

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 17 September 2020

Present:

Members: Councillor N Akhtar (Chair)

Councillor F Abbott

Councillor M Ali

Councillor M Heaven

Councillor R Thay

Councillor D Welsh

Other Members: Councillor D Welsh (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities)

Employees: D Ashmore, V Castree, J Crawshaw, G Holmes

Apologies: Councillor R Bailey, Cllr S Walsh

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 February, 2020 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

3. Housing and Homelessness Update

Cllr Akhtar welcomed Cllr Welsh to his first meeting as Cabinet Member Housing and Communities. Cllr Akhtar thanks the previous Cabinet Member, Cllr T Khan, for the work he had undertaken in the role.

The Scrutiny Board received a presentation which provided an update in relation to Housing and Homelessness.

The presentation included the following:-

- The Council had been awarded for £782,000 from Government to support rough sleepers over the winter period as the City's night shelters would not be able to open due to the pandemic.
- A summary of achievements and successes in relation to the One Coventry Housing and Homelessness Strategy was provided. These included that there were no families or singles in Bed and Breakfast accommodation; 220+ rough sleepers had been accommodated due to Covid; 26 refurbished properties at Caradoc Hall had opened in

December 2019 delivering a £1million saving; Housing continued to work with Register Social Landlords to deliver affordable housing and Cornerstone had been contracted to deliver 103 permanent Local Housing Allowance properties by April 2022.

- Potential future issues were highlighted including the delay on evictions which was due to end on 20 September 2020 and the potential impacts of a likely recession.
- Housing demand was summarised – there were 13,600 households on the housing register, with only 1342 properties available last year, of which 9.5% were age restricted to over 55+. The greatest demand was for family accommodation with an average of 284 bids being received for a 3 bedroom property.
- Frank Walsh House had been used to accommodate singles in response to the Covid crisis – those still being accommodated there would be rehoused shortly and families moved into the properties by November.

The Scrutiny Board questioned officers on aspects of the presentation and received responses on the following issues including:-

- The role and responsibility of Landlords to support tenants and how the Council could support to tenants/landlords to maintain tenancies.
- There had been rough sleepers in Coventry over the past six months and the reasons for this were multiple. Some were individuals who were entrenched rough sleepers, some had to leave the accommodation they were in due to family/ relationship breakdowns and some were new to the streets. All on the streets were regularly offered accommodation and the homelessness outreach service operated across the City and not just in the City Centre.
- There had been success in moving rough sleepers into accommodation for a number of reasons. These included fear of the pandemic, especially from those with underlying health conditions and lack of revenue in the City Centre due to reduced footfall which was an incentive for some to address their substance misuse problems.
- Over the past 5 month, the Council had prevented the eviction of 450 families through the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- To date there had not been any Covid-19 outbreaks in the Temporary Accommodation sites. Plans had been drawn up with Public Health to manage temporary accommodation safely should a resident have a positive Covid-19 test.
- Work was being undertaken with the Local Government Association to look at possible options for building more homes in the City, which would be shared with scrutiny at an appropriate time.
- The recent Government revenue grant of £782,000 would be spent on providing accommodation over the winter at The Days Hotel on Holyhead Road with support for those living there, the reconfiguration of some of the accommodation space at the Salvation Army to meet Covid safe requirements and further projects with partners, the details of which had not yet been confirmed. A capital bid had been submitted for around £3million to address

longer term provision requirements for rough sleepers, the outcome of which was not known at the time of this meeting. It was noted that whilst grant money could be well utilised, there were significant challenges with planning a service when funding was provided through bids or short-term grants.

- Members recommended that consideration be made to simplifying digital access to Homefinder, perhaps through an app. The Cabinet Member agreed that Officers would explore this and feedback to the Scrutiny Board on progress.
- Local Housing Allowance levels were shared with the Scrutiny Board as these had been increased nationally due to Covid-19.

RESOLVED that the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4):-

- 1. Recommends to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities that consideration be given to simplifying digital access to Homefinder**
- 2. Requests further information on the numbers of households prevented from becoming homeless since the introduction of the Housing and Homelessness Reduction Act**
- 3. Requests further items to be included on the work programme:**
 - a. Housing Enforcement**
 - b. Impact of Housing Licensing Schemes**

4. Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) Work Programme and Outstanding Issues

RESOLVED that the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) note their Work Programme for 2020/21 and requested the inclusion of the following on their Work Programme;

- 1) The City Centre Parking include of city parking and park and ride**
- 2) Residents Parking Schemes**

5. Any Other Items of Public Business

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.20am)