

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 24 October 2019

**PRESENT:** Councillors Ben Curran (Chair), Tim Huggan (Deputy Chair), Sue Auckland, David Baker, Penny Baker, Michelle Cook, Dawn Dale, Karen McGowan, Pat Midgley, Anne Murphy and Alison Teal (Substitute Member)

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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kaltum Rivers (with Councillor Alison Teal attending as her substitute) and Richard Shaw.

**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 Councillor Sue Auckland declared a personal interest in Item 9 on the agenda – Controlling Migration Fund (Item 8 of these minutes) - as she is a private sector landlord.

**4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2019, were approved as a correct record, subject to the addition of Councillor Pat Midgley to those Members present.

4.2.1 With regard to the proposed Gun and Knife Crime scrutiny review at Item 4.1.2 of the minutes, the Chair said that he had met with the other Scrutiny Chairs and had agreed to arrange another meeting on this issue.

4.2.2 Alice Nicholson (Policy and Improvement Officer) confirmed that she had circulated to Members further data on the impact of Universal Credit as stated in paragraph 7.2 of the minutes.

**5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

**5.1 Question asked by Stuart Crosthwaite**

5.1.1 At the last meeting of the Scrutiny Committee I asked if Immigration Enforcement was one of the “partner agencies” with which the Private Housing Standards (PHS) team shared tenants’ data. I was answered with “The project being carried out by the Controlling Migration Fund does not include checking tenants or occupants immigration status, so referrals will not be made to Immigration

Enforcement as that information is not being gathered”

In a previous SCC bid to the Controlling Migration Fund (which has now been removed from the SCC website) it was stated that the PHS team had “made several referrals to UKBA” of undocumented migrants. A “referral” would necessarily include data about tenants/occupants. Why and how did the PHS gather this information about tenants' immigration status when their role was supposed to be investigating housing standards?

## 5.2 **Question 1 asked by John Grayson**

Firstly, Councillor Wood's reply to my question at the last Scrutiny Committee meeting - “The Private Housing Standards Team have never handed any person over to UKBA or any other agency.”

“The Private Housing Standards Service is the regulatory and prosecuting authority as it is the Service's legal duty to address poor housing conditions in the private rented sector. We do not check the immigration status of tenants or occupants during a routine inspection, therefore we do not hand over anyone to Immigration Enforcement Services.”

Then statements contradicting this:

In an email sent to me on 2 September 2019, Councillor Wood said -

“We do not intend to be working with UKBA directly to remove people from the Country but we could as part of this intensive work uncover activity or people that do not have all the approvals they need to stay in the UK. However, as a Council, if we find anyone acting illegally then we have a responsibility to inform statutory agencies.”

In the 2017 application for Controlling Migration Fund (CMF) money, it was stated that housing standards staff undertaking inspections in pursuit of rogue landlords between 2014 and 2017 had “made several referrals to the UKBA and had suspicions about other individuals who disappeared from premises immediately after initial visits had been attempted.”

The Council also admitted these “referrals” in a reply to an FOI request from Dr Rachel Humphris in July 2019, saying that “Sheffield City Council does hold information about referrals made to the UKBA” by the private housing standards team.

Also reports from a meeting with housing officers suggested that the Council staff had given information to ICE staff who arrested two Romanian citizens in January 2017 who were subsequently sent to Yarl's Wood.

**Clearly these statements are directly contradictory.**

My question perhaps will allow you to clarify this apparent contradiction.

On the 2017 application form for CMF funding the Council said “yes” that they had “demonstrated assurance from the local Immigration Compliance and

Enforcement team, if a proposal involves their resource, that they are able to commit the resources requested in the proposal”.

**Can Councillor Wood confirm that in the process of inspection from 2014 to the present, council staff did pass on information to their statutory partner the UKBA, as well as the police, the DWP, the Modern Slavery Hotline, the Salvation Army and the Gangmasters agency?**

Council staff perhaps did not physically “hand over” people to UKBA ICE staff. They would not need to, ICE staff are warranted like police, if they were given information from the Council staff about tenants they can arrest and remove people from the UK.

The Council do not deny that inspections for selective licensing and to identify “rogue landlords” involve partners – the police, DWP and other “statutory” partners presumably the UKBA. In email correspondence on 3 October, Councillor Wood confirmed that in the last 14 months two cases had been reported – one to the Police and one to the DWP. Since July 2019 in CMF work in the East of the city, 6 referrals had been made to the police.

The Council has stated (wrongly) in answer to another question that the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 requires them proactively to give information to the UKBA about migrants they know about who may be undocumented, as Councillor Wood put it “if we find anyone acting illegally then we have a responsibility to inform statutory agencies.”

### 5.3 **Question 2 asked by John Grayson**

Councillor Wood in answer to a question about noncompliance with the Home Office, states that “Local authorities have a statutory duty under section 129 of the Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 to supply information for the purpose of establishing where a person is **when requested** about someone who is suspected of committing certain immigration offences under the Immigration Act 1971”.

