

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2018

I N D E X

Page No	Minute No	Heading
1	267	Apologies for Absence
1	268	Declarations of Interest
1	269	Minutes of Last Meeting
2	270	Scrutiny Review – Homelessness
3	271	Action Plan – Previous Scrutiny Review, including Parking Aspect
4	272	Action Plan – Domestic Abuse
5	273	Scrutiny Review
10	274	List of Key Decisions – Issue No 77
10	275	Scrutiny Work Programme 2018/19
10	276	Additional Urgent Items
10	277	Date of Next Meeting

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 5 OCTOBER 2018

Present:

	Councillor T Reader	(Chair)		
	Councillor C Tite	(Vice-Chair)		
Councillor	W Armitage		Councillor	C Hunt
"	B Barnes		"	R Marriott
"	L Blanshard		"	L Robinson

Also Present

Steve Brunt	-	Head of Street Scene (for Minute No 271)
Peter Campbell	-	Head of Housing & Community Safety (for Minute Nos 271 & 272)
Phil Delaney	-	Principal Planning Officer (for Minute No 271)
Richard Dixon	-	Housing Options Officer (for Minute No 273)
Faye Green	-	Community Safety Manager (for Minute No 271)
Jane Kirkwood	-	Housing Options Officer (for Minute No 273)
Lee Pepper	-	Housing Options Team Leader (for Minute No 270)
Jo Richardson	-	Accommodation and Prevention Officer (for Minute No 273)
Sue Veerman	-	Overview and Scrutiny Manager
Alan Maher	-	Governance and Civic Officer

267 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor M Foster.

268 Declarations of Interest

Members were requested to declare the existence and nature of any disclosable pecuniary interest and/or other interest, not already on their register of interests, in any item on the agenda and withdraw from the meeting at the appropriate time.

There were no interests declared at this meeting.

269 Minutes of Last Meeting

The Chair highlighted the Minutes of previous Committee meetings and emphasised just how important it was that they provided an accurate and true record of the meetings.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee held on 3 August 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

270 Scrutiny Review – Homelessness

Members were reminded that the Committee had agreed to carry out a review of the Council's Homelessness Service. They were assisted in this by the Housing Options Team Leader, who sought to "set the scene" for the review by giving the Committee a presentation on the role and functions of the service and how it had responded to the challenges of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

The Housing Options Team Leader covered a wide range of issues. He explained what forms homelessness can take, the reasons why people are homeless and who are most likely to be affected. Members discussed this information and in particular, noted that rent arrears, parent/family evictions and relationship breakdowns had helped to drive the increase in homelessness which had taken place in the District.

Members were then advised of ways in which the service helps to prevent and respond to homelessness. They also heard about the new duties placed on Local Housing Authorities by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and how, collectively, they had resulted in an even greater administrative burden on the service. In particular, the Housing Options Team Leader explained that every case dealt with now had to be treated as a homeless application. Personalised housing plans then had to be produced for each of them.

The Committee discussed with the Housing Options Team Leader the points raised in the presentation. As part of this, specific concerns were raised about the potential impact of benefit reform and in particular how delays in processing Universal Credit payments might impact on both tenants and landlords. Concern was expressed that landlords might see payment delays as a barrier to taking on as tenants' people who have to claim benefits. There was also concern that existing tenants might fall into arrears because of benefit changes, which they then might find difficult to escape from.

As part of their discussion Members considered how the views of service users could inform the Review. There was a consensus that it would not be appropriate for the Committee to carry out face-to-face interviews with those who had experienced homelessness or the threat of homelessness.

Members felt that instead the client satisfaction information, collated from the Homelessness Survey, should be used to help inform the Review.

The Committee recognised, however, that it might be difficult to get a balanced picture on customer satisfaction from this survey data. Members were informed that those who had been helped usually say that they are very happy with the support which they had received. Those whom the service has not been able to help are usually very aggrieved and so do not rate the service.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Housing Options Team Leader left the meeting.

RESOLVED – That the Committee thanked the Housing Options Team Leader for his scene setting presentation and his contribution to the Committee’s discussion.

