

COMMUNITY HOUSING AND HEALTH (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

17 OCTOBER 2019

PRESENT:

Councillors Eagland (Chairman), Evans (Vice-Chair), Gwilt (Vice-Chair), Baker, Binney, Birch, Cox, Leytham and Silvester-Hall.

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillors attended the meeting).

11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Ball, Parton-Hughes and Wilcox

12 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests at this point.

13 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Ball submitted comments in his absence and it was agreed that regarding the George Bryan Centre to include reference to the request of contacting former patients for views and the GDPR regulations could be overcome by asking to use their data for this purpose before sending any questionnaire.

Councillor A Yeates was asked to notify the Committee after the meeting as to whether he had received a response from Staffordshire County Council regarding the way they had contributed to the problem of not delivering Disabled Grant Facilities as well as might be expected.

RESOLVED: That subject to the agreed amendments, the minutes of the last meeting be signed as a correct record.

14 WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was circulated and noted.

15 STANDING ITEMS

- a) Lichfield District Health Provision
There was no new information presented to the Committee
- b) Staffordshire Health Select Committee
It was noted that the SCC Healthy select Committee's work programme had been attached to allow Committee members to raise issues more proactively rather than receiving minutes from previous meetings. The Committee was content with this approach. It was noted that Councillor Leytham was remaining as the Lichfield representative and he would raise the Committee's views at the SCC meetings.
It was requested that pressure and the importance of the George Bryan Centre continue to be raised and that this Committee have concerns on the process being followed currently. It was also asked that mental health wellbeing especially in

younger people be raised as important as provision in schools is not as good as it could be.

16 COMMUNITY LOTTERY

The Committee received a report seeking views on setting up a community lottery scheme to directly benefit local community groups and charities that play an essential role in reducing the need for statutory services. It was noted that this had been considered before however a lot more information and data had been collected to allow for a more informed decision.

It was reported that the Cabinet Member along with Officers had met with Aylesbury Vale Council and discussed further how a community lottery could operate. It was also reported that it was proposed that Gatherwell Ltd be appointed to manage the lottery as it would be far less resource intensive than operating it in-house. It was also proposed that We Love Lichfield would distribute the share of proceeds that the Council is allocated to distribute on the same basis as is administered for the Small Grants Fund.

The Committee discussed the morals of gambling and the risks to vulnerable people and it was agreed that the help the lottery would give to the voluntary sector outweighed the risks. It was confirmed that evidence showed that winners of this sort of lottery, paid their prizes back into the proceeds for charities as the motivations of players were very different.

When asked, it was confirmed that there would be a one off set up cost to Gatherwell Ltd then they would take 20% of ticket sales. Members were assured that currently no other lottery of this proposed size would be giving so much to good causes. It was asked if sporting clubs could be included as they do much for the community and health and wellbeing and it was reported that they could but with all groups and charities would be vetted by the Council.

It was asked how the minimum, average and maximum projected figures were arrived at and it was reported that comparative data from good and bad performing authorities were used and advice was taken from Aylesbury Council on the model proposed.

It was requested that the Committee consider suitable names for the lottery and send them to the Cabinet Member.

- RESOLVED:**
- a) That Cabinet be recommended to approve the establishment of a local lottery for Lichfield District and the attached confidential Business Case.
 - b) That Cabinet be recommended to approve the preferred option to appoint an External Lottery Management (ELM) and the appointment of Gatherwell Ltd is progressed subject to a contract waiver being agreed by the Chief Executive.
 - c) That Cabinet be recommended that the Head of Regulatory Services Housing and Wellbeing and the Partnership, Community Safety & Licensing Manager are appointed to be responsible for holding the license and submit the necessary application to the Gambling Commission.
 - d) That Cabinet be send name ideas for the lottery.
 - e) That Cabinet be recommended to approve the policies listed below to govern the operation of the lottery:
 - Social Responsibility in Gambling
 - Protection form Crime and Disorder
 - Implementation Procedures
 - Fair and Open Gambling
 - Children and vulnerable person protection

f) That it be recommended that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Community, in consultation with one of the license holders, is authorised to determine if any cause should be removed or rejected from being a member of the lottery.

g) That Cabinet be recommended to appoint We Love Lichfield to distribute the share of the proceeds the Council is allocated to distribute (10%) received from the lottery on the same basis as they administer the Small Grants Fund.

17 HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY

The Committee received a report on a proposed section to the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 on specifically homelessness and rough sleeping.

The Committee welcomed the report and although recognised that there were not the numbers as seen in larger cities, was still a need to address and help these individuals. Members noted that mental health issues played a big factor at times and support was paramount.

The Committee discussed the need to engage with private landlords and it was reported that Officers did meet with them to persuade them to house homeless or rough sleepers but it was difficult as there was reluctance to take tenants with complex needs. The Committee was reminded that the purchase of a number of properties and support Officers would help bridge the gap and give people a good tenancy history.

