

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, 20 January 2020 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor T Wendels (Chairman)
Councillor R Holloway (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor M Brock, Councillor Mrs B Brooks, Councillor Mrs I Brown, Councillor M Brown, Councillor S Carlton, Councillor L Dales, Councillor L Goff, Councillor Mrs S Saddington and Councillor P Peacock (Substitute)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mrs P Rainbow and Councillor M Skinner

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor Mrs K Arnold (Committee Member)

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

Councillor Mrs S Saddington declared a personal interest in Agenda Item No. 10. Councillor Saddington is a Member of the Fire Authority.

39 DECLARATION OF ANY INTENTION TO RECORD THE MEETING

NOTED that there would be live streaming of the meeting undertaken by the Council.

40 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 25 NOVEMBER 2019

AGREED (unanimously) that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

41 SHERWOOD & NEWARK CITIZENS' ADVICE - ANNUAL PERFORMANCE 2018/2019

The Committee considered the joint report of the Business Manager – Housing, Health & Community Relations and the Homeless Strategy Officer which sought to inform Members of the achievements of performance targets for the commissioned debt management and homeless prevention service to residents in the district for the financial year 2018/2019 by Sherwood & Newark Citizens' Advice (SNCA).

The report provided Members with details in relation to the Debt Advice Service's Service Level Agreement between the Council, SNCA and Newark and Sherwood Homes including a table of performance indicators with target and outturn figures. The SNCA Annual Report for 2018/2019 was attached as an appendix to the report.

In considering the report a Member queried how clients travelled to meet with advisors. In response, the Chief Officer of SNCA, Jackie Insley, advised that clients travelled in a variety of ways and that a home visit would be undertaken but only in exceptional circumstances. Interviews were also conducted over the telephone and using the internet.

A Member queried whether further information was available to those who were entitled to Universal Credit and also to landlords who tenants were in receipt of the benefit. Ms Insley advised that the DWP had offered training to landlords and that SNCA would also assist a tenant who breached their set working hours, thereby potentially affecting their entitlement. The Business Manager also advised that a Landlord Liaison Officer was available at the Council.

Members also commented on the unacceptable length of time taken to carry out a mandatory reconsideration of a Personal Independence Payment. Ms Insley stated that they would assist the individual through the process and also collate and feedback information to the Department of Work & Pensions. Ms Insley added that the process could take up to 10 months which was too long.

In response to a query about volunteers, Ms Insley stated that recruitment was difficult, especially from younger people. She also added that as the SNCA was a Charity, it was also difficult to recruit Trustees.

AGREED that:

- (a) the contents of the report be noted, particularly the performance outturns for the commissioned debt management and homeless prevention service to residents in the district for the financial year 2018/2019; and
- (b) Ms Insley pass on the thanks of the Council for the continued work of the Sherwood & Newark Citizens' Advice.

42 HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21

The Committee considered the joint report of the Director – Communities & Environment and the Deputy Chief Executive/Director – Resources in relation to the budget and scales of fees and charges for those areas falling under the remit of the Homes & Communities Committee for 2020/2021.

The report set out the proposals for recommendation to the Policy & Finance Committee on 20 February 2020 in relation to the base budget for 2020/2021 for inclusion in the overall Council budget and the 2020/2021 fees and charges.

In considering the report Members queried whether grants to external organisations had been reduced. The Business Manager – Financial Services advised that the main decrease in grants was due to those awarded to Parish Councils, a number of years previously, coming to an end.

In response to Members noting the increase in budget for ICT and communications, the Business Manager advised that the Council were moving towards a hosted environment and the licence fees for that were costly. The increase in cost was also attributable to the employment of an ICT Technical Project Officer.

It was further noted that the Energy & Homes Support had reduced. Members were advised that the previous Project Officer post had been linked to a grant which was no longer available. The Director advised that the work previously undertaken by that postholder was now embedded in the day to day working of the Council.

A Member queried how the reintroduction of housing management would affect the Committee's budget in future. The Business Manager advised that the housing budget was managed by Newark and Sherwood Homes through the Housing Revenue Account which was separate to that of the Committee's revenue budget.

AGREED that the following be recommended to the Policy & Finance Committee on 20 February 2020:

- (a) the 2020/2021 base budget (Appendix A) for inclusion in the overall Council budget; and
- (b) to Council on 9 March 2020, the 2020/2021 fees and charges (Appendix D).

43 HOUSING MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION - PROJECT UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Business Manager – Commercialisation & Major Projects which sought to provide Members on progress of the housing management implementation project.

The report set out the background to the decision to bring the housing management service back in-house with details in relation to: TUPE; Staff Engagement; Pensions; Branding; Tenant Engagement, Influence and Accountability, Transfer of Assets and Savings Identified being provided at paragraph 3.

In considering the report Members welcomed the progress made and noted that the implementation date had now moved from April 2020 to February 2020.

Councillor Peacock proposed that Recommendations (b) and (c) be subject to slight amendment as follows:

- (b) the number of committee members on the Advisory Group be increased from 2 to 3.
- (c) the further report setting out proposals for future tenant engagement and involvement etc. to include a timetable for the works.