271 Action Plan – Previous Scrutiny Review, including Parking Aspect

The Committee was asked to consider Cabinet’s Action Plan on “The Impact of Town Centre Environments on Community Safety”. In particular, Members were asked to determine whether the Plan could now be “signed off” by the Committee. Members were assisted in this by the Community Safety Manager, the Head of Housing & Community Safety, the Principal Planning Officer and the Head of Street Scene.

Members considered the specific responses to the Committee’s recommendations set out in the Action Plan. In this context, Members were reminded that the Committee had asked for the Community Safety Partnership to offer advice on how businesses could be made safer, including technical advice on lighting and on providing their own CCTV cameras.

The Committee was advised that the Community Safety Team were not sufficiently qualified or indemnified to give specific advice on either business security or CCTV. Consequently this might leave the Council open to claims if anything went wrong as a result of any unsound advice which the Council had offered to them.

Members accepted this argument. They welcomed the fact that the Community Safety Team would produce instead a leaflet setting out the various types of issues which local businesses ought to consider when they sought specialist advice about security and CCTV. The Committee hoped that this leaflet would be widely distributed.

The Committee had also recommended that the Council should try and levy an extra rate on certain businesses, such as takeaways, in an attempt to obtain a better mixture of businesses in the District’s town centres and so help to secure an increased footfall through the day.

Although the Committee had hoped this aim could be achieved through the Local Plan it now seemed probable that there would not be time to develop a sufficiently strong evidence base, whilst keeping to the Local Plan timetable. Members noted this.

The Committee discussed what could be done to promote diversity of use and discourage similar businesses, such as hairdressers, congregating in the same areas. As part of this discussion they were told that only limited action could be taken within planning law, especially if these businesses did not have to apply for planning permission in order to change the use of premises.

The Committee discussed extensively the problems caused by the lack of parking enforcement, especially late at night in the District's town centres. These problems, it was stated, had been raised by officers with Derbyshire County Council at the Highway Authority. Members felt that the Committee should also now make their views known to them. Members also agreed to pass on any specific issues to the Highways Authority – such as photographs showing the number plates of illegally parked vehicles – which they were aware of, to the County Council, so the hopefully appropriate enforcement action could then be taken.

At the conclusion of the discussion the officers were thanked for their contribution and left the meeting.

RESOLVED – That:-

- (1) The Action Plan on The Impact of Town Centre Environments on Community Safety, including the Parking Aspect, be signed off.
- (2) The Committee continues to receive updates on issues within the Action Plan, as and when appropriate.
- (3) The Lead Officer on behalf of the Committee contacts Derbyshire County Council, as Highway Authority, to express its concern that appropriate action should be taken to ensure that appropriate parking enforcement is in place in the District.
- (4) Elected Members be encouraged to provide Derbyshire County Council as Highway Authority with any evidence of parking offences that they are aware of.

(Head of Street Scene/
Overview & Scrutiny Manager)

272 Action Plan – Lead Office Response into the Scrutiny Review on Domestic Abuse

Members were reminded that the Committee had carried out a review on Domestic Abuse as part of its Work Programme for 2017/18.

One of the Committee's main findings was that the appointment of a dedicated Domestic Abuse Officer be explored. Following on from this, Cabinet had now agreed to undertake an options appraisal on the appointment of a dedicated Domestic Abuse Officer – taking into account the existing resources within the County Wide Community Safety Domestic Abuse Team, including the procurement of the County Wide Advice Service.

The Head of Housing and Community Safety – explained that as part of this option appraisal they had identified three possible ways forward. The Committee was asked to consider these and to recommend which of them it was felt would be most appropriate.

The first option, he suggested, would be to appoint an officer to provide a full internal NEDDC service. A similar approach had been adopted in Bolsover and had worked well.

The second option would be to create a part-time post, which would deal with relatively low level issues, rather than to provide a comprehensive service. The third option, would be to retain the existing arrangements, which it was pointed out, relies heavily on the Derbyshire Wide Domestic Abuse Advice Service.

The Committee discussed this matter in detail. At the conclusion of this discussion there was a consensus that the most appropriate way forward would be to appoint an officer to carry out or to deliver a comprehensive service for the Council.

Members felt that a full-time post ought to be created to help ensure that an appropriate candidate could be recruited. Members recognised the resource constraints facing the authority and discussed how this post might be funded. They felt that the post should be recruited to, in the first instance, for three years – but reviewed after two years to determine its effectiveness and whether it should be extended further. The Committee thought that this was a good suggested approach.

