

**Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee**

**Meeting held 7 April 2016**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Tony Damms (Chair), Steve Ayriss (Deputy Chair), Penny Baker, David Barker, Richard Crowther, Keith Davis, Tony Downing, Denise Fox, Aodan Marken, Roy Munn, Peter Rippon, Richard Shaw and Zoe Sykes

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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor John Campbell.

**2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2016, were approved as a correct record and there were no matters arising.

**5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

5.1 The Chair, Councillor Tony Damms, informed Alan Kewley that he would receive a full written response to his questions regarding the responses received to the questions asked at the last Committee meeting relating to:-

- (a) the Council's protocol for responding in writing to public questions raised at Scrutiny meetings, particularly in relation to the timing of the response;
- (b) the timescales for the publication of the agenda for meetings of the Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership Board on the Partnership's website, as the agenda for the Board's previous meeting had only been published two days prior to the meeting; and
- (c) progress on the review of locality management.

**6. ROUGH SLEEPING IN SHEFFIELD**

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services on Rough Sleeping in Sheffield, which issue had been referred to the Committee following the presentation of a petition to Council calling on the Council

to open empty buildings as Winter shelters for homeless people.

- 6.2 In attendance for the item were Councillor Jayne Dunn (Cabinet Member for Housing), Suzanne Allen (Head of Citywide Neighbourhood Services), Zoe Young (Housing Options and Advice Service Manager) and Kelly License (Petitioners' Representative).
- 6.3 Zoe Young took the Committee through the report, making particular reference to the relationship between rough sleeping and homelessness, statistics on rough sleeping in Sheffield, identifying and supporting rough sleepers in Sheffield and Severe Weather Provision. She stated that there were currently eight genuine rough sleepers in the City and that some rough sleepers would not engage with the support services, but chose to make their money by begging. At the moment, the situation in the City was able to be monitored, but it would be difficult to monitor any buildings which were made available as shelters for homeless people. Suzanne Allen stated that she was proud of the low number of rough sleepers in the City, but was concerned that this could increase. She added that she was leading work on working more effectively with those homeless people with complex needs, which involved crisis and prevention work and also fitted with the Council's Housing+ approach. She was also undertaking work in connection with the Government's ten challenges to local authorities.
- 6.4 Members made various comments and asked a number of questions to which responses were provided as follows:-
- In relation to homeless people who had no recourse to public funds, there were agencies in the City which were undertaking good work and the Council was under a duty to provide accommodation for those who were at risk to themselves or others under Human Rights legislation. A reconnection service operated through the Archer Project for those not at risk and the Council was responsible as a corporate parent for homeless people with children. In addition, there was also much charitable work being undertaken with regard to homelessness in the City.
  - In terms of gaps in the service, there was an issue of unknown people who may not wish to be visible to the public authorities. The Interpretation Service assisted in this regard, but the public were asked to let the Housing Options and Advice Service know of anyone about whom they had concerns, so that any significant issues could be investigated. As far as they were aware, officers considered the situation to be under control at the present time. Legislation provided a narrow provision for assistance and this was used as appropriate, as well as support from charities and faith agencies.
  - There were issues associated with using empty buildings as Winter shelters for homeless people such as which buildings to use and, more importantly, their suitability. In Sheffield, there was access to supported housing, which was safe, appropriately staffed and suitable for use. There were logistical issues with opening buildings for homeless people, but Sheffield did have alternative provision, so it was not felt that opening buildings was a better

solution.

