

COMMUNITY HOUSING AND HEALTH (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

18 MARCH 2020

PRESENT:

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

(In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No.17 Councillor A. Yeates attended the meeting).

22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Evans (Vice-Chairman), Humphreys and M. Wilcox

23 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests.

24 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were signed as a correct record.

The Cabinet Member was asked to for an update on DFG's and it was reported that progress was slow but underway and he would report further to the Committee when he could.

It was also asked if there was an update into removing the category of under 10 year olds from upper floor flats and it was reported that it was a recommendation for the final allocations scheme.

25 WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was received and it was noted that this was the last meeting of this municipal year. It was requested that any ideas for the 2020-21 year work programme be sent to the Overview & Scrutiny Officer and to include expected aims to help plan what information would be required. It was requested that an item on straight pathways be included.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be updated.

26 STANDING ITEMS

The Committee received the work programme for the Staffordshire Healthy Select Committee and were asked to forward items that they would wish to be raised at the County Council through the District Council's representative, Councillor Leytham.

Members asked if it could be asked if there was a build programme in place for the ne George Bryan centre following the results of the consultation for it to remain and in its current location. There was some concern that this new facility would be out patients only and not in patients as before.

It was noted that the previous Staffordshire Healthy Select Committee chairman had agreed to roll over an item on primary and secondary care and the lack of communication between the two. It was asked for this matter to be raised again.

RESOLVED: That the views be noted and items raised at the Staffordshire Healthy Select Committee.

27 HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019-2024

The Committee received a report on the draft Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 which set out the council's plans to tackle homelessness, rough sleeping and a range of other housing-related challenges over the next five years in Lichfield District from 2019 to 2024. The Cabinet Member thanked Officers for the work they had undertaken in preparing the report.

It was asked that in light of the Covid-19 situation, something similar to the severe weather protocol be added for severe viruses. It was noted that night shelters had been closed due to the high risk and inability to distance however work was underway to try and open them again quickly. It was also noted that the Council was monitoring the situation of the virus and the increase demand on services including housing including the impact on landlords and would be awaiting guidance and support from central government

It was agreed that it would be difficult to eradicate homelessness as some of it was hidden behind issues like sofa surfing.

Discussions took place regarding why rough sleepers weren't using night shelters and there was anecdotal evidence that it was because they had been warned not to because of the risk of theft however there was also evidence that this was an excuse and one of the true reasons was because drug taking was prohibited. It was reported that Spring Housing, the outreach service used by the District Council was used to deal with these concerns as many times, Officers are seen as a barrier by rough sleepers. Donations to a central pot instead of giving directly to rough sleepers/beggars was also discussed and it was felt that effective communications and marketing was key to its success.

It was asked what enforcement could be undertaken with beggars and it was reported that many of these people had complex needs and the approach was to support these people before taking a draconian approach so Spring Housing were doing this and the introduction of assisted housing would help too. It was noted that Police have powers if required but they also had no desire to use them unless in extreme situations where there was violence or risk to public safety. It was requested that this was communicated to businesses as most of the begging happened outside of these premises.

Housing stock was then discussed and it was noted that some wasn't available to adapt to meet need and it was felt that a SPD would be required with the new Local Plan to address this. It was also requested that the needs for all age groups be considered. It was noted that SPD's came under the Economic Growth, Environment & Development (Overview & Scrutiny) Committee and in the past there had been joint committee meetings to consider this type of issue and it was proposed and agreed to do the same in this instance. Fall hazards in homes were also discussed and it was noted that it was a responsive service provided and although no budget, educating developers and RSLs on Cat 1 hazards was undertaken.

When asked, it was noted that income based rent levels was an initiative of the West Midlands Combined Authority but the District Council would be investigating all ways to help. It was also requested that the Housing Company set up by the District Council only provide housing for rent but it was noted that it was for the Strategic Asset Management Committee to consider this.

Affordable housing was discussed and it was requested that no approval be given to developments providing under 35%. It was reported that it would require a change in government policy to allow this and to demand it without could lead to no housing being delivered especially on brownfield sites which along with higher home standards, gives less viability for affordable housing.

It was noted when discussed that there were still empty homes in the District although not a great number when considered in proportion to the number of overall stock. It was reported that the rise in Council Tax for empty properties has helped the situation although for some companies that own these houses, 400% increase was still favourable to renovation costs to get the property back into use.

Houses of Multiple Occupancy was mentioned and it was noted that they should be regulated and are when the Council knew about them so it was requested that information Members had be passed to Officers to investigate.

The Committee noted that there was a lower percentage of adults with learning difficulties living in settled accommodation than the rest of Staffordshire or country as a whole. It was reported that there was a shortage of accommodation although there was a scheme in Burntwood.

RESOLVED: That the draft Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024 be noted and it be recommended for approval by Cabinet.

28 COMMUNITY SAFETY DELIVERY PLAN

The Committee received a report on the statutory requirement for Community Safety Partnerships to produce a three year community safety plan, which is reviewed annually. It was reported that in Lichfield, the District Board acted as the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) for the District.

It was noted that the Staffordshire Observatory produced a strategic assessment which looked at crime figures, trends and prevalent issues and suggested priorities for the District. The latest update was published in February 2020.

It was asked what was happening with regards to the Late Night Listeners during the Covid-19 pandemic as many of them were in the high risk group. It was reported that the Council had met with the volunteer sector and all was being done to protect them and also recruit more volunteers by signposting people to Support Staffordshire. It was reported that as the pubs had been requested to close by central government, the need for the Late Night Listeners should reduce greatly.

Members were concerned that the level of domestic violence could increase due to the requirement to isolate and it was noted that work was underway with organisations such as Pathway to deal with this. It was requested that all Councillors be prepared to help people in need of advice and help.

It was asked if there had been an affect from the removal of the Police Partnerships Managers and it was reported that the role had been backfilled by the service and partners had added where they could for example the vulnerability hub.

RESOLVED: That the draft Lichfield District Community Safety Delivery Plan 2020-2023 be endorsed for approval by the Lichfield District Board.

29 VOTE OF THANKS

It was proposed, duly seconded and

RESOLVED: That the sincere thanks of the Committee be recorded to all the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen and Officers for their work during the past year.

(The Meeting closed at 7.10 pm)

CHAIRMAN