RESOLVED – That:-

- (1) The Committee recommends the creation of a full-time Domestic Violence Officer post, initially for three years.
- (2) A review of the post takes place after two years to determine whether it should be extended beyond the initial three year period.
- (3) The Council explores further the options for securing additional funding for this post.

(Head of Housing & Community Safety)

273 Scrutiny Review - Interviews

The Committee undertook interviews as part of its review into Homelessness. Members heard from the Accommodation and Prevention Officer and the Homeless Team Officers, who were asked to address a series of questions.

Accommodation and Prevention Officer

- (1) *What is your role in this area?*

The Officer explained that the focus for her role was managing temporary accommodation and liaising with landlords – although she also dealt with some individual cases.

- (2) *How do you think the processes in place at the Council are working to help prevent Homelessness and respond when it occurs?*

The Officer explained her perceptions of the effectiveness of the Council's processes to prevent and respond to homelessness. In this context, she explained how the Council uses bed and breakfast accommodation in only limited circumstances – as it would not be in the best interest of those who are homeless and because it is not cost effective. Members also heard that very few bed and breakfasts actually provide the specialist facilities that are often required. She pointed out that only one bed and breakfast had a “wet room” which disabled people often require.

- (3) *Are the Council responding effectively to the Homelessness Reduction Act?*

Her general feeling was that the Council had responded well to the new demands placed on the authority by the Act.

- (4) *How effectively is the Council communicating in this area?*

Her general feeling was that the Council communicated well with clients, other agencies and housing providers. Specific mention was made of the Homelessness Forum as a way of sharing information.

- (5) *What do you think about the provision of temporary accommodation within the District, including the use of bed and breakfast accommodation?*

The Officer explained that the Council has a preferred supplier – although in some circumstances homeless people cannot be sent there because of potential safety issues for the proprietor. The Officer stated that there was a need to provide more temporary accommodation. Issues about specialist accommodation, especially for disabled people, were raised by her. She again reiterated the point that only one bed and breakfast had a “wet room”.

- (6) *What kind of reception does the Council offer to those who approach as homeless?*

The Officer explained that the Council continues to offer a professional, empathetic response to those seeking assistance in order to help them remain in their own homes or, if necessary, to be rehoused.

- (7) *What feedback do we have from customers using the service?*

The Officer felt that the service was well received by those who it had managed to help, but for obvious reasons gets less favourable feedback from those whom they have been unable to assist.

- (8) *How does the Council measure the outcomes of the homelessness service?*

The Officer explained that this was something which she had had a great deal of involvement with – this was more a matter for the Team Leader.

- (9) *How effective are joint working arrangements between partnerships and the Council (including with other internal Council sections)?*

The Officer felt that there was a good working relationship between the Council and other agencies. Special mention was made of the joint work between Local Councils and the Churches to provide a winter night shelter.

- (10) *Is the Homelessness Forum working well?*

The Officer felt that the Homelessness Forum was working well and was successfully engaging a wide range of agencies and housing providers.

- (11) *What funding is the service accessing and how is it being spent? Is it achieving the desired outcomes?*

The Officer felt that the service was effective and value for money.

- (12) *How do you believe our performance compares to other comparable Councils in the area?*

The Officer advised that the Section was about to start a consultation exercise on how NEDDC was performing compared to other local authorities.

- (13) *Have you any ideas for improving the service?*

The Officer reiterated the earlier points she made about the need for temporary and specialist accommodation.

- (14) *Is there anything else you would like to tell us?*

The Officer did not make any additional points at this stage.

The Committee thanked the Officer for her contribution to the Review and for discussing these with Members.

The Accommodation and Prevention Officer then left the meeting.

Housing Options Officers

- (1) *What is your role in this area?*

The Officers explained how their roles had changed following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the additional administrative tasks

that they have to deal with, as well as the scope which they now have to deal with to prevent or respond to homelessness.

- (2) *How do you think the processes in place at the Council are working to help prevent Homelessness and respond when it occurs?*

The Officers felt that the processes which the Council had in place to prevent and respond to homelessness were working well. They highlighted the additional workload pressures which they now faced and the new systems that had been put in place to help them successfully meet these pressures.

