

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee held at 10.30 am on
Wednesday, 12 December 2018

Present:

Members: Councillor T Khan (Chair)
Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor J Clifford
Councillor G Crookes, substitute for Councillor Andrews
Councillor D Gannon
Councillor J McNicholas
Councillor M Mutton
Councillor R Singh

Other Members: Councillors P Hetherton, Cabinet Member for City Services
and E Ruane, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities

Other Representatives: Louise Morley, Experts by Experience Group
Kate Still, West Midlands Housing Group
Neelam Sunder, West Midlands Combined Authority

Employees:

M Andrews, Place Directorate
D Ashmore, People Directorate
S Elliot, Place Directorate
S Evans, Place Directorate
G Holmes, Place Directorate
L Knight, Place Directorate
A Walster, Place Directorate

Apologies: Councillors A Andrews, B Kaur, Deputy Cabinet Member,
J O'Boyle, Cabinet Member, and G Ridley

Public Business

31. Declarations of Interest

Councillor N Akhtar declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in the subject of Minute 34 below headed 'Taxi Licensing Matters'. He left the meeting for the consideration of this item.

32. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th November, 2018 were signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

33. Draft Housing and Homeless Strategy 2019 - 2024 Public Consultation

The Committee considered a briefing note and presentation of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) concerning the public consultation currently being carried out to develop the Housing and Homeless Strategy 2019-2024. Further views or inputs into the Strategy and the supporting Action Plan were sought from Members. Councillor Ruane, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, attended the meeting for the consideration of this item along with Kate Still, West Midlands Housing Group (WMHG), and Neelam Sunder, West Midlands Combined Authority. Louise Morley also attended as the representative of the Experts by Experience Panel. The response to the Strategy from the Experts by Experience had been circulated with the briefing note. These representatives addressed the Committee setting out their views on the draft Strategy.

The briefing note indicated that under Section 1 of the Homelessness Act 2002, the Council was required to develop and publish a Strategy to prevent homelessness every five years. An up to date Homelessness Strategy was required from 2019 and the Council had decided to combine this with the Housing Strategy so the Strategy was not seen in isolation. At their meeting on 3rd October, 2018 Cabinet had approved a public consultation on the draft Strategy.

The draft Strategy focussed on the following four main themes:

- i) Preventing homelessness and supporting homeless households
- ii) New housing development
- iii) Improving the use of existing homes
- iv) Support for people and communities.

A draft action plan had been published alongside the draft Strategy. Once approved, the action plan would be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that the actions were being progressed and responding to any changes. Reference was made to the transfer of Council's housing stock to Whitefriars Housing in 2000 and the need for the Council to work proactively with developers and registered providers. Attention was drawn to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and to the changes to the Council's homelessness duties required by the Act. The duty to refer process had only recently commenced and was to be reviewed in due course.

The briefing note informed that key stakeholders, partners, advice agencies and other Council departments had been engaged throughout the development of the strategy. The consultation would run from 6th November to 18th December, 2018. The purpose was to ensure that the correct priorities had been identified for housing and homelessness issues faced by the city, along with the correct actions. The results would be reviewed and any necessary changes made to the strategy and action plan prior to final consideration by Cabinet and Council in February 2019.

The Committee were informed that to date, 99 responses had been received to the consultation. At 30th November, the majority of the responses had been received from individuals, 79%, with the remainder from interested groups and organisations. The majority of these responses showed support for the principles and actions included in the draft Strategy. The briefing note set out a summary of the key points raised in response to the four strategy themes. A summary of all the responses would be included in an appendix to the final report.

Members questioned the officers and representatives on a number of issues and responses were provided, matters raised included:

- What support was currently being provided by WMHG for tenants with multiple complex needs and how would this be improved
- Concerns about the impact on the wider community and taking into account the needs of existing residents when placing tenants with multiple complex needs in the community
- Concerns about Housing First, in particular the level of support for tenants with multiple complex needs and whether the financial resource was sufficient to meet the required level of support be considered as part of the consultation process
- Particular concerns about the high levels of support required by tenants with mental health issues
- Details about attendees at the Homeless Forum which held on 9th November
- That the comments from the Experts by Experience should be considered seriously as part of the consultation feedback and if there were any operational quick wins in their suggestions, these should not have to wait until the political sign off of the Strategy to be implemented
- There should be immediate action on a safe place for women who were rough sleepers
- Generally, residents with multiple complex needs should have a sufficient support package to prevent them from becoming homeless, particularly at pinch points such as discharge from hospital and release from prison
- Further information about how the consultation has been publicised
- The consultation should be promoted as much and as widely as possible so that as many stakeholders could comment on the draft Strategy, including members of the community
- When the Council considered land for sale, that the social value of the land be considered rather than maximising capital receipts, in order to promote the building of social housing
- The Council should enforce the policy on proportions of affordable homes within development and not agree to variation orders to maximise the number of social houses
- Concerns that there were a lot of people in unsuitable accommodation
- Where Neighbourhood Plans were considered to be developed, consultation should involve all parts of the community affected, not just the vocal minority
- The Choice Based Lettings system, Homefinder, should be reviewed – this had already been included on the work programme for the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board
- The Committee supported the proposals by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities to strengthen the housing department in the Council, with recruitment to senior posts and a Head of Housing.
- The implications of the introduction of universal credit for tenants in WMHG accommodation.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The consultation measures being carried out as part of the development of the Housing and Homeless Strategy 2019-2024 be noted.

