

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities held at
4.00 pm on Monday, 1 July 2019

Present:

Members: Councillor T Khan
Councillor M Lapsa (Shadow Cabinet Member)

Employees (by Directorate):

People: D Ashmore, J Crawshaw

Place: U Patel, L Stockin, B Welch (Trainee Solicitor)

Apologies: Councillors R Bailey and D Welsh

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 March, 2019 were noted. There were no matters arising.

3. 12 month review of the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA)

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 ("the Act") 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 political party support throughout its progress through the legislative process.

The legislation placed the following 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. Where appropriate officers try to keep the customer in their current tenancy or seek alternative accommodation to prevent the customer becoming homeless.

Relief Duty – for households who are already homeless or for those whose homelessness could not 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 focusses on reducing the number of households becoming homeless by working with them before they reach the point of crisis.

A report was presented to Cabinet on 6th March 2018 which sought approval to make relevant changes as a result of the Act. It was recommended a review of the new service within 12 months, to be presented to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities.

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

The first year of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 had been a challenging one both locally and nationally. The principles of the legislation focus on early intervention and prevention. The change of legislative 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 are still presenting to us as homeless on the night. This means that our use of temporary accommodation is still high. This reflects 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; either 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 our new Top Up Rent scheme will 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 Council recently approved its Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2019 to 2024 and contains a number of longer-term objectives for the Housing and Homelessness Service over the next 12 months. Key actions over the next 6 months include, improving quality of temporary accommodation options, review of the Coventry Homefinder Policy and continuing to encourage development of permanent housing options.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities:

- 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.**

4. **Outstanding Issues**

The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Place) which detailed a list of outstanding issues and summarised the current position in respect of each item.

With regard to item 1 headed “Article 4 direction – HiMO’s”, the Cabinet Member noted that the delay in the submission of a report was due to information not being forwarded by the residents’ association as agreed. The Cabinet Member was assured that he would be briefed on this matter should there be any progress.

With regard to item 2 headed “Response to a petition to get homeless people accommodated & not living in Barracks Car Park”, the Cabinet Member noted that the Council had established a Strategic Housing Board, chaired by Coventry’s Chief Executive; which would focus on the delivery of a new Housing and Homeless Strategy, including a detailed focus on Rough Sleepers. In addition, there were a number of forums, with key service users and third sector organisations, to progress both the strategic and individual casework in relation to rough sleeping.

RESOVLED that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities having considered the information above, agreed that the above items can be deleted from the Outstanding Issues Report.

5. **Any other item of public business which the Cabinet Member decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 4.30 pm)