

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 8 March 2018

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Peace (Chair), Penny Baker (Deputy Chair), Michelle Cook, Dawn Dale, Mark Jones, George Lindars-Hammond, Magid Magid, Karen McGowan, Zahira Naz, John Booker (Substitute Member), Adam Hurst (Substitute Member) and Richard Shaw (Substitute Member)

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received and nominated substitutes were appointed, as follows:-

<u>Apology</u>	<u>Substitute</u>
Councillor Zoe Sykes	Councillor Adam Hurst
Councillor Sue Auckland	Councillor Richard Shaw
Councillor Keith Davis	Councillor John Booker
Councillor Richard Crowther	No substitute nominated
Councillor Terry Fox	No substitute nominated
Councillor Joe Otten	No substitute nominated

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 18th January 2018, were approved as a correct record and, arising from their consideration, it was noted that:-

- In relation to the two bullet points in paragraph 4.1 (Minutes of Previous Meeting), a date had not been fixed yet for Committee Members to visit Atlas Court.
- In relation to the first bullet point in paragraph 6.4 (Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership), a reply was awaited from Chief Superintendent Morley regarding the ethnicity mix of offenders in the local neighbouring authorities and equivalent cities referred to in the presentation.

- In relation to paragraph 6.5(d)(ii) (Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership), a response was awaited from Chief Superintendent Morley regarding the status of the Sport FX initiative.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no questions raised or petitions submitted by members of the public.

6. UPDATE ON HOUSING +

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Head of Neighbourhood Services, which provided an update on the Housing+ service provided to Council Housing tenants across the City.

6.2 Present for this item were Councillor Tony Downing (Cabinet Adviser for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety), Bev Mullooly (Head of Neighbourhood Services) and Peter Brown (Project Manager – Future of Council Housing).

6.3 The report was introduced by Bev Mullooly who made particular reference to the account taken of Committee Members' comments from the previous update given at the Committee's April 2017 meeting, the development of Housing+ and performance management. She also commented on work being undertaken on anti-social behaviour, rents, the impact of Universal Credit and referrals.

6.4 Members made various comments and asked a number of questions to which responses were provided as follows:-

- In relation to the offer to tenants of an annual visit, it was recognised that some tenants needed support, whilst with others there may be a need to be more assertive, where entry to a property was necessary, e.g. in cases of damage to the property.
- A total of 18,000 visits had been offered, with 12,000 tenants taking up the option of a visit from their Neighbourhood Officer.
- Neighbourhood Officers had been issued with phablets on which they could make appointments and send emails, but some staff preferred to use smartphones.
- The Customer Relationship Management system, which was used in Customer Service, including the Call Centre and the Housing and Neighbourhoods Service, would be upgraded and improve the service delivered to tenants.
- In relation to complaints of anti-social behaviour, staff would try to resolve issues before getting involved in the legal process, as this could often involve a lengthy procedure. There was also a training issue, in that staff needed to be given the confidence to set out what could be done and manage expectations.

- Feedback had been obtained on the staff training which had been undertaken and best practice was shared. The approach to training may differ in different areas and it was thought that the performance management system would help in identifying officers where training and support was required.
- The Neighbourhood Teams worked closely with the Income Management and Financial Inclusion Unit on the planning for the introduction of Universal Credit. In addition, the service would attempt to mitigate any resulting rent arrears, which may include the provision of budgetary and debt advice to tenants.
- The level of rent arrears stood at about £11 million and this was on target. The approach was to provide support to tenants, in the shape of advice on benefits, money and debt and the maximisation of income and benefits. However, if a tenant wouldn't pay, then the Council would take recovery action, including pursuing the legal process.
- Councillor Jayne Dunn (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety) had set up a Member Task and Finish Group to look at the Allocation Policy. This would include age redesignation, but if there were complaints in relation to this, then they would be managed.
- The Housing and Neighbourhoods Service Service was working closely with the Police to provide appropriate support in relation to anti-social behaviour complaints, which would hopefully lead to better outcomes.
- Support should be provided to tenants who were experiencing anti-social behaviour, and Bev Mullooly asked Committee Members to let her know of any cases where this was not happening.
- The information contained in the report would be updated to include both figures and percentages.
- In relation to the legal process, it was felt that the Council did sometimes take a risk averse approach, but it should be recognised that, to pursue legal action, evidence would be needed to prove that there had been a breach of the tenancy conditions. However, this evidence gathering was improving due to joint working with the Police.
- Progress on referrals to agencies would be checked and, if the referral had been unsuccessful, then the matter would be escalated. In making referrals, officers needed to be mindful of demand on the services they were referring to, e.g. Mental Health.
- There were always opportunities for staff to apply for other posts in the service to assist their professional and career development, and there was the possibility of redeployment if staff were felt to be unsuitable for any particular post.

- At the request of Members, officers would look at some form of recognition for model tenants and also encourage the sharing of skills, e.g. to improve gardens, and this may also help in reducing social isolation.
- In relation to the Under-Occupancy (Bedroom Tax) Provisions, the service worked with tenants on rehousing, particularly if there were rent arrears involved.
- Officers would work with the Communications Team to consider how to publicise good news stories on Council Estates.
- Tenants wanted the Neighbourhood Officers to be approachable and officers needed to build up a rapport with them and be given the tools to enable them to do this. It should be noted that some good relationships had been established with vulnerable tenants.
- There was always a natural turnover of staff at Neighbourhood Officer level and this was positive, as there were development opportunities for staff with the skills. Since the introduction of Housing+, there had been no increase in staff turnover at this level.

