

**Coventry City Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)**  
**held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 30 January 2025**

Present:

Members: Councillor M Ali (Chair)  
Councillor J Gardiner (sub Councillor R Bailey)  
Councillor G Hayre  
Councillor R Lakha (sub Councillor B Christopher)  
Councillor J McNicholas  
Councillor E Ruane  
Councillor R Thay  
Councillor CE Thomas (sub Councillor L Kelly)

Other Members: Councillors:  
N Akhtar (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities)  
S Agboola (Deputy Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities)  
P Hetherton (Cabinet Member for City Services)

Employees (by Service Area):

Adults and Housing A Chowns, J Crawshaw, S Hall

City Services and Commercial M Adams, R Sekhon

Finance & Resources B Strain

Innovation C Knight

Law and Governance J Adams, G Holmes, C Taylor

Others in attendance: CI Godhania, DI Ingram – West Midlands Police

Apologies: Councillors: R Bailey, B Christopher, L Kelly and T Sawdon

## **Public Business**

### **17. Declarations of Interest**

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

### **18. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2024 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

## 19. **Street Lighting**

The Board received a Briefing Note providing an update on the part-night Lighting.

At the Council meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024, the Council agreed, as part of the budget setting process, to introduce citywide part-night lighting. The programming of the streetlights started in May 2024 and all eligible streetlights were programmed by July 2024. It was estimated approximately 70% of lights would operate part-night however, once the criteria had been applied, this reduced to 60% (excluding the City Centre).

The part-night lighting was estimated to make savings of the street lighting electricity budget by £700,000 and this funding would be used to protect other vital services. Due to the decrease from 70% to 60% of lights, programming of the lights taking 2 months and the reduction in the cost of energy from October 2024, the saving target had been reduced to £600,000. Savings from the part-night from May to December 2024 had been approximately £350,000 based on 38pkwh. The Council's energy price reduced to 26pkwh from October 2024.

The Police had conducted a review of the part-night lighting and found no evidence of crime going up as a result of the changes in street lighting. It was noted that there had been a reduction in night-time collisions during the hours of the part-night switch off.

A petition bearing 1482 signatures to switch the lights back on had been received. The petition had been discussed with the Cabinet Member for City Services who had agreed to issue a determination letter advising that the part-night lighting policy would continue as there had not been any increases in crime.

The upgrading of 29,500 street lighting to LEDs was agreed at Council on 14 January 2025. The LED lighting would provide a better quality of light but use half the amount of energy. The upgrade would also provide Council with more flexibility over the street lighting.

An Equality Impact Assessment had been carried out and it was found that there were groups of people that could be negatively impacted by the part-night lighting however, as the police had reported there had not been an increase in criminal activity.

West Midlands Police provided an overview of police data for the period since the part night street lighting had been introduced,

In considering the briefing note, the Board questioned officers, received responses and discussed matters as summarised below:

- Any crime related issues concerning the part-night light switch off were discussed regularly in partnership with local policing and community safety colleagues. Community meetings were held to understand where crime/anti-social behaviour trends were taking place in the city.
- Car crime in Coventry from May 2024 – November 2024 was below trend.

- Police data was intelligence led rather than being published figures. Data showed that crime was expected to be the same as before the part-night light switch off.
- Information regarding the fear of crime, not specifically relating to the part-night switch off had been included within the report. Residents were being encouraged to report crime via social media.
- The LED lights were not adaptive however, sensor ports would be included. The LED lights would switch on at a certain lighting level and then dim to a possible 30%. LED lights which were sensitive to movement would incur an additional capital spend.
- Data was being collected from the Foleshill Road as a trial site where the lights were being kept on all night however, data was currently not sufficient to indicate high or low footfall or vehicle usage.
- Residents who worked during the night had not been contacted for their opinions on the part-night lights.
- A community safety plan was currently being developed which would include crime surveys. Officers were engaging with communities across the city to address fears and encourage residents to report crime.
- A decrease in collisions and reported accidents with street lighting columns and street furniture had been seen from May 2024 – November 2024.
- For safety reasons, streetlights had not been switched off surrounding pedestrian crossings in the city. New heritage streetlights would be installed around the pedestrian crossing outside the Council House in March/April 2025.
- The new LED lighting would be starting in the Autumn 2025.
- The 25 year PFI contract started in 2010. Lamps had been replaced every 6 years in line with maintenance. The LED lights would not require to be replaced as frequently and once the upgrade was complete, £1.7m of maintenance savings would be returned to the city council.
- Data provided by West Midlands Police provided an overview of the statistics which established a baseline and identified whether there had been any exceptional crime patterns, but did not look into finer details or further into the causes. No exceptional patterns had been identified
- West Midlands Police did not hold data relating to non-crime related injuries.

The Board requested the following information:

- Include part-night light switch off in the crime survey parameters and provide further information relating to the fear of crime when streetlights were off.
- Provision of increase/decrease of temporal data.
- Future reports relating to the budget savings to provide a financial breakdown.
- Data relating to personal injuries sustained during the part-night light switch off.

The Cabinet Member for City Services welcomed the report highlighting the concerns she had received from early morning shift workers regarding the part-night light switch off. She also made reference to the importance of good driving, in particular, around pedestrian crossings and also, pavement lighting and how

much this would be dimmed down to enable uneven pavements and potholes to still be visible.

