

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Homes & Communities Committee** held in the Civic Suite, Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, Notts NG24 1BY on Monday, 11 March 2019 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor B Laughton (Chairman)  
Councillor T Wendels (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Mrs B Brooks, Councillor Mrs C Brooks, Councillor Mrs I Brown, Councillor Mrs S Michael, Councillor N Mison, Councillor N Mitchell, Councillor Mrs P Rainbow, Councillor Mrs S Saddington and Councillor D Staples (substitute).

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor Mrs S Soar (Committee Member)

Prior to the commencement of the meeting the Chairman, Councillor R.B. Laughton, thanked all Members and Officers for their work over the past four years. He stated that the Homes & Communities Committee had achieved a great deal during the life of the Council and that it was to be applauded.

54 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS AND AS TO THE PARTY WHIP

Councillor Mrs P. Rainbow declared a personal interest in Agenda Item No.6 - Temporary Accommodation - Project Update. Councillor Mrs Rainbow owns land adjacent to the land referred to in the report.

55 DECLARATION OF ANY INTENTION TO RECORD THE MEETING

NOTED that there would be an audio recording of the meeting undertaken by the Council.

56 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 14 JANUARY 2019

AGREED (unanimously) that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

57 SHERWOOD & NEWARK CITIZENS' ADVICE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

The Committee considered the report of the Business Manager – Housing, Health & Community Relations jointly presented with Jackie Insley, Chief Officer for Sherwood & Newark Citizen Advice (SNCA) in relation to the performance targets in respect of core advice service provision and debt advice, as set out in the Service Level Agreement between SNCA and the Council. Circulated at the meeting was the Client Experience Dashboard 2017/18.

Ms Insley highlighted the main points contained in the report whilst adding that it had been a very busy year for the service. She noted that the amount of clients the service had dealt with had reduced from the previous year but that their issues were more complex. She also noted that more clients presented with mental health issues

and that this was a challenge for the staff to deal with. It was reported that referrals to food banks continued to rise but that some clients did not wish to use the service as they were embarrassed to do so.

Ms Insley advised that the service continued to operate with the use of volunteers, some of which had left in the previous 12 months. A rolling programme of recruitment and training was in operation but that to fully train a volunteer could take up to 12 months. She added that advice over the telephone was continuing but that a web chat was also to be launched in April. Ms Insley stated that the Council's Customer Services Team continued to support the work of the SNCA and that this was invaluable. She added that the SNCA were looking to extend their partnership working with other organisations in order to maintain a sustainable local provision.

In considering the report and presentation Members raised a number of queries. In relation to the lower number of clients seen, a Member queried whether this was due to fewer individuals presenting themselves or whether it was because the numbers had to be managed due to the complexity of their issues. Ms Insley advised that it was very difficult, at times, to manage the waiting area. Some clients may only require a 10 minute interview but other issues may take up a number of hours. In those cases the clients waiting may not be seen and seek advice from a different source.

A Member noted the aborted partnership working with Bassetlaw and queried as to the motivating factor to create the partnership. Ms Insley advised that if a larger organisation was created it offered the opportunity for bigger funding to be bid for. Any additional funding would enable face to face services to be maintained at a local level.

A Member queried the total number of referrals to the service and where they had been referred from. Ms Insley advised that they were from both Newark & Sherwood District Council and Newark and Sherwood Homes. She added that it was hoped that the statistics could be expanded to give a clearer picture as to the nature of the referrals but that at present it appeared that most were in relation to debt.

A Member referred to the use of food banks and cited the case of a resident in the ward she represented. She congratulated the work that SNCA, the Council and Newark and Sherwood Homes did to help the individual concerned.

In summary, the Chairman thanked Ms Insley on behalf of the Committee for her informative report and that he was pleased to see that SNCA working at Castle House continued to assist in the continued improvement of an already excellent service provision, adding that he would wish to see such provision in the Ollerton area of the district.

**AGREED** (unanimously) that the report, particularly the performance outturns and annual report regarding the provision of core and debt advice service provision to residents in the district provided by SNCA, be noted.

The Committee considered the report of the Director – Governance & Organisational Development presented by the Business Manager – Housing, Health & Community Relations which sought to update Members on the work being progressed to ensure the Council had appropriate temporary accommodation available to discharge its statutory homeless duties, to meet current and anticipated future demand and determine the long term use of a strategic site, which is allocated for residential development and includes the Seven Hills homeless hostel.

The report set out the duty on local housing authorities in England in relation to securing accommodation for unintentionally homeless households in priority need and those placed in temporary accommodation under an interim duty pending completion of inquiries into a statutory homeless application. The report provided Members with statistical information into homelessness both locally and nationally and the current provision of the Council. Paragraph 4 of the report set out the options for Members to consider, providing information for both re-configuration and redevelopment with an update of the work undertaken by a Project Team assembled to deliver as set out in a project initiation document. A note of the financial implications of managing two hostels was set out in paragraph 7 of the report.

