

## **COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 3 February 2020 at 6.00 pm in Meeting Room G3/4, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT**

**Present:** Councillors E J Carter, T L B Janke, D Johnson, J E Lavery, K S Sahota and C R Turley (Chair)

**Also Present:** Councillor D Wright (Cabinet Member: Housing, Transport and Infrastructure)

**In Attendance:** A Astley (Executive Director: Housing, Communities & Customer Services), K Callis (Housing Investment Programme Service Delivery Manager), T Guest (Housing, NuPlace & Commercial Projects Service Delivery Manager) and Paula Meyrick (Project Manager - Specialist Accommodation)

**Apologies:** Councillor C Cassar

#### **1 Declarations of Interest**

None.

#### **2 Scrutiny Review of Housing and Homelessness**

The Cabinet Member: Housing, Transport and Infrastructure welcomed this opportunity to explore the issues set out in the report and develop policy in conjunction with Scrutiny. Some positive work was taking place in this area: the new Housing Strategy would be presented to Cabinet and Council in the next few months and there were options set out to develop policies collaboratively.

The Housing, NuPlace & Commercial Projects Service Delivery Manager provided an overview of the current service and offer provided in relation to young people and housing, as detailed in the report.

*How does the Council become aware that an individual is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless?*

The Service became aware that an individual would be likely to become homeless when either there was a direct approach from the individual or if another organisation/body passed the information.

Certain public bodies had a duty to refer users of their service who they had reason to believe were homeless or threatened with becoming homeless within 56 days, to the local authority. If the individual was over 18, permission was needed to make the referral but not if they were under 18.

*What data was available on the success of prevention and relief?*

It was agreed that data on the prevention and relief duty would be provided in writing.

*It was noted that different choices and opportunities were presented to young people and that this might mean some young people did not come into contact with the Council.*

It was important that the Council made it easy for young people to interact with the Council at whatever stage in their housing journey they were at and also as they moved in and out of need.

*When a family including young people was made homeless, was the young person considered a family member or a young person?*

This depended on the outcome of interview with the family about what they wanted, ie to stay together as family unit or if the young person wanted to move on.

*How were messages being conveyed through appropriate media in a userfriendly format (eg targeting advertisements through snapchat etc)?*

The Council's Corporate Communications Team were leading on raising the profile of the work that was being done. It could be that there were information routes not yet being accessed that could form part of the future communications plan.

*Whilst digital methods of communication were import, it was important to have alternative approaches, eg through libraries.*

Best practice in this area might be something the Committee would like to focus on.

*Was there a pathway for released prisoners?*

There was a specific process for those leaving prison; the Council worked closely with a number of partners to provide supported accommodation for prisoners to be discharged to.

*What schemes were on offer for people with poor financial records who could not meet housing association deposit/tenancy requirements (eg, the Xroads scheme)?*

The Welfare Team worked closely with the Crisis Support Team to provide support that made the best use of discretionary housing funding – for example paying a deposit up front – and Tenancy Sustainability Officers provided further support. There were also accommodation options provided partners such as Maninplace, Stay and the Kip Project.

*There was a natural tendency for private landlords to provide tenancies to “safe” tenants only. Could a database of Licensed HMOs offer any solutions?*

The Council was working closely with private sector landlords to increase trust. For instance, there was an understanding among landlords that the Council acted quickly to process the deployment of universal credit to limit any impact.

The Service Delivery Specialist: Housing Investment Programme provided an overview of housing for older people and people with disabilities as set out in the report.

*Noting the difficulties faced by older people wishing to downsize from their large family homes to bungalows in the communities they have lived in for a long time, what plans or standards were in place to support building to accommodate changing demographics?*

The Local Planning Authority were working to see an increase in the delivery of bungalows but needed the support of the local plan review to facilitate this. A change in developers’ views was also being noted – with the provision of specialist housing being seen as a lucrative opportunity, this was more on the agenda than ever before. The provision of specialist housing is also now a key component of Housing Association’s business plans.

*What powers did the Council have to make developers build accommodation for this demographic?*

Planning Policy was not currently robust enough to achieve this. There was reference to accessibility but without a strong evidence base, developers could not be forced to build. The proposed Specialist & Supported Housing Strategy, coming forward to Cabinet in March would provide this evidence base for the first time.

Members may also wish to talk to developers about Lifetime Homes Standards, a series of design criteria intended to make homes more easily adaptable for lifetime use at minimal cost.

Concluding discussion on this item, Officers and the Cabinet Member: Housing, Transport and Infrastructure welcomed the opportunity to work with Scrutiny on these issues.

Members **AGREED** to progress the eight potential areas of work for Scrutiny set out in the report.

It was noted that the Council was seeking appointment to the position of Director: but whilst such appointment was awaited, the Committee **AGREED** to progress the following areas of work:

Young People and Housing

- Look at what other authorities were doing to address youth homelessness and identify best practice examples.
- Review what other authorities are doing to intervene early and provide advice to young people who are not homeless but would like housing advice.

#### Housing for People with a Physical Disability and Older People

- Review the Housing Assistance Policy and suggest any amendments to ensure it meets need.
- Look at what other authorities were doing to secure delivery of housing for older people and people with a physical disability.

The Committee agreed to meet informally in six weeks to feedback on the above elements of the review, consider the scope of this review and next steps.

### **3 Work Programme 2019-20 to 2020-21**

Members noted the suggestions set out in the report on the Work Programme and **AGREED** to prioritise work on the housing and homelessness review.

With regard to the remaining items on the work programme it was **AGREED** that the Democratic & Scrutiny Services Team would redraft the work programme to amalgamate linked suggestions and provide more detail to enable scoping and effective prioritisation.

### **4 Chair's Update**

The Chair requested the Democratic & Scrutiny Services Team identify a date for the next meeting and circulate to the Committee.

The meeting ended at 7.33pm

**Chairman:** .....

**Date:** Wednesday, 11 November 2020