AGREED that:

- (a) the project update be noted;
- (b) the proposals for an interim arrangement, for an Advisory Group comprising of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, three Committee Members, senior housing officers and the three tenant board members (as set out in paragraphs 3.5.3 to 3.5.7 of the report) be approved, with the Director – Governance & Organisational

Development having delegated authority to put the arrangements in place including retaining remuneration for the tenant board members on a pro-rata basis and that the Homes & Communities Committee nominate the three Committee Members to the Advisory Group as follows:

Councillor Mrs Kathleen Arnold
Councillor Mrs Irene Brown
Councillor Michael Brown

- (c) a further report be submitted to the Committee setting out the proposals for future tenant engagement and involvement and, if required, further support for the Committee in the development and delivery of housing and tenant related services, such report to include a timetable for the proposed engagement; and
- (d) a further report be submitted to the Committee setting out the savings achieved and recommending areas for allocation of the saving accrued.

44 PUBLIC SPACE CCTV

The Committee considered the report of the Business Manager – Public Protection which sought to provide Members with an update of public space CCTV and future issues facing the system within Newark & Sherwood.

The report set out the primary objectives of the service when it was first introduced in 1999. It also provided information as to the stakeholders and partners of the current provision together with a note of the assets; cameras; monitoring and staffing; finance; and recording of incidents. The proposals were listed in paragraph 3 of the report which were that a full review of the public space CCTV system be undertaken and also a review of the CCTV Policy and Procedures to ensure full compliance with the relevant codes of practice.

Members raised the issue of the previously agreed coverage in Edwinstowe and the length of time it was taking to reach a permanent solution. The Business Manager advised that the intention had been to install a fixed camera but this was not now possible. The only option was to use a fibre optic solution which was proving difficult to source. He noted that a portable camera was currently in operation. In response to concerns raised that the cost benefit review may result in all coverage being withdrawn, if it was shown that no criminal behaviour was recorded, the Business Manager advised that it had been the decision of the Committee that the camera be installed and this would be actioned and added that he accepted that the presence of a camera acted as a deterrent.

A Member queried whether it would be possible to gain additional funding from the Police if they were used for traffic enforcement purposes. The Business Manager advised that whilst some local authorities used them to assist with the issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices, it was understood that this was not something that Nottinghamshire County Council wished to pursue.

A Member queried whether it was possible to use the current cameras in conjunction with a public address system which enabled the operator to let the public know that they were being observed. The Business Manager advised that there were two issues with the use of a PA system. One was due to the ratio of the number of cameras and operatives monitoring them. Sometimes there was only one individual monitoring approximately 135 camera feeds. The second issue was the infrastructure which would be required to enable the use of a PA system. The Council cameras were either fibre optic or used via wifi and it was not always possible to transmit audio through such equipment.

In acknowledging the need to review the cameras and the cost benefits thereof, the Chairman stated that consideration must be given to the original primary objective of reducing the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

AGREED that:

- (a) the current activity recorded by the public space CCTV network in Newark & Sherwood be noted;
- (b) a review of the whole system, including each camera, be undertaken with a further report being presented to the Homes & Communities Committee;
- (c) a review of the CCTV Policy be undertaken and a revised Policy be produced for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee; and
- (d) a review of the financial contributions made to CCTV be undertaken with the findings and options being reported to a meeting of the Committee for a future financial model.

45 EMPTY HOMES UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Business Manager – Public Protection which sought to provide Members with information on the current position with empty homes in the district.

The report set out the number of various reasons that a property may remain empty and the local district picture in comparison to that of neighbouring authorities. The pattern of empty homes over the past 10 years was detailed at paragraph 3.4 of the report with the enforcement action of the Council's Environmental Health service being listed in paragraphs 3.7 to 3.12.

In noting that any property which remained empty for 2 years or more was subject to 200% council tax, a Member queried what the income therefrom was used for, as the Council did not employ a dedicated Empty Homes Officer. The Business Manager advised that the Council did not take a proactive approach to the issue and it was therefore difficult to formulate a strategy to deal with it. He advised that some work had previously been done with Mansfield District Council with a view to sharing the resource of their dedicated officer. However, the individual was redeployed as the role had not been cost effective. He added that he would make enquiries as to whether the monies were ring-fenced for any specific use.

Members agreed that it was to be welcomed that the Council were not complacent in tackling the issue but concern remained in relation to the number of long term empty properties.

AGREED that the report be noted together with the range of actions taken to bring long term empty properties back into use.

46 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of the Business Manager – Housing Strategy & Development which sought to provide Members with an update on the progress being made with the 5 year Housing Revenue Account Development Programme and the Extra Care Scheme in Boughton.

The report set out the background to the delivery of additional affordable homes across the district which was a strategic priority for the Council. Details of the number of homes to be provided and already delivered were listed in section 2 of the report. It was noted that Phase One had been completed with details of the progression of Phases Two, Three and Four being reported in paragraphs 3.5 to 3.14. Members were advised that the contract to develop the Boughton Extra Care Scheme had been awarded to North Midland Construction following a procurement exercise with an indicative practical completion date of March 2021. Financial details of the scheme were provided in section 4 of the report.

AGREED that the progress being made with both the 5 year Housing Revenue Account Development Programme and Extra Care Scheme in Boughton be noted.

47 HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE'S FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for February 2020 to January 2021 with the Chairman inviting Members to put forward any items they would wish to be considered by Committee at a future meeting.

The Vice-Chairman advised that new legislation was coming into force in April 2020 in relation to Energy Performance Certificates which would affect landlords of properties in Band E or above. She advised that there would be a report to Committee in March 2020.

Councillor Carlton commented that he would wish to see a formal mechanism for reporting back from the meetings he attended as the Council's representative on the Nottinghamshire Police & Crime Panel.

Meeting closed at 7.25 pm.

Chairman