- (3) *Are the Council responding effectively to the Homelessness Reduction Act?*

The Officers thought that the Council was responding effectively to the Homelessness Reduction Act. The Officers did not think that the Homelessness Reduction Act had had the same impact in North East Derbyshire as it had had in many other Councils. The service here had always sought to help anyone seeking assistance, not just certain groups. It continues to offer advice to help people to get on the housing register etc.

- (4) *How effectively is the Council communicating in this area?*

The Officers thought that the Council communicates well, including with landlords. The Team has sought to build a good relationship with them, which is of great help when trying to resolve any issues with tenants or to prevent them from escalating to the point of eviction.

- (5) *What do you think about the provision of temporary accommodation within the District, including the use of bed and breakfast accommodation?*

The Officers reiterated the point that there was not enough temporary accommodation or specialist accommodation in the District, and what there is has tended to be full over the last few months or so. When necessary, the Council has to use bed and breakfast accommodation, although this is not an option of choice. They also pointed out that only a limited amount of accommodation is available for those with special needs.

- (6) *What kind of reception does the Council offer to those who approach as homeless?*

The Council had a very customer focused approach, which was well received by service clients. A more family friendly interview suite had been created, which has been well received. The service also now provided packs with basis information for use across the Council, so that clients can receive at least initial assistance whenever they make contact.

- (7) *What feedback do we have from customers using the service?*

The Officers felt that the service gets good feedback from those whom they can help.

- (8) *How does the Council measure the outcomes of the homelessness service?*

The Officers explained the internal and national performance arrangements that were in place.

- (9) *How effective are joint working arrangements between partnerships and the Council (including with other internal Council sections)?*

The Officers pointed out there are very good working arrangements, with the Call Centre especially performing well. Revenues Service can help to speed up benefit payments when required and the relationship with Rykneld Homes Ltd was also good.

- (10) *Is the Homelessness Forum working well?*

Both of the Officers felt that the Homelessness Forum was working well. A lot of different agencies were now involved and it was seen as worthwhile. The Officers emphasised how partnership working had become more important than ever and they welcomed the holistic approach to solving problems that had become increasingly common around debt advice and substance misuse to help prevent people from becoming homeless, both now and in the future.

- (11) *What funding is the service accessing and how is it being spent? Is it achieving the desired outcomes?*

The Officers explained how the service tries to assess the costs and benefits of expenditure in terms of what was most likely to keep someone from becoming homeless, such as manageable loans through the Credit Union and Deposit Guarantees, through to helping people get appropriate new accommodation when it is no longer possible to keep someone in their existing or former home.

In response to questions from Members, there was a discussion about the impact of the changes to the benefits system, and in particular, the introduction of Universal Credit. Delays in paying this benefit had been reported, which had, it was stated caused hardship for those involved.

- (12) *How do you believe our performance compares to other comparable Councils in the area?*

The Officers felt that the Council was performing well. There is a "good offer" of social housing and most people can be accommodated. The specific issues of low levels of supported accommodation was again highlighted.

(13) Have you any ideas for improving the service?

The Officers felt that more disabled access for accommodation was required in the District.

(14) Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

No other specific points were raised.

Following their discussion Members thanked the Officers for their contribution to the Review.

The Housing Options Team Officers then left the meeting.

Members discussed and reflected on the evidence which they had received and how this would help to inform its next set of interviews, in November 2018.

274 List of Key Decisions – Issue No 77

The Committee considered Issue No 77 of the List of Key Decisions which set out the major decisions being taken over the next few months. In this context, Members noted that the proposed Empty Property Trial had been agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 5 September 2018.

RESOLVED – That the List of Key Decisions, Issue No 77, be noted.

275 Scrutiny Work Programme 2018/19

The Committee considered the Work Programme for the Communities Scrutiny Committee 2018/19, which set out the items that the Committee would consider over the forthcoming year.

RESOLVED – That the Communities Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme for 2018/19 be noted.

(Overview & Scrutiny Manager)

276 Additional Urgent Items (if any)

There were no urgent items to be discussed at this meeting.

277 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee would take place on Friday, 23 November 2018 at 1.00 pm in the Executive Meeting Room.