

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 9 February 2023

Present:

Members: Councillor L Bigham (Chair)
 Councillor S Agboola
 Councillor R Bailey
 Councillor J Gardiner
 Councillor M Heaven
 Councillor A Hopkins
 Councillor R Singh
 Councillor R Thay

Other Members: Councillor P Hetherton, Cabinet Member for City Services

 Councillor D Welsh, Cabinet Member for Housing and
 Communities

Employees (by Service Area):

Environmental Services C Hickin, M McHugh

Law and Governance S Bennett, V Castree

Regulatory Services D Blackburn, A Chowns

Waste Services S Elliott

Apologies: Councillors G Hayre and G Lloyd

Public Business

27. Death of Council Employee

The Chair, Councillor L Bigham, referred to the sad recent death in service of one of the Senior Crew Members in Waste Services.

The Scrutiny Board stood for a Minute's silence as a mark of respect.

28. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

29. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 December, 2022 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

30. **Empty Dwellings**

The Scrutiny Board considered a Briefing Note which provided an update on progress in dealing with empty dwellings following the approval of the Empty Dwellings Strategy in August 2021, with the main aim of reducing the number of long-term empty dwellings in Coventry to a practical minimum.

A long term empty dwelling is considered to be any property that has been empty for six months or more. A number of actions have now been completed within the Strategy and a presentation at the meeting updated the Scrutiny Board on progress made to date, together with information in relation to powers available to the Council to deal with empty properties.

The presentation covered:-

- The three main objectives of the Strategy:-
 - Objective 1 – promote a range of advice, assistance and support and develop new solutions
 - Objective 2 – use enforcement action to bring long term problematic empty dwellings back into use
 - Objective 3 – better understanding why dwellings are being left empty and where possible prevent dwellings from becoming empty for long periods of time
- The City Council's approach:-
 - Three phases leading up to formal action
 - Phase 1 – work with the owner to identify options and find a solution
 - No satisfactory progress – case will progress to phase 2 (Informal warning)
 - Subject to regular environmental crime and ASB – skip phase 2 and move to phase 3 (formal action)/ owner of a property is untraceable or demonstrates an unwillingness to work with the Council
 - The Council will seek to recover all costs where possible
 - Extent of enforcement determined by the resources available to fund both the revenue and capital elements
 - Prior to enforcement, look at all options available legally and within available resources to ensure not being subjected to unnecessary risk
- Action Plans for dealing with empty properties
- Work undertaken so far including:-
 - Identifying 300+ cases to develop an empty dwellings property database

- Identified 32 priority case – targeting 4 for potential insolvency action or enforced sale; 6 potential Compulsory Purchase Order action; 22 requiring proactive enforcement
- Targeted one long term problematic case with Demolition Order/CPO action
- During 2022, brought 33 properties back into use
- Enforcement powers available to the Council including:-
 - General enforcement powers
 - Enforced sale
 - Compulsory Purchase Orders
 - Empty Dwelling Management Orders

The Scrutiny Board asked questions, sought assurances and made comments on a number of issues including:-

- Noting that the Strategy did not cover empty commercial properties
- Assurances in relation to defining dwellings as empty after a six month period and ensuring that any action taken is applied proportionality, noting that each case is treated individually and on its own merit
- Sources of information used to identify empty properties, including Council tax information
- Assurances in relation to advice and support given to home owners
- The situation in relation to home owners who live abroad
- Difficulties in relation to applying timeframes to dealing with each case due to the potential complexities involved

The officers were thanked for the comprehensive presentation and all the work carried out in this regard.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board:-

- 1) Notes the current position and the situation regarding funding constraints**
- 2) Supports and welcomes the co-ordinated response to managing empty dwellings in the City**
- 3) Requests that an update on progress and outcomes achieved in relation to long term empty dwellings be included on the Work Programme for 2023/24**
- 4) Requests that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities considers reviewing the wording of the Empty Dwellings Strategy to provide reassurance to residents that the Policy is applied proportionality and the case studies as to how the Policy is applied are appended to the Policy**

31. **Update on the Recommendations from the Fly-Tipping Task and Finish Group**

The Scrutiny Board considered a Briefing Note, together with a presentation at the meeting, which provided an update on the recommendations identified by the Fly-tipping Task and Finish Group which were submitted to the Cabinet Member for City Services in March, 2022.

The Task and Finish Group made 25 recommendations, details of which were contained in an Appendix to the Briefing Note, including progress to date on implementing the recommendations.

The presentation covered fly-tipping trends over a three year period, including total fly tipping incidents; ward figures (including no of fly-tipping incidents per ward); and fly-tipping by types.

The Scrutiny Board asked questions, sought assurances and made comments on a number of issues including:-

- Numbers of fly-tipping incidents and how they are recorded and counted
- The disposal of fridges and steps undertaken to ensure these are collected and disposed of properly, together with lobbying undertaken to try and bring a change to legislation so that old fridges are collected when a new fridge is delivered
- An initiative currently being trialled by Birmingham Council – “Bring Tip to You”, which is similar to the “pop up sites” which operate in Coventry
- Work being undertaken in relation to education people regarding disposing of waste properly, including enlisting more volunteers and using the small waste education team in the most efficient and effective way
- “Hot Streets” – which are identified as the streets with the most incidents of fly-tipping and which resources are then focused on
- Collection of side waste, which was now being undertaken (subject to health and safety rules)
- Data collection in relation to fly-tipping and how this is used to target resources
- The use of CCTV cameras in the City and how, in the right location, these can be very effective deterrents. The constraints of using mobile CCTV cameras were noted
- Support and advice given to private land owners when fly-tipping occurs on private land
- Fly- tipping on land owned by Citizen
- Work undertaken by the waste education team
- Fly-tipping fixed penalties
- The assisted bin lift scheme and how this is operated
- Abandoned supermarket trollies and the “Trolleywise” app where residents can report abandoned trollies to be collected and returned

The Scrutiny Board thanked officers for the comprehensive presentation and for all of the work undertaken in relation to fly-tipping.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board notes and welcomes the update on the implementation of the recommendations from the Fly-tipping Task and Finish Group.

32. Waste Services Update

The Scrutiny Board considered a Briefing Note, together with a presentation at the meeting, which provided an update on Waste Services, including the impact of the industrial action and information on the Christmas waste collection 2022.

The presentation detailed:-

- Industrial Action during 2022:-
 - Extent of action taken
 - Pop up sites provided during the strike
 - The impact of the industrial action on tonnage and recycling rates
 - The financial implication of the industrial action
- Christmas Collection 2022:-
 - Historic information outlining previous difficulties experienced with collections over the Christmas period
 - The new waste services agreement as part of the strike negotiations which means that collections are now provide over the Christmas period, without the need for clear sacks
 - The reduction in complaints received as a result of the new Christmas arrangement
 - The financial implications of the new arrangements

The Scrutiny Board asked questions, sought assurances and made comments on a number of issues including:-

- The numbers of drivers who left the authority and the early retirements/voluntary redundancies costs associated with those drivers (it was noted that this information would be circulated to the Scrutiny Board)
- The complaints process for members of the public in relation to waste collections (it was noted that this information would be provided to the Scrutiny Board)

REOLVED that the Scrutiny Board notes the update on Waste Services.

33. Outstanding Issues and Work Programme 2022/23

The Scrutiny Board noted their Work Programme for 2022/23.

34. Any Other Items of Urgent Public Business

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.30 pm)