

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)
held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 7 March 2024

Present:

Members: Councillor M Ali (Chair)
Councillor R Bailey
Councillor S Keough (Substitute for Councillor J Gardiner)
Councillor R Lakha (Substitute for Councillor A Kaur)
Councillor C Miks (Substitute for Councillor A Hopkins)
Councillor R Thay
Councillor CE Thomas (Substitute for Councillor L Kelly)

Other Members: Councillor P Hetherton (Cabinet Member for City Services)
Councillor G Lloyd (Deputy Cabinet Member for City Services)
Councillor D Welsh (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities)

Employees (by Service Area):

Adult Services P Fahy (Director), J Crawshaw

Highways, Traffic and Road Safety M Adams, P Ullah

Law and Governance G Holmes, E Jones, T Robinson

Apologies: Councillors J Gardiner, G Hayre, M Heaven, A Hopkins, A Kaur, and L Kelly

Public Business

29. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

30. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2024 were signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

31. Highways Asset Management Programme

The Scrutiny Board considered a Briefing Note and comprehensive presentation of the Head of Highways which provided an update on the Highways Asset Management Programme and an overview of the scoring mechanism, as well as delivery of the programme. Additionally, the note focused on the effectiveness of strategy in managing potholes and overall performance in line with the One

Coventry Plan (OCP) indicator National Highways and Transport Network (NHT) resident satisfaction survey data.

In July 2022 the scheme assessment process was reviewed by the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4). No additional comments or recommendations were made by the Board.

The use of asset management principles has been applied for many years in Coventry to ensure appropriate investment with longer term planning and this was set out in detail within the Highways Infrastructure Asset Management Plan which was published in 2016.

The briefing note stated that every year during December and January the Councils Highway Maintenance Technical Services engineers, working with the Asset Management Engineer, prepare a draft programme of schemes for approval by senior highway managers which is then presented to Cabinet. The schemes are presented as part of the Transportation and Highway Maintenance Capital Programme in March each year.

Councillor P Hetherington, the Cabinet Member for City Services, drew the Board's attention to a number of important salient points. Namely that, currently the state of highways has been a popular issue in the press and the Council is working hard to tackle not just issues on the roads but also on pavements and footpaths. Modern technology, such as the JCB Pothole Pro, has been a crucial tool in overcoming these challenges. She also highlighted the ongoing long-term issue of climate change, and the impact wetter weather is having in exposing road surfaces to the increased likelihood of potholes and damage. She stated these challenges were likely to remain in the future.

The Board questioned Officers and the Cabinet Member and received responses on a number of matters relating to the Highways Asset Management Programme:

- Clarification that pothole maintenance was identified as worst first for reactive treatment. The IMD and an area's deprivation was used for forward planning.
- Who the Highways Operation Team (DLO) operatives are in each area and how Members get in contact with them.
- Continuing surface treatment plans were still in use as a stop gap. Concerns about the state of unmaintained pavements in residential areas and the financial investment needed to repair footpaths.
- Works carried out by City Fibre, Severn Trent and other utilities companies lifting paving slabs, flooding areas, cutting IT cables, and inflicting permanent damage on pavements and roads as a result – whether fines are imposed as a result of this damage. Concerns raised by Members were noted by officers.
- Enforcement options against illegal dropped curbs.
- Increasing use of vans on roads and the knock-on effect of parking on pavements not built to withstand continual parking.
- The possibility of S&R construction assisting in identifying potholes and the lifecycle of removed paving slabs of good condition.
- The role of the planning committee in determining dropped curbs on new developments for those with specific accessibility needs.

- The backlog of highway maintenance jobs due to recent weather conditions.
- Encouragement through council literature such as Citivision for residents converting front gardens into driveways to apply for a dropped curb.

The Cabinet Member concluded the Board's questions by drawing their attention to the Travel Access Plan which will be used as a guide for all road users and pedestrians. She also touched upon the questions raised around the works and damages carried out by City Fibre and the difficult meetings held with them as a result. Additionally, she highlighted the use of new technology such as drones to survey road conditions during different times of the day. New technologies, therefore, feed into the Council's approach to address ongoing climate change issues, with drainage being especially crucial. She emphasised, however, that nothing beats employees on the ground who can address critical issues straight away and continue to do an amazing job across the city.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board notes the content of the briefing note and appendices and had no further recommendations for the Cabinet Member.