6.5 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Councillor Tony Downing (Cabinet Adviser for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety), Bev Mullooly (Head of Neighbourhood Services) and Peter Brown (Project Manager – Future of Council Housing) for their contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report and responses to questions;
- (c) welcomes plans for staff training to help them deal with anti-social behaviour and improve the quality of evidence and hopes that this develops and looks forward to receiving details of progress at a future Committee meeting;
- (d) reminds Committee Members of the opportunity for them to shadow Housing+ officers to further their understanding of the service; and
- (e) requests that:-
 - (i) officers give consideration as to how good news stories can be communicated;
 - (ii) information on exclusions, closures and evictions, including the costs of these, be sent to the Policy and Improvement Officer for circulation to Committee Members;
 - (iii) details of the position on arrears, particularly in relation to the approach to the 'Can't Pay, Won't Pay' split, be sent to the Policy and Improvement Officer for circulation to Committee Members;

- (iv) the initial findings of the University of Sheffield's study on the 'Tenant Perspective on the Impact of Housing+' be sent to the Policy and Improvement Officer for circulation to Committee Members; and
- (v) officers give consideration to the wording of the letter of offer of an annual visit to tenants by a Neighbourhood Officer, particularly in relation to giving the tenant the option to refuse such a visit.

7. STREET CULTURE TASK GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The Committee received a report of the Street Culture Scrutiny Task Group which provided details of the Group's examination of Street Culture and included its findings and recommendations.
- 7.2 The Chair (Councillor Chris Peace) took the Committee through the report, which provided an overview, details of the approach taken, findings, recommendations, issues for future consideration and conclusion.
- 7.3 Also present for this item was Councillor Tony Downing (Cabinet Adviser for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety).
- 7.4 Members of the Task Group commented on their involvement, making particular reference to the positive work being undertaken by the City Centre Ambassadors, the need to be clear on the difference between rough sleeping and begging, the need for Council Members to report rough sleeping hotspots, the predominance of people who had been released from prison amongst those sleeping rough, the need to encourage local businesses to become involved and the Help Us Help campaign.
- 7.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:-
 - (a) thanks Councillor Tony Downing (Cabinet Adviser for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety) and the members of the Street Culture Scrutiny Task Group for their contribution to the meeting;
 - (b) notes the contents of the report and Members' comments;
 - (c) approves the report's recommendations as follows:-
 - "(1) Support what is done now across the system. We recommend areas for improvement in education of others to improve our message about rough sleepers, and for example the relationship with begging, and particularly raising profile and awareness of "Help Us Help" through media;
 - (2) Ensure the system is effective for all those involved in working at the frontline on the street and that they know how/where to get the right support for an individual, enhanced through common training & culture in frontline organisations of handling individuals;

- (3) Encourage the sharing of information and systems that support joined up provision and collaboration – both technical and relationship – and that the current good communications and relationships across agencies continue to be formalised so that they are not dependent on individuals or impacted negatively by changes in personnel;
 - (4) We support and reinforce our previous recommendation that having heard testimony from a range of experts in the field of homelessness, that the excellent work by different agencies, including Help Us Help, be given the opportunity to develop further before the idea of a Night Café be considered. Further, whilst commending the intentions behind this idea, note the concerns about its safety expressed by some contributors at the committee meeting on 9th November and subsequently to the task group;
 - (5) We do have some concerns about current provision, for example what are the alternatives when some provision is not there e.g. Ben's Centre on Wednesdays, and the suggestion that addiction services be offered outreach as well as drop-in, and we ask Cabinet to lead on a response to this;
 - (6) We have a concern with the robustness of communication on Weather Watch, and ask that the channels of communication for informing Weather Watch is in operation be reviewed and/or monitored;
 - (7) We want to feed our recommendations into multi agency working for further response. For example to the City Centre task groups and into the action plan of the workshop held on 11 October 2017;
 - (8) We would recommend that Committee findings be shared with health providers for a response. We would like to see that access to universal health services is not disadvantaged by being of no fixed abode or in a hostel, especially mental health services, as we believe these are essential to tackle predominant underlying issues for rough sleepers, street beggars and substance misusers;
 - (9) We seek reassurance that should the Authority take the legislative route of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) where appropriate, it would be implemented proportionately. We would welcome early engagement in development of any Sheffield PSPO and ask the Cabinet Member to include the Committee, or its task group, in the development process; and
 - (10) Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 should be included in the scrutiny work programme 2018/19 – review of impact and actions in Sheffield.”
- (d) requests that Cabinet provides an initial response to the recommendations

by July 2018; and

- (e) requests that Cabinet leads on behalf of partners to provide a multi-agency response for October 2018.

8. SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE - SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2017-18 DRAFT CONTENT AND WORK PROGRAMME 2018-19

8.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer, which provided a summary of its activities over the Municipal Year for inclusion in the Scrutiny Annual Report 2017/18, which were contained in the appended draft report. The report also included topics which were recommended to carry forward for consideration as part of the Committee's 2018/19 Work Programme.

8.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) approves the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee 2017-2018 Draft Report for inclusion in the Scrutiny Annual Report 2017-2018;
- (b) approves the topics, namely Hate Crime, Street Culture and the Private Rented Housing Sector, for consideration as part of the Committee's Work Programme for the 2018/19 Municipal Year; and
- (c) requests that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considers the opportunity for joint working between this Committee and the Healthier Communities and Adult Social Care Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee in relation to Street Culture.

9. HATE CRIME

9.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the Hate Crime Report.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

10.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on a date to be arranged.

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