

COMMUNITY HOUSING AND HEALTH (OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

20 JANUARY 2021

PRESENT:

Councillors Eagland (Chairman), Evans (Vice-Chair), S Wilcox (Vice-Chair), Baker, Ball, Binney, Birch, Humphreys, Leytham, Parton-Hughes, Silvester-Hall, Tapper and M Wilcox.

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

36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

37 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interests.

38 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were circulated and agreed as a correct record.

39 WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was circulated and it was noted that information was awaited from Staffordshire County Council regarding Stroke Pathways and if necessary, would be moved to the next Municipal Year.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted.

40 STANDING ITEMS

The Committee received a presentation from Wayne Mortiboys from Staffordshire County Council (SCC) on progress made at the new GP facility being built at the Greenhouse site, Burntwood.

It was reported that it had been considered and agreed that it would be easier and more cost effective to put in deeper foundations that would enable a first floor extension, if needed, now at the build stage than try and do this in the future.

It was also reported that the building would have a life of 60 years before requiring any major refurbishment. Rent for the GP practice had been agreed between SCC and the NHS for these 60 years on a peppercorn rate however the pharmacy element to the build would not be at peppercorn and for period of 15 years so it was noted that there could be up to five changes/re-contracts for the life of the building.

The Committee were pleased to hear and see the progress made especially in a short period from agreement. It was felt that it had taken some time to get an agreement and it was hoped that there would be some lessons learned moving forward. It was agreed that this was especially important as the Health & Wellbeing Centre was still deemed a temporary structure

and a permanent one much needed. It was reported that the finite temporary planning permission would help focus the project.

Drainage at the site was discussed and it was asked whether anything else could be done with the water tank instead of discharging it in to the water system. It was reported that the building was being built to a BRIAM excellence and it had been investigated in reusing that water collected for other means eg toilet flushing however there would still be a requirement to clean that water to an extent and it was agreed not to proceed.

Wayne Mortiboys was thanked for his presentation and it was agreed to invite him back for an update when appropriate.

RESOLVED: That the information received be noted.

The Committee then discussed other health matters that needed to be raised at the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee via the Council's representative, Councillor Leytham.

The news that the George Bryan centre would not reopen was discussed and there was some disappointment as the Committee felt they had been assured it would remain open by the NHS Foundation Trust at previous meetings. It was felt that mental health help was more important in current times due to effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and it was felt that there should be a request to review this decision at SCC made.

It was also requested that there be a review of the poor performance of South East Staffordshire CCG.

It was requested that SCC consider the need for a permanent Health Centre in Burntwood to replace the current temporary one.

It was requested that information be sort as to whether beds at the two Community Hospitals in the District were being used as Covid-19 recovery beds and if so, if there was any risk to other non-covid related patients or whether those non-covid related patients were able to access beds if required. It was reported that Community Hospitals had reverted back to their original requirements of taking more elderly patients in need of medical care and unable to return home and many currently would be covid-19 patients. It was discussed that the Together We're Better team assured the Committee previously that the Community Hospitals would continue to be operable and GPs be encouraged to use the facilities available including the underused maternity service at Samuel Johnson. It was suggested that the TWB team be invited back to give an update although it was noted that there was no requirement for them to attend unlike the SCC Committee.

RESOLVED: That the information given be noted and Cllr Leytham raise these matters at the Healthy Staffordshire Select Committee.

41 HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY REVIEW

The Committee received a report setting out the type of assistance offered to residents with disabilities or vulnerable to allow them to stay on their own home. It was reported that the policy had not been updated significantly since 2013 and the Committee were asked for their views on various options that could be considered for offering further assistance. It was noted that there was an underspend on Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) due to a number of reasons and it would be unlikely to fully spend that grant through statutory offerings only.

The following areas were discussed

Increase of discretionary top up grant for Mandatory DFG work

This was welcomed by the Committee as it would help ensure adaptations were not withheld or delayed for funds to be found by the residents. It was felt that affordability should prevent anyone from accessing a grant however potentially an assessment of hardship could be considered if required.