32. **Housing & Homelessness Service Update**

The Scrutiny Board considered a Briefing Note of the Head of Housing and Homelessness which outlined the progress of the Housing and Homelessness Service and the key initiatives that have been implemented. It also provided the Board with the opportunity to discuss the key homelessness issues and trends over the previous 12 months and note any actions that will be progressed during the next 12 months to achieve the key objectives of the Homeless Service.

The Council approved its Housing and Homelessness Strategy (2019-2024) in March 2019 with it being the core strategy that drives the service forward. The Strategy and action plan was refreshed during 2022 to ensure that the actions were still relevant and those that had been completed were removed. The strategy has four key areas of focus:

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

The Housing and Homelessness Service has undergone significant change over the previous 5 years with a number of initiatives/projects being worked on with the intention of:

- Reducing the financial burden on the Authority whilst providing better quality temporary accommodation options.
- Increasing the number of households where homelessness is prevented or relieved and therefore decreasing the number of households in temporary accommodation.
- Increasing the number of properties available to households in exceptional housing need that are either at social/affordable rents or at the Local Housing Allowance rates if in the private rented sector.

The briefing note stated that the demand for homelessness services in the city has grown significantly over the last 12-18 months. These increases have been reflected nationally with the highest number of households ever recorded currently living in temporary accommodation in England.

The homeless service is currently being approached by an average of 200 individual households each week in need of housing. A number of these receive initial advice and guidance with over 50% progressing to a homeless application.

As of the 26th February 2024 there are a total of 1145 households in TA provided by Coventry City Council. Of these 791 are households with dependent children with the remaining 354 households being single people or childless couples. The number of families in TA has increased at a greater rate than single people with large family accommodation being particularly high demand.

The briefing note similarly highlighted the Council's rough sleepers team which undertakes outreach walks across the city 5 days a week to engage and work with people currently sleeping rough in the city. The frequency of these walks means that the service is fully aware of who is sleeping rough in the city. The team find some people only once whereas they also have people sleeping rough who have done so for a number of years. In January 2024, even though additional accommodation was available due to SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) for 18 nights they found a total of 51 people with approximately 15 individuals sleeping rough on any one night.

Councillor D Welsh, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, introduced the Board's discussion by providing a broad overview of the housing and homelessness landscape. Overwhelmingly, the service is experiencing increased demand whilst looking to reduce costs. To do this, the council is working increasingly with partners and providers to continue service provision. He stated that they are trying to help as many people as possible to stay in their accommodation and provide people and families with even better-quality accommodation. Increased demand has resulted in using Bed and Breakfasts (B and Bs) again, however, when viewed as a percentage of overall service use this remains very low. He also emphasised the continuing work being done to encourage residents to downsize to free up larger family homes for families who need them.

In conjunction to the report, officers reiterated the various challenges the service faced both in terms of the cost-of-living crisis and the housing market but emphasised the number of achievements in preventing homelessness in the city. Specifically, the acquisition of more council properties has broadened the accommodation options the service has available and reduced renting costs. Being able to provide temporary accommodation for almost 800 families with children also demonstrated a significant achievement. However, officers did provide the Board with the stark perspective of the challenges the service faced. Specifically: rising costs, rising demand, increased approaches from homeless service users, and the future prospect of rising mortgage payments.

The Board questioned Officers and the Cabinet Member and received responses on a number of matters relating to the Housing and Homelessness Update:

- The impact of increased asylum seekers on accommodation figures.

- (Note: the Council only has a duty to house people with a legal Duty to Remain in the UK).
- The number of properties owned by the council's accommodation service and the numbers able to be housed.
- The impact of the loss of Vincent Wyles House and William Malcom House and the requirement for larger family properties. Planning Committee's role in reinforcing that need.
- Contact details for Members to identify rough sleepers and to access Streetlink to report rough sleepers.
- The definition of temporary accommodation, there is no time limit, and that the Council would not place a family above the legal limit for overcrowding.
- Whether social housing properties could be combined to make provision for larger bedroom properties and the work being done to address underoccupancy.
- The numbers of empty and 'no-fine' concrete properties in the city.
- Whether the Council can legally build temporary accommodation and the options available.

The Board and the Cabinet Member thanked officers for their continued hard work in delivering a service despite the number of persistent and wide-ranging challenges identified.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board notes the information contained within the report.

33. Work Programme Review

The Board noted the Work Programme with the agreement that the following items be added to the Work Programme for the next municipal year:

- 1) Rough Sleeper Strategy
- 2) Housing Strategy
- 3) Flytipping

34. 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 business.

(Meeting closed at 11.55 am)