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Coventry City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 4 November 2021

Present:

Members: Councillor L Bigham (Chair)
Councillor R Auluck
Councillor M Heaven
Councillor A Hopkins
Councillor S Keough
Councillor S Nazir
Councillor R Thay

Employees (by Directorate):

Adults: P Fahy, J Crawshaw
Law and Governance: V Castree, L Knight
Streetscene and
Regulatory Service: R Back

Citizen (by Invitation): N Byrne – Executive Director of Development
M Nelson – Chief Operating Officer

Apologies: Councillor R Bailey
Councillor J Mutton and D Welsh

Public Business

7. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

8. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th July 2021 were agreed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

9. Housing and Homelessness Services Update

The Board considered a briefing note which provided an update on Housing and Homelessness Services.

The Head of Adults introduced the item and indicated that the briefing note covered a range of the housing and homelessness issues and provided an update on progress with various housing and homelessness initiatives, along with key issues resulting from the Covid 19 Pandemic and steps to ensure a supply of homes in the City.

The Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2019-2024) was approved by Council in March 2019 and is the core strategy that drives the service forward, focusing on four key areas:

- Preventing homelessness and supporting homeless households
- Support for people and communities
- Improving existing homes
- Housing development.

The Service has undergone a significant transformation, with a number of initiatives and projects being worked on with the aim of reducing the financial burden on the Local Authority whilst providing better quality temporary accommodation; increasing the number of households where homelessness is prevented or relieved and therefore decreasing the number of households in temporary accommodation; and increasing the number of properties available to households in exceptional housing need that are either social / affordable rents or at the Local Housing Allowance rates if in the private rented sector.

The briefing note also provided a progress update and next steps for the following:

- Re-commissioning of Homelessness Support Services
- Operational Data
- Implementing Homefinder Allocations Scheme
- Rough Sleeping Team
- Rough Sleeper Strategy
- Reducing cost of expensive Temporary Accommodation
- Eliminate the use of B&Bs for families
- Eliminate the use of B&Bs for single people
- Alternative Temporary Accommodation for families
- Discharge Homeless Duty into the PRS Policy and Let's Rent Coventry
- Temporary Accommodation Charging Policy
- Temporary Supported Accommodation
- Housing Advisors Programme
- Cornerstone Contracts

The Board noted that there had been some significant impacts on Housing and Homelessness as a result of the Covid 19 Pandemic nationally, including an increase in the number of reported anti-social behaviour incidents being reported to Social Landlords; some delays in lower level repairs being completed by landlords; an increase in people seeking alternative housing due their current accommodation being unsuitable; an increase in the number of evictions, particularly in the Private sector following delays during the Pandemic; and positive work with tenants to ensure that arrears levels have remained relatively low, though some Registered Providers have experienced an increase in arrears.

The Head of Housing and Homelessness outlined the work being undertaken with Registered providers and other organisations / landlords in the City to ensure that there is an appropriate level of accommodation build in the City to meet the needs of residents. Representatives from Citizen were present at the meeting and provided details on the work they are undertaking to provide a new supply of

accommodation. This has included delivering 442 homes in the City over the last 3 years, with a further 92 expected during 2021. A pilot has also been undertaken in Willenhall with modular buildings and a further pilot is to be undertaken with 'modern methods of construction' which provides a 'flat pack' system of building. Citizen are looking to see if this method of construction would work well on some of the City's infill sites as it would mean less time on site and consequently less disturbance for local residents.

Citizen further highlighted a number of operational issues, providing a view over the last few months and priorities going forward. They indicated that there had been an increase in the number of anti-social behaviour complaints, though in some cases it was identified that the incidents were not carried out by Citizen tenants, but by other individuals coming from outside. While there has been a new approach to tackling anti-social behaviour, it was recognised that there was still more that could be done. One option being looked at was the provision of a concierge / caretaker resource at tower blocks. The organisation had also been working closely with neighbourhood Police teams to deal with issues of drug dealing and gang violence in some communities. Although there had been a priority on new homes, it was recognised that there was a need to focus on the existing housing stock to improve conditions for all tenants.

Board Members asked questions and received responses on the following topics:

- The number of families and single people are still in temporary accommodation.
- The number of affordable homes that have been built and how many of those have been through S106 funding since the Local Plan was adopted in 2017.
- Whether developers keeping to the 25% affordable housing requirement.
- The number of larger properties, 4-5 bedrooms, being developed by Citizen.
- Issues around transfer to the new Homefinder system and existing users needing to re-register and being unable to bid on properties while waiting for the re-registration to be processed.
- Whether larger family homes being lost to HIMO's.
- What figures the building programme is based on and whether they are the most recent available.
- Whether temporary accommodation used to house homeless individuals and families is fit for purpose.
- The difference between social and affordable housing.
- The current status of right to buy.
- What number of units of accommodation are going to be lost as a result of the Spirit, Spon End and Wyken regeneration projects.
- Response from Citizen when issues of fly tipping, estate verges etc., are reported by residents.
- The effectiveness of the new models of tackling anti-social behaviour.
- How the situation is dealt with if a resident is a perpetrator of significant anti-social behaviour which leads to eviction and effectively makes that person homeless.
- How empty properties are being brought back into use.

- Data on rough sleeping.
- Whether support can be provided to residents with mortgages who are at risk of being homeless as they are unable to afford full mortgage payments for short periods of time.
- Use of private sector landlords.

The Board requested that further information be circulated to them outside of the meeting as follows:

- Affordable housing definitions and numbers;
- The number of properties purchased in Coventry under Right to Buy / Voluntary Right to Buy;
- Energy efficiency and running costs of modular buildings;
- Management of anti-social behaviour; and
- Rough sleeping cohort in the City.

In addition, the Board requested that future update reports include metrics.

RESOLVED that, the update on housing and homelessness be noted and that the Board have no recommendations for the Cabinet Member.

10. **Work Programme and Outstanding Issues 2021/22**

The Board considered the Work Programme 2021-22 and requested that a future item be added to the Work Programme on Housing, to include an update on homelessness prevention and work with private sector landlords to get them to rent at below market rates.

The Board further requested that a briefing note be circulated to them on Christmas Waste Collection plans.

11. **Any other items of public business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of the special circumstances involved**

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.00 pm)