

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 13 February 2020

**PRESENT:** Councillors Ben Curran (Chair), Tim Huggan (Deputy Chair), Sue Auckland, Penny Baker, Dawn Dale, Karen McGowan, Pat Midgley, Peter Price, Peter Rippon, Kaltum Rivers, Andrew Sangar and Richard Shaw

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**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Anne Murphy.

**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 8 on the agenda – Private Sector Housing Regulation and Selective Licensing Update (Item 7 of these minutes) - on the grounds that she is a private sector landlord.

**4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

4.1 The minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2019 and 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2020, were approved as correct records.

**5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

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

**6. HATE CRIME IN SHEFFIELD**

6.1 The Committee received a report and presentation providing an update on what is currently being carried out to address hate crime and incidents in the city. The report also provided an overview of the national picture in relation to hate crime.

6.2 Present for this item were Maxine Stavrianakos, Head of Neighbourhood Intervention and Tenant Support Services and Mark Seston, Performance and Partnership Manager, Safer Neighbourhood Service (SNS).

6.3 Maxine Stavrianakos gave background information to the report and presentation. She said the Community Safety Partnership Hate Crime Co-ordinator was now in post and was looking at how people report hate crime and to raise awareness and develop a better understanding of hate crime and how it affects individuals and communities. She said that during the past year, events had been held to raise

awareness of what hate crime was, training professional bodies to identify hate crime and there had been an attendance in school assemblies to educate students on how hate crime was committed and its effects on victims, families and wider communities. Mrs. Stavrianakos said the definition of hate crime was any incident or criminal offence perceived to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards a person, and could be for a number of different reasons such as race, religion, sexual orientation or disability. She then referred to non-crime hate incidents whereby it was perceived that action against a victim was motivated by hostility but no criminal offence was committed. She said that recently there had been an increase in "mate crime" which was the exploitation of vulnerable people and in particular, a rise in those who had been targeted by criminals through the obituary columns. Mrs. Stavrianakos then referred to the hate crime strands as set out in the presentation and said that numbers of reported hate crime incidents were increasing year on year. She stated that the Partnership had provided £10,000 in funding towards the "Stop Hate UK" campaign by providing a hate crime reporting line, but hate crime was greatly under reported and the main challenges facing the Partnership was to raise awareness as the public had a lack of understanding as to what hate crime was, were not aware of how to report it, had a lack of trust in reporting incidents to the police and the fear of reprisals if offenders were not dealt with.

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

- There are a number of ways people can report hate crime, either to the police, online, or through the city council's webpage. There are a number of ways it can be reported and a list would be provided to Members.
- With regard to the incident of crime against someone in the Jewish community last summer, this was the first time anything of this nature had been reported and a meeting is to be arranged with the Rabbi in Sheffield to ascertain whether this was an isolated case or whether there had been other occasions when incidents of hate crime against the Jewish community happened, but had not been reported.
- It was acknowledged that there was a need to promote online and telephoning mechanisms including those that are "third party" and do not involve direct contact with the police. There was a need to make sure this message was passed on to all agencies and departments.
- In response to a comment from a Member who said that she had not seen any literature relating to the Stop Hate UK campaign for the last two years, it was acknowledged that, although proactive in the beginning, this was work in progress and it was accepted that more needed to be done to step up advertising the campaign and a better distribution of leaflets.
- The police were unable to force victims to take matters further. Victims were fearful that the police would name them to the perpetrators and there would be further reprisals for the victim and/or their family.

- The Sheffield Community Safety Partnership were working with their counterparts in core cities and across South Yorkshire who have encountered similar difficulties in encouraging people to report hate crime, with the aim of finding a solution to this. Work was also ongoing with Liverpool, who also use the Stop Hate UK reporting tool, to understand how they promote services.
- Ongoing work is taking place with South Yorkshire Police to ensure that staff are provided with regular training on hate crime/incidents to enable them to monitor hate crime, identify emerging trends and intelligence, and take proactive steps to disrupt and prevent escalation. This work links into the partnership. The police command team also look at all hate related incidents/crimes on a daily basis to ensure appropriate action/escalation.
- Training sessions can be arranged for Councillors on hate crime, equalities and prevent to assist them identifying possible hate crime victims within their communities, so they might be better placed to offer help and advice to victims and their families.

