

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 11 July 2019

Present:

Members: Councillor N Akhtar (Chair)
Councillor M Ali
Councillor C Miks
Councillor R Thay
Councillor S Walsh

Other Members: Councillor P Hetherton (Cabinet Member for City Services)

Employees (by Directorate):

People: J Crawshaw

Place: V Castree, T Cowley, U Patel, A Walster

Apologies: Councillors F Abbott, R Bailey and D Welsh (Deputy Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities)

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March, 2019 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

3. Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan (HIAMP)

The Scrutiny Board considered progress of the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan.

The City Council's Highway Asset Management Policy & Strategy which outlined the Authority's long-term asset management approach to highway maintenance was approved by Cabinet in November 2015. Following the publication of the 2016 Well Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice, the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management (HIAMP) was revised to ensure compliance with the new code.

The HIAMP was designed to direct and inform service users and those involved in service delivery about the way in which the Council intends to maintain its highway assets.

As part of the review and update of the HIAMP, the City Council collaborated with other Local Authorities through meetings and working groups. This was to ensure that the HIAMP adopts best practice and, where possible, was consistent with other similar Local Authorities.

The changes to the HIAMP included the inclusion of a risk-based approach to highway maintenance, a review and update of the road hierarchy and the defining of resilient highway network.

Coventry's highway network is estimated to have a construction value of £1.3billion. the operation and maintenance of this vital asset must support the city by delivering the required service to road users and by using public money wisely.

Over the last 10 years the Councils funding from government has been halved, meaning the Council has to change what is done and how it is delivered. A key function of the HIAMP would be to set out what the Council will do to deliver the best possible service with the resources available. The HIAMP covers a wide range of activities, from inspections, to routine and cyclic maintenance, to structural maintenance and more substantial refurbishments and improvements.

The Scrutiny Board questioned officers on aspects of the report including: -

- The maintenance of footways and programme of works outstanding
- Traffic light replacement/upgrade
- Dropped kerbs policy
- Monitoring, inspections and prioritisation of work
- Funding from WMCA
- Parking on pavements
- Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) car and enforcement

The Scrutiny Board requested further information to be circulated on the following:

- The amount of money spent on refurbishing footways around the City and the work outstanding.
- The sets of traffic lights upgraded around the City

Following a recommendation from the Cabinet Member for City Services, the Scrutiny Board requested a visit be arranged to the traffic management centre to see the system in action.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:

- 1. Notes the progress and actions regarding the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan.**
- 2. Supports the Highway Infrastructure Asset Management Plan appended to the report.**
- 3. Had no further recommendations for the Cabinet Member to consider.**

4. 12 Month Review of the Implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA)

The Scrutiny Board considered a report of the Head of Housing and Transformation on the 12-month review of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA). The report was considered by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities at his meeting on 1 July, 2019.

The report provided information relating to the number of cases presenting as homeless, the needs of our customers and how well we are responding to these needs. The report also highlighted areas for further work.

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 came into force on 3 April 2018 and placed new statutory duties on Councils in England to provide enhanced advice and assistance to people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. It was the single most significant change to homelessness legislation since 1977 and received cross party support throughout its progress through the legislative process.

The legislation placed the additional statutory duties on the Council; prevention duty - working with customers to understand the circumstances that have led to the threat of homelessness and agree a Personal Housing Plan (PHP), including a set of reasonable steps to undertake to prevent homelessness. And relief duty – for households who are already homeless or for those whose homelessness could be prevented. The Council and the applicant must agree ‘reasonable steps’ within their PHP to help them secure accommodation which is suitable and available for at least 6 months.

The Act focuses on reducing the number of households becoming homeless by working with them before they reach the point of crisis.

The first year of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has been a challenging one both locally and nationally. The principles of the legislation focus on early intervention and prevention. The change of legislation framework has required a significant culture change for staff in how they support our customers. During the first year of the Act the Housing and Homelessness Service has successfully prevented or relieved homelessness for 366 cases.

However, a significant number of people who require support were still not seeking help early enough as evidenced by those who were still presenting to us as homeless on the night. This reflected the national picture whereby use of temporary accommodation has increased as a result of the Act.

The reasons for homelessness were not just about the loss of a home but finding and accessing an affordable alternative, wither in the private rented sector or social housing. For Coventry, the gap between our Local Housing Allowance rates and private rented sector costs is higher than other areas in addition to the shortage of social housing. The Council is seeking to mitigate this by continuing to utilise our prevention pot monies to best effect. It is also hoped that our new Top Up Rent scheme would increase the numbers of people; particularly families, who

can access the private rented sector in the medium term whilst waiting for social housing if that is their preferred option longer term.

The Scrutiny Board questioned officers present on aspects of the report, particularly in relation to:

- How much money had been paid for deposits to landlords
- Working with, and the role of, partner agencies such as Whitefriars and Salvation Army
- Housing first scheme
- Families in temporary accommodation

The Scrutiny Board requested further information on how much money has been paid for deposits to landlords to be circulated to members of the Board.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:

- 1. Considered the information relating to the number of cases presenting as homeless and endorses the work being done to respond to their needs.**
- 2. Endorses the progress made to date and notes the areas highlighted for further work.**
- 3. Had no further recommendations for the Cabinet Member to consider.**
- 4. Requests that a report be submitted in 6 month's time on rough sleeping following the publication of the official figures in January 2020.**

5. Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) Work Programme and Outstanding Issues 2019/20

The Scrutiny Board considered their Work Programme for 2019/20 and identified the following items for future consideration: -

Update on traffic lights upgrade - September meeting

Recycling plant – to be scheduled in the New Year

City Centre Parking – to be scheduled once information is available

Visit to the Traffic Management Centre – to be arranged

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board's Work Programme be updated to incorporate the issues identified above.

6. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.55 am)