I am sure this is true but what was being asked was for the Council not to **proactively, even when not receiving a request**, supply information to the Home Office without the persons permission. This is what 11 other Labour controlled authorities have decided to do and I am sure their legal departments have advised that they can do this. So ... will Sheffield City Council join them?

### 5.4 **Question asked by Andy Shallice**

All local authorities with Roma citizens should consider Selective Programme apart from the 12 month report re Page Hall. No further report has been written regarding the impact of Selective Licensing in the Page Hall area. Should this Committee discuss this within the next six months?

5.5 Councillor Paul Wood, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety, gave the same answer to the questions raised by Stuart Crosthwaite last

month that the Council do not give information to the UKBA, the Council does not ask the immigration status of proposed Council housing tenants. In answer to John Grayson's questions, Councillor Wood said that to use the word "illegal" was perhaps the wrong word to use and that it would be better to say that someone carrying out a "criminal activity" might be reported to the statutory agencies. Councillor Wood also stated that he could not find any record of six people being reported to the Police and if the names could be provided to him, he would carry out further investigations.

- 5.6 Councillor Wood said that he had been looking in depth at the protocols the City Council work to in relation to migration in the city and had found a lot of things in the protocols that were admirable, however there was nothing to deal with undocumented migration and this was something that he was hoping to add within the next month so that he can say to officers that this is what we will work to. Funding received had been used to employ street wardens; community workers; carry out surveys; offer support to new arrivals by getting them into work, education and language courses and carry out enforcement against landlords who abuse the rights of tenants and do not provide suitable habitable accommodation. Councillor Wood said that he had attended a meeting with other authorities relating to the Inclusive Cities Project which deals with all aspects of migration and considers that it would be beneficial for Sheffield City Council to become part of the Project. Councillor Wood said that he had taken on board the questions raised by Andy Shallice with regard to the Roma migrants and said that there was no one from the Roma community employed by the City Council and acknowledged that the Council was not an inclusive employer in this regard. He felt that there was a need for Teaching Assistants who speak the Roma language to be employed.

## **6. COHESION SHEFFIELD - AN UPDATE ON CITY WIDE FRAMEWORK, JOINT STRATEGY AND AREA PROJECTS**

- 6.1 The Committee received a report of the Director of Libraries, Learning, Skills and Communities, explaining how the City Council and its partners work on building and maintaining community cohesion in the city.
- 6.2 Present for this item were Angela Greenwood (Community Services Manager) and Mike Fitter (Co-Chair, Sheffield Cohesion Advisory Group).
- 6.3 Angela Greenwood introduced the report and stated that community cohesion was about integration and supporting existing and new people in the city and everyone getting on together, living and working with respect and consideration for each other. Cohesion was about building and maintaining good relationships with neighbours and colleagues across the city. A successful bid for funding through the Paul Hamlyn Foundation ensured that cohesion work could continue in the city. Angela Greenwood stated that the City Council had created a Charter of Actions to respond to the Cohesion Strategic Framework and this had been approved in October 2018 by the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety and endorsed by the Cohesion, Migration, Integration Strategic Group. The action plan included supporting people in their communities, listening to people by attending local meetings, giving support to asylum seekers and

refugees and educating those new to Sheffield so that they understand their rights and responsibilities and to know what is and is not tolerated in the city.

6.4 Mike Fitter referred to the cohesion grant fund which was supporting projects across the city to promote cohesion work and good community relations across the city. He said that Sheffield Cohesion Hub was working with Compass, a charity which provided health and wellbeing services, to ascertain what makes an inclusive city, by working together in tackling injustices and creating a more equal society.

6.5 Members of the Committee made various comments and asked a number of questions, to which responses were given as follows:-

- The RUBIC project is funded by the Big Lottery and is focused around Parkwood Academy in the north of the city. The Project has a whole systems approach working with a school and its feeder communities. It aims to make connections between newly arrived migrants and more established residents in their own neighbourhoods. It helps young refugees, new arrivals and school students to live harmoniously together, with greater understanding and respect for each other and the communities in which they live. It helps new arrivals settle in and support one other, and it encourages local people to discuss their concerns in an open, safe and inclusive environment. By engaging with people who have been in Sheffield all their lives as well as more recent arrivals, the project aims to increase understanding and create more resilient communities. Some students of Parkwood Academy attended a meeting of the full Council last year and presented their story.
- Sheffield is a pilot city for the Place Based Approach to New Arrivals and has successfully created a Street Warden role to work in Darnall and Page Hall to assist new arrivals into those areas.
- It is intended to increase the use of libraries across the city with the aim of engaging with people in the heart of their communities by promoting them as a free and safe space to use and learn. The issues highlighted at this meeting, at one of the libraries, will be looked into.
- One issue is that EU nationals, prior to current requirements, have not had to register in the UK, so it has been difficult to offer help and advice. Elected Members have an idea of who is living within the community they represent and data can be picked up from GP surgeries and schools.
- Learn Sheffield aspires to encourage people to be better educated and the city as a whole to be better educated. Its aim is to help schools work with each other to identify and overcome the barriers to learning for vulnerable learners and their families, including learners with English as an additional language.
- It is hoped to set up meetings in schools in relation to the increase in the numbers of pupils being excluded from schools, particularly those having

arrived into the city with little grasp of English and many of the children struggle to get to grips with the city's formal education system. Schools could be opened up to the public in the evenings to address this.