6.5 RESOLVED: That this Committee:-

- (a) thanks Maxine Stavrianakos and Mark Seston for their contribution to the meeting; and
- (b) notes the contents of the presentation and report now submitted, and the responses to the questions raised, and the additional information to be supplied.

## **7. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING REGULATION AND SELECTIVE LICENSING UPDATE**

- 7.1 The Committee received a report and presentation giving an update on the London/ Abbeydale/Chesterfield Road Selective Licensing scheme.
- 7.2 Present for this item were Janet Sharpe, Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services and Catherine Hughes, Team Manager, Private Housing Standards.
- 7.3 Janet Sharpe reported the progress to date of the Scheme, outlining the number of inspections that had been carried out, the number of properties that were compliant with the licence conditions and the number of properties where a serious hazard had been found.
- 7.4 Catherine Hughes referred to the team structure of the Private Housing Standards Team (PHST), which, due to reductions in Government grants and austerity measures, had been reduced by around 60% over the past 10 years. She stated that the priority of the PHST was to protect some of the most vulnerable people living in private sector properties, but around 40% of those properties were built pre 1919 and the condition of those properties had deteriorated. The most recent stock condition survey shows that 10,801 of private rented properties have a Category 1 hazard. She said that the Private

Sector Housing Service was ranked as one of the best in the country in supporting tenants, working closely with landlords to improve standards and take enforcement action against those landlords who flout the law and put tenants at risk. She referred to the numbers of Houses in Multiple Occupation in the city and how the Team carry out inspections, issue licences and then renew such licences every five years. She also made reference to the number of asylum seeker properties across the city.

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

- With regard to student accommodation, there were some 60,000 students across the city and when new schemes in the city centre are completed, the majority of students, if affordability allows, prefer to move into the newest properties, leaving the older schemes struggling to fill up and being under-occupied.
- Some of the earlier built student accommodation blocks were purpose built and not fit for family use. The service has been looking at some of the under-occupied blocks to see if they can be altered to make them fit for use.
- With regard to cladding in tower blocks, the Government was doing a lot of work to remove the risk of fires following the disaster at the Grenfell Tower block. The powers governing fire safety was shared between the Housing Service and the Fire Service. The Government has introduced a funding programme to make it easier for building owners to access resources to remove combustible cladding to their properties. This work had been carried out to the Housing Service owned properties, but some private landlords were proactive in accessing the funding available and carrying out the works, others were slow to react, but it was hoped that all properties in Sheffield would be made safe during the next 12 months.
- The Housing Service works in partnership with the majority of letting agencies in the city, providing help and advice to improve housing standards. A lot depends on the arrangements that landlords have with their lettings agent, some agencies were given full responsibility, but it can be challenging to get landlords to co-operate. Where an unscrupulous landlord is exposed as providing sub-standard and dangerous accommodation, the City Council will take enforcement action against them. The City Council are aware and monitor those landlords/agencies who do not act correctly and responsibly. The Service also provides guidance for landlords and managers who hold licences for houses in multiple occupation or who are licensed under the Selective Licensing Scheme.
- Due to national policy changes, a student housing strategy was being developed. This strategy will explore the potential impact of these changes on the existing and future student accommodation provision in Sheffield. The city has a mixed accommodation offer for students, with an increasing

amount of Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) and whilst demand for PBSA was continuing to grow, existing stock was still not at full occupancy and there was a risk that the provision of more PBSA will lead to oversupply and older blocks falling empty. It was hoped that this and housing plans for the city as a whole would be known by the end of the summer.