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

**1) Supports the continuation of the Part-night lighting.**

**2) Requests that any policy decisions on roll out and levels of LED lighting come to the Board before a decision is made.**

## 20. **Supported Exempt Accommodation**

The Board received a Briefing Note providing a progress update on the Supported Housing Improvement Programme (SHIP) funding, as well as an update on progress with changes to legislation. Exempt Supported Accommodation was previously considered by Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee at its meetings on 7 December 2023 and 8 January 2022.

Exempt accommodation was supported housing which was exempt certain Housing Benefit provisions. It often housed more marginalised groups with support needs such as prison leavers; care leavers; those fleeing domestic violence; and homeless people with substance dependence or mental health issues.

There was an element of care, support and supervision provided and it was exempt from Local Housing Allowance (LHA) caps. These exemptions enabled organisations providing this type of housing to charge higher rates to clients living in their properties. Where the accommodation was provided by an organisation other than a registered provider, Local Authorities would bear the additional costs of the provision beyond the LHA rate.

Exempt accommodation clients were usually housed in Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The three main types of providers in Coventry were:

- Registered Providers' who provide supported housing eg. Citizen, St Basils
- Non-RP's which were well established organisations eg. Salvation Army, Coventry Cyrenians, Mind
- Community Interest Companies who often had limited expertise/experience of accommodating vulnerable groups.

Following a successful bid for funding via SHIP with the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), the Council was awarded circa £350,000 funding to deliver a robust set of actions to improve the quality of SEA in the city.

Following successful recruitment to the 3 newly created roles, the SEA Team began to work towards the objectives set out in the SHIP delivery plan. The team had successfully:

- Liaised with teams within the Council and with external stakeholders who had a known relationship with SEA providers.
- Created a Quality Assurance Tool Kit

- Created a Gateway for providers wishing to operate SEA within the city
- Developed a single access point to capture “Comments, Concerns and Complaints” relating to a provider or accommodation
- Created a virtual panel to assess new applicants

Annual figures from April 2023 to May 2024 evidencing savings made from Housing Benefit payments when a provider’s rents had been restricted and costs negotiated, had been provided in the report.

Details of costs avoided where housing benefit had refused payment to a provider or revoked the status of a provider based on information provided, suggested the provider was unable to provide Supported Exempt Accommodation which met the minimum requirement for Housing Benefit regulations, had also been provided in the report.

The team were continuing to undertake reviews of the quality of support offered and the housing conditions through inspections to assess minimum standards via the Housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS) in licensed and non-HMO properties. The team aimed to visit all supported accommodation at least once during the project length as per the project plan. The team would continue to respond to reactive complaints via the online portal regarding poor housing conditions and the HMO licensing breaches along with the lack of support, care, and supervision.

The Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act 2023, was enacted in the summer of 2023 however, to date, local authorities had not been required to implement the Act. A live consultation was currently underway which would determine how the Act was put into practice and how local authorities, including commissioning services, licensing and enforcement functions and revenue and benefits departments, would adhere to its requirements. This would include how local authorities would identify the need and requirements for exempt accommodation provision in their areas as well as publishing a Supported Housing Strategy for the area.

It was assumed that local authorities would receive new burdens funding to support implementation of the Act however, this had not yet been confirmed and funding provided by MHCLG was only up to 31 March 2025.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Councillor N Akhtar welcomed the briefing note and the partnership working undertaken to improve exempt supported accommodation in the city for vulnerable people.

In considering the briefing note, the Board questioned officers, received responses and discussed matters as summarised below:

- Accommodation provided through the Circo government asylum scheme was not the same as exempt supported accommodation however, officers kept records of those addresses and if anti-social behaviour was experienced, encouraged residents to report it.
- As part of the SHIP programme, 200 homes had been inspected for physical condition and care provision.

- In 2022, legislation was introduced but without any regulations. Officers were waiting for guidance from the government on the new regulations.
- Accommodation providers could operate if they were CIC or a registered provider and met housing benefit regulation.
- Most of the properties were occupied in a similar way to Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO's).
- Officers were not aware how many under 25 care leavers were living in unregulated exempt accommodation as self-referrals and referrals from eg The Probation Service, did not require contact with council officers.
- There were no plans to reduce the 3 posts created through SHIP.
- Year on year, an increase had been seen in applications to provide exempt supported accommodation. Last year, the number of units increased by 463 across 79 properties. There were 34 new applications, 7 of which were now providing accommodation.
- The council had limited control over exempt providers and the mix of residents in any property.

The Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities, Councillor N Akhtar reassured colleagues the exempt supported accommodation would continue for the most vulnerable residents and welcomed introduction of the legislation.

The Board requested the following information:

- The number of care leavers 18-25 living in commissioned supported exempt accommodation in the city.

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

- 1) Notes the current position and funding.**
- 2) Notes the progress and co-ordinated response to managing Supported Exempt Accommodation in the city.**
- 3) Requests the Cabinet Member ensures sufficient resources to enable the three posts created through the SHIP to continue beyond March 2025.**
- 4) Requests the Cabinet Member to consider the legal implications of making public the names of the providers referred to in the report, and any future providers who have Supported Exempt housing benefit payments stopped or refused.**

## **21. Work Programme and Outstanding Issues 2024/2025**

The Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) received a report of the Scrutiny Co-ordinator that detailed issues on the Board's Work Programme for meetings of the Board for 2024/25.

**RESOLVED that the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) notes the issues on the Board's Work Programme for 2024/25 and requests that:**

**1) Prior to any policy decision being made, LED lighting to come back to SB4 including financial information and roll out of the programme.**

**2) Retrofit of social housing to be allocated to a specific meeting.**

**22. 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 12.30 pm)