- The findings of the "Salah effect" in Liverpool would suggest that positive exposure to out-group celebrities, has contributed to lessening anti-Muslim rhetoric and cutting hate crimes in the United Kingdom and it was hoped that lessons could be learned from this for Sheffield.
- Sheffield could adopt an approach, whereby children during their first year in school are supported to speak the native language.
- It is thought that people coming from different parts of the world benefit from being placed initially with each other, to help them feel secure and that integration into the wider community comes more successfully from being integrated as a group.
- People from around the world don't necessarily understand how our GP service works within the local NHS options available and it was felt there was a need to include something in the "Welcome to Sheffield" pack offering more information on this and assist in identifying health needs.

6.6 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Angela Greenwood, Mike Fitter and Councillor Paul Wood for their contribution to the meeting; and
- (b) notes the contents of the report and the responses to the questions raised.

## **7. CITY OF SANCTUARY**

7.1 The Committee received a verbal update from Tom Martin (newly appointed Director of the City of Sanctuary), regarding the City of Sanctuary. He said that since Sheffield became the first City of Sanctuary in the UK in 2007, a lot had changed since then and the vision is for every city in the United Kingdom becoming a City of Sanctuary. Since the premises opened on Chapel Walk last year, The Sanctuary is regarded as a safe haven by users. It provides a welcoming space for individuals to relax and socialise whilst being able to access key services and support. Although funding has been received towards costs to support key services and functions in the city, a team of volunteers are being trained to deal with the basic problems people need help with. The services could not be delivered without the help from volunteers and at the beginning of the year, there were around 19 volunteers, but the number has now significantly risen to 28.

7.2 Tom Martin referred to the report on Controlling Migration and expressed concern regarding the report. He said he welcomed the fact that the Housing Services Team have again reiterated that they would never make referrals to the UKBA of migrants in the city unless they were acting criminally. He said the City of Sanctuary was there to offer safety and support for migrants and make sure there is an understanding of what people have been through to get here. Mr. Martin

welcomed a training programme to be rolled out across the Council to ensure its officers understand the protocols around dealing with asylum seekers and refugees.

7.3 In response, Councillor Paul Wood, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety, stated that a lot of funding had been spent on the settlement of the Roma community and that sometimes when problems arise it is not always under the control of the City Council and therefore nothing more can be done to assist. Councillor Wood also stated that there needed to be closer ties with other Cities of Sanctuary throughout the country.

7.4 The Chair thanked Tom Martin for attending the meeting and providing the update.

## **8. CONTROLLING MIGRATION FUND**

8.1 The Committee received a report on the Controlling Migration Fund to confirm the detail of the Private Sector Housing submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

8.2 In attendance for this item was Janet Sharpe (Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services) and Councillor Paul Wood (Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety).

8.3 Janet Sharpe stated that the Controlling Migration Fund had been launched by MHCLG to help local authorities mitigate the impacts of migration on communities and the Managing Migration Project will put in place measures to support the most vulnerable people living in private sector rented housing. One of the priorities for officers in the Housing Service is to ensure safe and secure housing conditions and being able to identify and disrupt organised crime such as trafficking, forced labour, intimidation and exploitation, however it is not their role to seek proof of immigration status and will not make referrals to the UKBA. It is intended to work closely with other local authorities and share best practice with them.

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

- Housing Teams have uncovered some serious crimes whilst carrying out inspections, resulting in a number of agencies being called upon, as well as the Police, to deal with these cases.
- It will take six to nine months to collect data relating to London/Abbeydale/Chesterfield Road Selective Licensing and, once this information is available, a report will be brought to the Committee. This information would have to be taken into account before Selective Licensing could be considered city wide, as an investment of up to £40m would be needed to get the scheme up and running.
- It was acknowledged that the Selective Housing Scheme in the Page Hall area of the city had initially been a success, but the emphasis is on to see if

it continues to do so.

- With regard to derelict public houses, which can be an eyesore, there are a whole range of powers that can be used. The Council works with the landlords and/or owners to convert the premises and bring them back into use. This was also the case with empty blocks of flats.

8.5 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Janet Sharpe for their contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report and the responses to the questions; and
- (c) expresses its regret at the concerns raised; encourages training and developing protocol; and asks that the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety releases an explanatory statement regarding the content of the report that prompted concerns and public questions on the purpose of the CMF in Sheffield.

## **9. WORK PROGRAMME 2019-20**

9.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson), attaching the Committee's draft Work Programme for 2019/20.

9.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee approves the Work Programme as detailed in the report.

## **10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

10.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2019 at 5.00 p.m., in the Town Hall.