- There has been a lot of work carried out by the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services, along with the respective Cabinet Members, regarding the Strategic Housing Market Assessment which was now complete, but they are looking to see if there was a need to update some of the housing plans for the city so that they will be in a position to put forward a report to Cabinet on this by the end of the summer.
- One of the challenges is around how to improve private rented houses across the city. The Housing Service was working with landlords in order for them to improve the basic standards of their properties, particularly to many of the older properties' thermal comfort. Part of the city's Health and Wellbeing Strategy was the need to ensure that those in poor health had access to decent housing, a warm and comfortable place to live and the aim was to see how properties could be improved and make sure that landlords were tackling Category 1 hazards to make sure that housing stock was up to an acceptable standard.
- As can be seen from the results of the survey which has been carried out, some families don't want the disruption of moving out of their properties whilst repairs were being carried out or even being rehoused. The perception of some tenants was that "I've put up with it, so I'll carry on with it", so homes fall further into disrepair.
- Part of the city's Health and Wellbeing Strategy acknowledges the current shortage of affordable housing and that a number of owner-occupied and private rented properties across the city are classed as having an excess cold hazard due to a mix of financial hardship and poor property conditions, and work was ongoing to address this.
- The introduction of Selective Licensing into an area can bring widespread benefits to the local community, by ensuring that all privately rented property within the designated area was safe and well managed, but the Scheme was costly to manage so there was a need to determine which area would benefit more from the Selective Licensing. The aim was for the Licensing and Enforcement Team to visit every property in the designated area to ascertain the condition of the property, assess it and make sure it was fit for purpose and only when that was completed, move on to the next area. The aim was to look at where the most serious cases were and deal with them before moving on to the next difficult area. Consultation with all affected people, such as tenants, residents, landlords, managing agents, businesses, Police, Fire Service, local councillors etc., needed to be held to determine whether the Scheme would be beneficial to the area. There was a need to deal with one area at a time rather than city-wide.

- Landlords need to make sure that tenants dispose of their waste properly. The Housing Service works with the Environmental Health Service to serve notices on those who do not maintain their properties, although it was felt that if a fixed penalty notice has been served or fines issued, the landlord would pass the cost on to tenants.

7.6 RESOLVED: That this Committee:-

- (a) thanks Janet Sharpe and Catherine Hughes for their contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report and presentation now submitted together with the comments now made and the responses to the questions raised; and
- (c) endorses the decision taken by the Cabinet at its meeting held 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2018 to designate an area of London Road, Abbeydale Road and Chesterfield Road for the Selective Licensing of privately rented properties, and requests that:-
  - (i) an annual report, giving feedback on the Selective Licensing Scheme, to see more detail on a regular basis, be brought to this Committee;
  - (ii) the Scheme be extended to other areas of the City; and
  - (iii) the Cabinet Member for Transport and Development continue to work with the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services relating to Page Hall.

## **8. PAGE HALL SELECTIVE LICENSING REVIEW**

8.1 The Committee received a report which outlined the outcome of the work which had been carried out by the Private Housing Standards Team (PHST) during the Selective Licensing Scheme which came into operation in April, 2014, in the Page Hall area of the city and ended in April 2019. The report which was presented was produced in 2018, which was four years into the scheme. There has been a lot of activity in Page Hall and the PHST had engaged with local schools, the MAST team and Adult Social Care workers. Initially, there were some landlords that didn't want their properties to become part of the scheme, so they sold up. However, the majority of landlords worked with the PHST and carried out the necessary works to the properties to ensure they were compliant. Where landlords did not carry out necessary works, enforcement action was taken. Common issues remaining in the area were around waste, how properties were managed and the level of rents people are paying. Councillor Paul Wood, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods and Community Safety, has asked that the PHST be involved in matters of waste and waste in housing. Everything that needed to be licensed was licensed and the works that needed to

be done had been carried out. It has been found that there were some issues in the area immediately around Page Hall and these were being investigated.

8.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted together with the comments now made and the responses to the questions raised; and
- (b) expressed their thanks to Catherine Hughes and the Private Sector Housing Team and the Housing Service for their help and assistance on cases within their areas. They wanted to thank the team for their professionalism and helpfulness.

**9. WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20**

9.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson), attaching the Committee's Work Programme for 2019/20. She provided an update on the outstanding items of business.

9.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee approves the Work Programme as detailed in the report and agrees that the following items of business be brought to the next meeting:-

- Community Safety Partnership Annual Report.
- Update on Housing +.

**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> March, 2020 at 5.00 p.m., in the Town Hall.

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