In considering the report a Member commented that she was pleased to see that a new build on the Seven Hills site to provide larger accommodation was being considered, adding that it was likely that this type of accommodation would be more frequently needed as the effects of universal credit increased. The Member also queried whether the assistance with winter fuel costs were paid weekly to those in receipt or in a lump sum. The Business Manager advised that that electricity cards were topped up on a weekly basis for a limited period during cold weather.

In relation to the financial implications a Member noted that the two hostels now appeared to be self-financing/profit making? The Business Manager noted that the rent and service charge did appear to show that but that there was no inclusion of charges for staffing and service provision. This financial information would be considered in further details as part of the developing business case, per site.

The Chairman noted and welcomed the contents of the report and added that the existing preventative work with the SNCA and private landlords must continue.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) the contents of the report be noted; and
- (b) support be afforded to the project team to continue its work to ensure the Council has appropriate temporary accommodation provision, which includes appraising opportunities for re-development on the Seven Hills site with a purpose built temporary accommodation facility and feasibility work to consider possible capital investment at Wellow Green.

59 HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION STRATEGY 2019-2024

The Committee considered the report of the Director – Communities & Environment, presented by the Homelessness Strategy & Safeguarding Officer which set out the new Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2019-2024 for approval and to outline its key themes which were informed by the Homelessness Review.

The report set out that a Homelessness Review was jointly commissioned with Mansfield District Council (MDC) and Ashfield District Council as they had become a shared service with MDC in 2015. Paragraph 2.6 advised that a further review was planned to identify gaps in current provision and to take account of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the implications thereof.

In considering the report Members entered into a debate about the definitions of affordable housing and social housing and how these were often misunderstood. The Chairman provided locations within the district where the Council provided affordable homes and stated that the Council aims to make maximum use of section 106 contributions, securing 30% of affordable housing where possible alongside the delivery of its social housing HRA build programme.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) the report be noted;
- (b) the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2019-2024 be approved.

60 ALLOCATION POLICY AMENDMENTS INCORPORATING NOTTINGHAMSHIRE'S LOCAL OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive, presented by the Business Manager – Housing, Health & Community Relations which sought to present to Members the proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme to ensure the housing elements of the Nottinghamshire Local Offer for Care Leavers (approved by Policy & Finance Committee on 21 February 2019) could be delivered in Newark & Sherwood.

The report set out that there were approximately 70,000 children in care in England at any one time and the disadvantages they faced when they left care in comparison to their peers. The report set out that it was a requirement of the Children & Social Care Act 2017 for each local authority to publish a Local Offer for its care leavers (18-25 years). The Local Offer should provide information about all available services and support, both statutory and discretionary that would be available to them from each local authority.

The Local Offer was created following discussions at the Nottinghamshire Local Authorities Chief Executives' Group when it was agreed that a joint single Care Leaver Offer for Nottinghamshire would be developed. The document was attached as Appendix B to the report.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) the proposed amendments to the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme to facilitate priority being given to care leavers in line with the Nottinghamshire Care Leaver offer be approved in principle; and
- (b) delegated authority be granted to the Director – Communities & Environment to approve the final detail of the amendments.

61 DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS NATIONAL REVIEW FINDINGS - IMPACT ON NSDC

The Committee considered the report of the Director – Communities & Environment, presented by the Business Manager – Public Protection which sought to update Members of the findings of the national review of Disabled Facilities Grants.

The report set out that the University of West of England had been appointed by the Department of Health & Social Care to carry out an independent review of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) in England. The review sought to ensure that the home adaptations policy remained fit for purpose and that funds were allocated as effectively as possible. A copy of the Review (in summary) was attached as Appendix One to the report. Paragraph 3 of the report set out how the DFG was currently operated and how it should change in the future. The areas identified were listed as: challenges identified; joining it up strategically; joining it up operationally; distribution formula; updating the regulations; developing a market; tenure issues; common parts; measuring outcomes; and the implications for the Council.

In presenting the report, the Business Manager stated that he was disappointed with the findings of the review. He noted that the grant for adaptations had not been increased for 10 years and that the maximum grant of £30,000 made it increasingly difficult to bring schemes in within budget, adding that NSDC had implemented their own discretionary fund to top-up the £30,000 maximum grant with an additional £10,000. He outlined to Members that each local authority administered their DFG differently and that this would make it difficult to have a single county scheme.

Members raised a number of queries in relation to how the funds were received and then distributed to those requiring adaptations. The Business Manager advised of the changes to the way in which the grant was received and the work undertaken to ensure that the cost of carrying out an adaptation was competitive, ensuring value for money.

In response to a Member stating that the report was only for noting, the Business Manager advised that, to-date, the Government had not responded to the findings of the review they had commissioned. He added that a further report would be presented to Committee once the Government responses were known.

A Member queried whether a means test was carried out prior to the level of grant being determined. The Business Manager advised that adaptations for adults were means tested but those for children were not. He added that it was likely that the

further roll out of universal credit would impact on the scheme further.

AGREED (with 10 votes for with 1 abstention) that the recommendations of the National Review of Disabled Facilities Grants be noted.

62 FORWARD PLAN FOR HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

AGREED that the Forward Plan for the Homes & Communities Committee between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020 be noted.

63 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

That, under section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 7 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

None

Meeting closed at 7.06 pm.

Chairman