- In relation to begging, officers were working with the City Centre Ambassadors and the Police to move people on and, on occasions, the Police would take individuals who were found begging to the Housing Options and Advice Service for assistance. There was also an anti-begging campaign, but it was difficult for the Police to act if no crime was being committed.
- Safeguarding networks were in place for individuals who had been subject to people trafficking, but in all cases it was important to look at why people were in these situations and provide an effective solution. Some work was also being undertaken on the City's estates where there were rough sleepers.
- It was important to treat each person as an individual, as there was a back story to each case and people had multiple needs, and devise a long-term action plan. This could link with training and education to raise aspirations and there had been some success stories in this regard.
- Some coffee shops and restaurants operated the Pay Forward Scheme, where donations were used to pay for a homeless person's breakfast.
- Some shops donated food to the Archer Project and also to food banks.
- There were instances where individuals refused to accept accommodation provided under the Severe Weather Provisions, but it was sufficient for the Council to make the offer for it to discharge its obligation. In these cases, support may be provided through other agencies such as hospitals, but it was not possible to force anyone to take up an offer of accommodation. The Council was under an obligation to have this provision and its availability was well known amongst those sleeping rough. It was important for Council officers to be accessible and there was now a focus on young, single adults. There were low numbers of people sleeping rough and accepted as homeless, but it was recognised that the Council could not do it all alone, so good links has been established with partners. There was a need to understand why people did not take up offers of accommodation and this may indicate that a different approach was required, but in these situations officers would go back to such people and continue to try to work with them.
- The criteria for operating the Severe Weather Provision was set by national recommendation and was not just about temperature, but also included factors such as wind chill.

6.5 Councillor Jayne Dunn emphasised the importance of having a pathway for homeless people which was tailored to the individual and provided the right support. She stated that she had visited various projects in the City and invited Members to attend. Councillor Dunn went on to refer to the need for services to interlink, the lack of one bedroomed accommodation and that officers were looking at the effects of the welfare reforms on the situation. She added that people were earning from begging, often to feed drug or alcohol habits. An anti-begging

strategy was in place and work was being undertaken with partners in relation to rehabilitation.

6.6 Kelly License disagreed with the statistics provided on rough sleepers and added that refugees were unable to get help. The petition which had been presented to Council contained over 5,000 signatures and more needed to be done. She invited Members of the Committee to go out with her on a Wednesday night, when she went out to meet and support rough sleepers, adding that even an unsafe building was more safe than rough sleeping and that such provision may be beneficial for those who didn't want to engage with local services.

6.7 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks those attending for their contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report, comments made and responses to questions;
- (c) requests that:-
  - (i) Rough Sleeping in Sheffield be included as an item on the Committee's Work Programme 2016/17;
  - (ii) officers provide statistics on homelessness in the City, together with a comparison with other similar cities, to the Policy and Improvement Officer for circulation to Committee Members;
  - (iii) officers give consideration to further publicity on anti-begging;
  - (iv) officers meet with the petitioners' representatives on a regular basis, so that they could be kept aware of those sleeping rough, with a view to providing appropriate support; and
  - (v) Members wishing to visit those sleeping rough with the attending petitioners' representative should contact the Policy and Improvement Officer; and
- (d) extends an open invitation to the attending officers to submit an update on Rough Sleeping in Sheffield, to be included as an information item on the Committee's agenda, with a copy of the update to be provided to the petitioners' representatives.

**7. SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16 (DRAFT CONTENT) AND WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17**

7.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee Annual Report 2015/16 (draft content) and Work

Programme 2016/17 Report; and

(b) requests that:-

- (i) any amendments to the Annual Report 2015/16 and Work Programme 2016/17 be sent to the Chair, Councillor Tony Damms; and
- (ii) Rough Sleeping in Sheffield be included as an item on the Committee's Work Programme 2016/17.

## **8. POLICE AND CRIME PANEL REPORT**

8.1 In the absence of Councillor John Campbell, this item was not considered.

8.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee wishes to thank Councillor John Campbell for the updates on the Police and Crime Panel which he has provided over the past year.

## **9. WRITTEN RESPONSES TO PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

9.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the Written Responses to Public Questions report.

## **10. CHALLENGE FOR CHANGE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT - PROGRESS UPDATE**

10.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the Challenge for Change Community Engagement Report, Progress Update; and
- (b) requests that the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services considers the report and drafts recommendations based on it for submission to the Committee.

## **11. RIGHT TO BUY UPDATE**

11.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the Right to Buy Update report.

## **12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

12.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on a date to be arranged; and
- (b) thanks the Chair, Councillor Tony Damms, for his excellent work in chairing

the Committee over the past year.