(2) The representation made to the Committee from the Experts by Experience be noted.

(3) The concerns about Housing First, in particular the level of support for tenants with multiple complex needs and whether the financial resource was sufficient to meet the required level of support be considered as part of the consultation process, with a further briefing being provided as appropriate and at a later date.

(4) The Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities be requested to consider all the issues raised during the course of the discussion as part of the consultation feedback.

(5) An update report be submitted to a future Scrutiny meeting detailing progress with actions following adoption of the strategy and after a period of six months.

34. Taxi Licensing Matters

The Committee considered a briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator concerning two issues from the recent review of the requirements and processes for taxi drivers, vehicles and operators in Coventry. A report on the review had been considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 27th November, 2018 and a copy of the report was set out at an appendix to the briefing note. The matters under consideration were the proposals to consult on a move away from age based vehicle licensing restrictions to a requirement based on emissions and the implementation of new conditions of licence to allow Pedicabs and Tuk Tuks to be licensed. Councillor Hetherington, Cabinet Member for City Services attended the meeting for the consideration of this item.

The briefing note indicated that the City Council kept its arrangements for licensing taxi drivers, vehicles and operators in Coventry under regular review in order to ensure that only 'fit and proper' individuals held a licence in Coventry; licensing processes were up to date and accessible and that taxi services in Coventry met the needs of customers.

At their meeting in November, Cabinet had approved the recommendations set out in the report which focussed on the following five proposals:

Part 1 – To update and replace the existing Private Hire Operator Conditions of Licence to incorporate requirements around the use of automated systems including the provision to grant licences to operators based outside of Coventry, subject to specific requirements

Part 2 - To implement changes to current processes for new and existing driver and vehicle licence holders following consultation with key stakeholders

Part 3 – To consult on a move away from age based vehicle licensing restrictions to a requirement based on emissions

Part 4 - To implement new Conditions of Licence to allow Pedicabs and Tuk Tuks to be licensed

Part 5 - Approve the continuation of the existing limit on the number of traditional hackney carriage vehicle licences at 859 in accordance with the recommendations in the recent hackney carriage vehicle unmet demand survey.

The Committee had been asked to consider Parts 3 and 4. The proposal to move away from age based vehicle licensing to a requirement based on emissions was in support of Local Air Quality Management requirements.

Members questioned the officer on a number of issues and responses were provided, matters raised included:

- Concerns about drivers being licensed by other Local Authorities and then operating in the city
- Support for the standards and requirements operated by the Council
- A request that Coventry drivers be allowed to drive other vehicles not on the list and be allowed more flexibility
- A concern about the short vehicle modification date
- Further information about the Coventry frame and the cap on the number of Hackney Carriage vehicle licences
- Concerns about the financial difficulties facing Coventry drivers in light of the requirement to have a new vehicle by 2024, particularly in light of the competition from Uber drivers
- Information of the package of measures to help the trade
- Concerns about drivers using the public highway to maintain and service their vehicles
- Further information about electric vehicles
- The suggestion that there should be national standards based on the standards operated by the City Council or a regional policy
- Concerns about the proposal that Tuk Tuks be pre-booked when the expectation is that they will be used by tourists visiting the city, especially in 2021.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The proposals to move away from age based vehicle licensing restrictions to a requirement based on emissions as set out in paragraphs 1.3.1 to 1.3.6 of the Cabinet report be noted.

(2) The conditions set out in Appendix A of the Cabinet report regarding vehicle conditions for licensing Pedicabs and Tuk Tuks be noted.

(3) The Cabinet Member for City Services be requested to seek support for a regional taxi licensing policy based on the current standards operated by Coventry Council.

35. West Midlands Combined Authority - Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee noted a briefing note of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator which provided an update on the work of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Sub-Groups.

The briefing note informed of the recent call-in by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of a decision of the Housing and Land Delivery Board at their meeting on 25th October concerning the Town Centre Programme, in particular ‘the lack of transparency within the report, supplementary information document and minutes as to the process used leading up to the selection and naming of the sites chosen’. At their meeting on 20th November, 2018 to discuss the call-in, the Committee agreed with the decision to allocate the funding to the town centres, however they were unhappy with the levels of transparency in the process for decision making. They agreed recommendations to provide scrutiny members with more information on the work programmes of all the sub-groups of the WMCA. The briefing note listed all the recommendations.

The Committee noted that, as the meeting wasn’t quorate, these recommendations would need to be ratified at the next quorate meeting. Members expressed concerns that Scrutiny meetings of the WMCA were inquorate. They were informed that concerns were being raised at a national level about the high level quorum required for Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny meetings.

The briefing note referred to the two meetings of the Health and Wellbeing Working Group. The focus for this group had been agreed as mental health, digital innovation and the justice system.

RESOLVED that:

(1) The contents of the briefing note be noted.

(2) The concerns being raised at a national level concerning the high level quorum required for Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny meetings be noted.

36. Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee Work Programme 2018/2019 and Outstanding Issues

The Committee noted their work programme for the current municipal year.

37. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no additional items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 1.20 pm)