When asked, it was confirmed that Bromford Housing supplied temporary accommodation. It was also reported that 15 weeks was the average length of stay in temporary accommodation however there was a shortage of affordable accommodation options for people to move into and there was a reluctance to move out of the District for a number of reasons including family and education for dependants. It was also reported that the average age had increased as the legislation had changed and there was now a duty to help non priority groups.

It was reported that data for the rough sleeper estimate was based on one night and was district wide. It was noted that the next count would be in November. It was also noted that data on sofa surfing was not taken as it was difficult but it was known how many came to the Council for advice.

It was noted that there were problems with professional begging in the district and the Committee were pleased to note that a 'diverted giving scheme' was being developed to encourage the public to give to instead of direct and ensure it helps the ones who truly need it.

It was requested that the Committee be kept up to date on consultation via briefing papers.

- RESOLVED:**
- a) That the Homelessness Review be noted; and
 - b) That Cabinet be recommended to approve the homelessness and rough sleeping section of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024.

18 CHANGES TO THE HOUSING OPTIONS SERVICE

The Committee received a report setting out proposals to change the way in which the housing register and allocations scheme were administered following notification from Bromford that they were no longer willing to manage the register on the Council's behalf when they withdraw from the Housing Direct choice based lettings scheme in 2020.

It was reported that it was proposed to operate the allocations scheme in-house and run a choice based letting scheme (CBL). The Committee were in agreement with this approach as it gave ownership to the system but wished to have concerns noted regarding the extra pressure on resources including costs and Officers. The Committee agreed that Bromford should bore some of the cost as it was their obligation to manage the register under the stock transfer agreement.

There were concerns about removing the category "Children under 10 in upper floor flat" from band B and this was noted by the Cabinet member.

It was reported that the new scheme would be launched with a full communications plan and current customers on the list would be consulted with. It was noted that there would be workshops to support people. When asked, it was confirmed that Councillors would be fully briefed and trained on the new system. It was noted that the new scheme would be largely online but staff including customer services would be available to help.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be recommended to approve the proposed new arrangements for the administration of the housing register and allocation scheme for social housing.

19 REVIEW OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARES

The Committee received a report on the application received from the Taxi trade for an increase in the tariff for Hackney Carriages. It was reported that there had not been an increase since 2012 although there had been increases in inflation. It was agreed that a balance was essential between what was reasonable for the public to pay and needs and incentive for drivers needed.

Options for the maximum tariff were presented and it was agreed to recommend to Cabinet, the proposals in the report.

Waiting time was then discussed as it had also been requested by the Taxi trade. It was noted that it was not currently charged for and was the only authority in the area that didn't charge. It was noted that there had been instances where drivers were waiting for customers to get take-away food amongst other things and Members felt this was unfair. There were concerns however that waiting time could kick in with sitting in traffic especially if there had been an accident and in these circumstances, it would not be the customers fault. It was felt that that the charge could be open to abuse by drivers. There were further concerns that taxis are used by people with low wages and income and further unknown charges could be difficult to pay. It was reported that the proposal was to not have waiting time charges begin until after 5 minutes stopped and then every 15 minutes which was less than other authorities. After much debate, it was agreed to recommend to Cabinet the recommendation on waiting time as set out in the report.

Soiling charges were then discussed and some Members felt a high charge of £100 should be introduced as a preventative measure, especially for body fluid soiling, to ensure customers were responsible for their actions. It was noted however that this had not been requested by the Taxi trade as it was recognised that it was very difficult to get payment anyway. The Committee posed different options of

- 1) £60 flat charge
- 2) £100 flat charge
- 3) Combination of charges dependant on the type of soiling.

It was agreed for Cabinet to consider these options.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be recommended to consider the maximum tariff rates to then be consulted on for Hackney Carriages in the Lichfield District taking into account the views of the Committee, trade requests and Officer recommendations.

20 DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS (DHP)

The Committee received a report proposing amendments to the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme. It was reported that it was a temporary assistance providing additional financial assistance for recipients of housing benefit or housing costs within universal credit. It was noted that the DWP gave a grant to cover these payments.

Members asked why applications would be refused and it was reported that it was mostly due to lack of evidence provided or incomplete applications. It was asked whether the scheme was well advertised and it was reported that most applicants were on benefits so know that it is there to help. It was reported that the proposals were to simplify the application form and process with a view of making it easier to apply. There was some concern that an easier process could expose the Council to the risk of fraudulent applications however the Committee was reassured that vetting of applications would continue. It was reported that the other risk was allocating more funds than available but it would be monitored by Officers.

When asked, it was reported that payments were given as soon as a decision was made as it was recognised that time was of the essence in these circumstances. It was also reported that the average length of payments was 13 weeks however as it was discretionary, could be made for longer if the case required it. It was also recognised by the Committee that the average rent in the district was higher than Universal Credit.

RESOLVED: That the amendments to the proposed revised policy be noted.

COUNCILLOR EVANS DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS SHE IS A TRUSTEE OF CASES WHO WERE A CONSULTEE.

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21 THANKS TO MR KING

Thanks were given to the Director of Place and Community, Richard King who announced he would be leaving the authority after 34 years of service.

(The Meeting closed at 8.10 pm)

CHAIRMAN