was a zero tolerance of bad behaviour. All the relevant agencies were aware of the service.

The Housing Needs Manager provided some statistics for approaches to the Council for homelessness in 2017/18 and from April to November 2018.

Members thanked the Housing Needs Manager for the update.

Moved by Councillor S. Peake and seconded by Councillor C.R. Moesby

RESOLVED that (1) the update be noted,

(2) the criteria for direct payment of housing benefit to landlords and also an update on Universal Credit roll out in the District be provided to Members at a future meeting of the Committee.

(Housing Needs Manager/Scrutiny & Elections Officer)

The Housing Needs Manager left the meeting.

0511. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

Committee considered their Work Programme for 2018/19.

HEALTHY, SAFE, CLEAN AND GREEN COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Scrutiny & Elections Officer reminded Members of the extraordinary meeting of the Committee which would be held in February 2019.

Moved by Councillor S. Peake and seconded by Councillor C.R. Moesby
RESOLVED that the Work Programme be noted.

The formal meeting concluded at 1125 hours and Members then met as a working party to continue their review work. The working party concluded at 1211 hours.