The Introduction of a Palliative Care Grant

The Committee were in favour of this grant which would be similar to DFGs but fast tracked to enable urgent works for terminally ill patients. It was felt that this should not be means tested. Also it was felt it should be an easy process to apply for to ensure these very ill patients are not “bogged down in paperwork” and any barriers are identified and dealt with. It was agreed that there should not be partners for this as it would slow the process. Rachel Frondigoun from Cherry White consultants did inform the Committee that they would have to consider how to define terminally ill as this can affect the grant and has been of a challenge elsewhere. Some terminal diagnosis have been from 6 weeks to years and there would not be a risk of this grant being used to take advantage of the fast track route or bypass means testing.

Hospital Discharge Grant

It was felt this should be considered further and the details presented in the report were deemed acceptable. It was noted that Occupational Therapists were important in this process as they would assess need for appropriate and necessary work.

Relocation Grant

It was felt that people may not choose to move but have which can take up savings that could have been used towards adaptations.

Emergency Home Repair Grant (HRA)

It was agreed that there should be a grant to ensure sub-standard housing was addressed however it was agreed that the equity release promotion option should not be pursued.

It was felt that issues seen with DFGs and underspends were happening from recently and many other Local Authorities were dealing with similar and any changes introduced would be welcomed and only beneficial to residents.

It was felt that resources to implement these measures should be considered and any blockages with providers etc investigated. It was also suggested that, if possible, a peer review of the service may be of an advantage.

It was felt and requested that there be more detail in the environmental impact section of the report and how the use of grants could promote carbon reduction or whether there could be any energy efficient measures in adaptations.

The Cabinet Member and Officers were thanked for bringing the draft policy to the Committee at this early stage to allow for their views on options to aid develop it into its final version.

The Committee were thanked for their views and comments and it was agreed that options would be considered further and a draft brought back to Committee in March.

RESOLVED: 1) That the current policy be reviewed and views recorded on the options identified;

2) That the outcomes achieved by the Emergency Housing Repair Assistance Grant (HRA) and Energy Efficiency Grant (EE) be reviewed and comments recorded on options; and

3) That comments be noted on other minor amendments recommended to the policy.

42 CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): RECOVERY PLAN SCRUTINY

The Committee received a report on the Council's Covid-19 Recovery Plan updating them on the activity and ongoing issues around recovery and provide a narrative regarding the progress and achievements against the plan developed and issued in May 2020. It was reported that whilst this had been a significant body of work, the longer term impacts of the pandemic on both the authority and the district as a whole were yet to be fully quantified.

The recovery plan was split into four areas of focus; maintaining key services; helping those in need; supporting our businesses and keeping you informed and to support scrutiny of the plan, and due to its broad and overlapping nature, each committee dealt with relevant topics and areas under their remit.

The Leader of the Council answered questions and advised on matters raised.

The Committee were pleased to receive the report and praised all involved especially Officers in aiding the recovery of the Council and District of a whole. Staff across the authority were thanked for their very hard work and this Committee thanked the Housing Service and Environmental Health Service especially. It was asked whether there was help provided to Officers if stress levels were having an effect and it was reported that there was an agreement in place with The Listening Centre on a self-referral basis.

It was noted that the voluntary sector had been invaluable during this time and it was hoped that the information gathered on who they were and the services they could provide to communities would be maintained in the future. These groups were also thanked for all their work and efforts in the area. It was hoped that these organisations were being picked up by Support Staffordshire.

It was reported that the LGA had worked with many Council's in looking at recovery models and it was also noted that there had been challenges especially financially and it was hoped that central government would not pass that burden onto Local Authorities as with the help in reaching the shielding or distribution of grants, it was obvious that it was Local Authorities that could get the job done.

It was felt that those rough sleepers that had not engaged with the Council attracted more media attention and it may it useful to communicate what help was offered in the future especially as weather may be a factor soon.

It was reported that response received by the Corporate parenting Panel when all Members were asked for suitable places could be found to allow contact between families and children in care could be maintained was very positive and thanks was given for that.

It was asked whether the impact of the relocation of disabled parking from city centre streets to car parks and it was asked if that would be included in the forthcoming Equality Impact Assessment. It was reported that it was a difficult decision to take and the EIA will cover all it needs to.

The recently launched Community Lottery was discussed and it was requested that some communications be released to confirm that the Council was not getting any revenue from the scheme contrary to some comments seen and it was agreed to do this.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

(The Meeting closed at 8.03 pm)

CHAIRMAN