

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

12 OCTOBER 2016

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Mahmood (Chairman)
Gbola Adeleke
Banks
Mrs Bassadone
Conway
P Hearn
Link
Imarni (Vice-Chairman)
W Wyatt-Lowe

Officers: Natasha Braithwaite - Group Manager – Strategic Housing
Kayley Johnston – Member Support Officer (Minutes)

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

56 **MINUTES**

It was agreed that the Housing and Community OSC meeting minutes on 22 September 2016 would be reviewed at the next meeting.

57 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from Cllr Fethney and Cllr Silwal.
Councillor Timmis was absent.

58 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There was no declaration of interest.

59 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

60 **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE
COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

None

N Brathwaite presented this report explaining the purpose was to provide the committee with an overview of the proposed Homelessness strategy 2016-2020. The report includes the approach taken to develop the strategy and an update on national and local trends, key changes in legislation and the council's commitment to achieving a Gold Standard homelessness service.

N Brathwaite was happy to take questions

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe said that this week was mental health week and that he had gone to a national session yesterday. He is trying to introduce mental health into policies and would love to see more on mental health in this strategy. Cllr Wyatt-Lowe will email N Brathwaite which will include approximately 7 places where he would like mental health and safeguarding mentioned.

N Brathwaite explained that it's a little difficult to break it down exactly, although it doesn't directly mention mental health it's definitely included in the strategy and it's taken very seriously and they do aim to tackle it, additionally N Brathwaite confirmed that the strategy is underpinned by the service and team plan, which specifies specific tasks that are required of the service to achieve outcomes. She is happy to take comments on board.

Cllr Mahmood asked if vulnerable people could be added to page 18, 4.4.

N Brathwaite explained that there is a vulnerable person's strategy policy and that is to be reviewed shortly, there are a few policies/strategies that feed into this policy.

Cllr Imarni referred to page 9, 4.9 housing allowance, are there concerns about us competing. She also referred to 5.1 on page 10 welfare reforms, which part will affect us. On 5.5 with extending the period do we have the means to support this?

N Brathwaite said that the local housing allowance helps us around the support we give our tenants we have over 150 tenants in rented property, there are concerns around rising rent and we need to ensure tenants can afford the rent and yes we are competing with other local authorities as they offer better incentives for landlords, in particular London Boroughs. We are looking at better incentives and enhancing the scheme, placements in the area are becoming an issue which does cause an impact on the service and this will increase. There is a second sitting in Parliament this month regarding the homelessness reduction bill; if this is brought in it will cause an impact on the service in terms of capacity and management of temporary accommodation.

Cllr Imarni asked if she could have a list of associated partners.

Cllr Adeleke referred to page 10, 4.1-6, in 2014 you identified 7-30 people sleeping rough, what happened when you identified these people. He also suggested as well as a Chair from the voluntarily sector to used 1-2 members to get them involved. N Brathwaite welcomed member's involvement in the Homeless forum.

N Brathwaite said homelessness it's a growing problem. People let us know and we send an outreach worker to them team to them. The number was high (2015) recently due to staff losing their accommodation at Champneys Health Spa.

Cllr Adeleke said that when he was Mayor he noticed a lot of office staff people had been sleeping in their cars, and asked if is this part of your catchment.

N Brathwaite confirmed it was part of their catchment; we would work with clients to consider options of more suitable accommodation.

Cllr Hearn congratulated N Brathwaite and her team on achieving bronze standard.

Cllr Mahmood referred to 2.5 do we use channel shift when children leave home.

N Brathwaite stated that they visited over 700 children last year, we fund an education service annually via Homeless Prevention Fund, which is delivered by Herts Young Homeless Group. The purpose is to put children into respite if they are going through difficulties with families and then have mediation to resolve the family difficulty.

Cllr Mahmood expressed how good the report was but said it lacked plans. N Brathwaite explained that the new format means that the strategy has no action plan, however is underpinned by Team Plan, can provide copy of this.

N Brathwaite said that she is happy to propose 6 months updates on the progress of the strategy.

This was agreed by Members.

Cllr Mahmood said that the conclusion in the final paragraph 'it's not an option' he thinks we need to re word this and put tackle.

N Brathwaite said that homelessness isn't a choice for people our aim is to prevent homelessness from happening so we don't want people to think that have an option of being homeless as this is not what we want.

Action: Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe to email minor amendments to N Brathwaite.
N Brathwaite to email Cllr Imarni associated partners.

Outcome: The report was noted.

62 DEN'S PERFORMANCE

N Brathwaite introduced this report the purpose of the report is to update the committee on the performance of the Elms contract, managed by the DEN's. She explained that the report detailed challenges with the hostel manager and how partnership works has been excellent and achieved improvement, good things are now happening since the new manager has been in place.

N Brathwaite was happy to take questions on the report.

Cllr Bassadone asked what the average age of people staying at the Elms.

N Brathwaite said that its mainly young people between 18-35 and the majority are males.

Cllr Bassadone asked the question, what you do when people disappear and haven't paid rent, do they ever come back.

N Brathwaite stated that this is then connected to their housing register application, there is an arrears policy including former arrears. The majority of people do return to the Elm's and then we put a repayment system in place.

Cllr Imarni referred to page 30, the severe weather protocol and extra staffing levels, we can't predict this.

N Brathwaite said that we have access to additional information, this enables us to track the weather, we are slipping into the winter period so we have to be cautious, there are crash pads available for emergency weather.

Cllr Imarni asked where these extra people come from in severe weather.

N Brathwaite stated that they can come from across the border. But many are already working with an known to the service

Cllr Wyatt-Lowe suggestion that the KPI's should include measuring the success of training given to residents.

N Brathwaite said that there were no successes to report when they wrote this, since then there has been someone who has achieved a catering course and someone who has done carpentry and is hoping to set up their own business.

Cllr Wyatt-Lowe referred to page 30 the performance section, does this include mental health.

N Brathwaite assured Members that they have attended all DBC essential training.

Cllr Adeleke asked if it was appropriate to advertise for volunteers to do a good deed for the DEN's, there is a man from London that comes over to cut their hair, it would be nice if more people could get involved.

N Brathwaite said it was a good idea and she can explore ways of advertising.

Cllr Imarni mentioned the lady in DBC that provides toiletries and raises money for sanitary products; she wanted to commend the good work which is happening.

Cllr Mahmood expressed his view and how he was alarmed to see such a high turnover off staff and asked if we have an open minded approach and more intervention.

N Brathwaite stated that DEN's had an extremely difficult period with the previous manager and this had a knock on affect, they did monitor this and they do meet regularly.

Cllr Mahmood asked for paragraph 3 to be looked at as it goes from passed to future and asked if a quarterly review could be done instead of an annual one.

N Brathwaite is happy to share updates on this.

Cllr Mahmood referred to item 4, contributions to the DEN's payment to the Council, are they achieving this.

N Brathwaite said that they were achieving this and costs may need to be looked at an increased due to increase in utilities costs.

Cllr Mahmood asked where people go when they are evicted from the DEN's.

N Brathwaite stated that this is very rare it's a last resort being evicted it's not a straight eviction. Its then comes down to the local authority to support them and look at alternative options.

Action: None

Outcome: Report was noted.

63 **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

Agreed

64 **WORK PROGRAMME 2016/2017**

Julia Hedger to give an update on new builds in November.

The Meeting ended at 9.55 pm