

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE
BOURGES & VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH
ON
TUESDAY 4 JUNE 2013**

Present: Councillors Lee (Chairman), Day (Vice Chairman) Over, Serluca, Johnson and Forbes

Also Present: Keith Jones, Citizens Advice Bureau
Julie Coleman, Department of Work and Pensions
Sharon Keogh, Peterborough Food Bank / Care Zone

Officers in Attendance: Adrian Chapman Head of Neighbourhood Services
Sean Evans Housing Needs Manager
Sarah Hebblethwaite Assistant Housing Needs Manager
Belinda Child Strategic Housing Manager
Leonie McCarthy Social Inclusion Manger
Gary Goose Safer & Stronger Peterborough Strategic Manager
Gurvinder Kaur Lawyer
Paulina Ford Senior Governance Officer

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Kreling, Simons and JR Fox. Councillor Over and Councillor Serluca attended as substitutes for Councillor Kreling and Councillor Simons.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2013

The minutes of the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17 March 2013 were approved as an accurate record.

4. Call In of any Cabinet, Cabinet Member or Key Officer Decisions

There were no requests for Call-in to consider

At this point the Chairman requested that the Committee consider item 8 - Review of 2013/13 and Work Programme for 2013/2014 first on the agenda. The Committee agreed to this request. Item 8 therefore became item 5 on the agenda.

5. Review of 2013/13 and Work Programme for 2013/2014

The Senior Governance Officer introduced the report which provided the Committee with:

- a review of work undertaken during 2012/13 and recommendations made
- the terms of reference for the Committee and
- a draft work programme for 2013/2014 for consideration

The Chairman reminded the Committee that part of the remit of the Committee was to undertake all of the Council's statutory functions in accordance with Sections 19 & 20 and associated regulations of the Police and Justice Act 2006, relating to scrutiny of crime and disorder matters, including acting as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee. This covered scrutiny of the Safer Peterborough Partnership Plan. The Chairman suggested that the Committee focus on the three priorities within the Safer Peterborough Partnership Plan over the next three meetings monitoring performance against outcomes. The priorities were:

- Reducing crime
- Tackling anti-social behaviour and hate crime
- Building stronger and more supportive communities

The Chairman also suggested that as Vivacity had now been in place for three years that the Committee look at whether it was providing value for money.

The Chairman informed Members that the Council needed to deliver a Cultural Strategy for the next five years which needed to be drafted and implemented during 2013. The Committee would therefore need to scrutinise this as part of its remit.

Members also requested that the City Centre Business Plan be brought before the Committee at the meeting in July.

ACTION AGREED

The Committee agreed that the Senior Governance Officer work with the Chair and Group Representatives to manage the work programme of the Committee and programme in the requested items.

6. Draft Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018

The Housing Needs Manager introduced the report which provided the Committee with the Draft Homelessness Review and Draft Homelessness Strategy 2013-2018. This was being presented to the Committee for final sign off before being presented to Cabinet and Full Council for adoption. Also in attendance was the Assistant Housing Needs Manager and Strategic Housing Manager. The Draft Homelessness Strategy had previously been presented to the Committee at its meeting on 7 March 2013 for comment. The proposed draft Strategy took the form of an action plan which would be monitored on a quarterly basis throughout the life of the plan. There were four strategic aims of the strategy:

- Strategic Aim 1 – Preventing and relieving homelessness through a robust partnership approach
- Strategic Aim 2 - Increasing access to safe, warm, healthy and affordable accommodation
- Strategic Aim 3 – Reduce and prevent rough sleeping
- Strategic Aim 4 – Promoting settled lifestyles and sustainable communities

The committee was asked to:

1. Note the findings of the Homelessness Review
2. Comment on and agree on the strategic objectives set out in the Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018 and approve the Draft Homelessness Strategy
3. Approve the draft strategy to be taken forward to Cabinet and Full Council for adoption

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members were concerned that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea were actively seeking land for accommodation for their homeless population in Peterborough. *The Executive Director of Operations informed Members that Peterborough City Council*

was not currently in negotiations with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and that there were no intentions to do so at this stage.

- *Was the Director aware of any other Authorities wanting to acquire land in Peterborough to facilitate the type of arrangements that had recently been detailed in the Press? The Executive Director of Operations was unaware of any other Authorities having approached Peterborough City Council to acquire land. Members were advised that any other Authority would be entitled to buy land and build houses in Peterborough if they so wished.*
- *Were officers aware of any residents who have come from London and taken up residence in the private rented sector in Peterborough? The Housing Needs Manager informed Members that following the introduction of the Localism Act in 2011 there were new powers handed down to Authorities to discharge their homelessness duties by making an offer of suitable accommodation within the private sector. This gave Local Authorities freedom to procure accommodation outside of their district. There were many London Boroughs who had looked for accommodation across the country. Local Authorities were free to contact private letting agents across the country.*
- *Members were concerned that people coming from London and taking up accommodation in the private sector would impact on the availability of accommodation for Peterborough residents. Was this being monitored? Members were advised that it was not a requirement for London Boroughs to inform Peterborough City Council when they placed people with private landlords. This would therefore be difficult to monitor.*
- *What was the 'Jam Jar' account? Members were advised that the 'Jam Jar' account had been set up with the Credit Union and was an account that helped people manage their money post receipt of Universal Credit. Money would go into the account and be sectioned off in to different 'Jam Jars' so that it could not be spent and only utilised for essential costs such as rent, electricity, heating or food. Its purpose was to help people who had not previously had experience in managing their money or who currently had difficulty in managing their money.*
- *How many people have applied for the discretionary housing payment, how many people have been accepted and how long does it take to make a decision after application? Members were advised that it was managed by the Serco Client Team and not within the Housing Team. The Officer advised that he would find out and report back to Members.*
- *The information in the report gave the total number of acceptances and number of households in temporary accommodation per 1000 by Local Authority and Peterborough compared to Norwich, Ipswich and Cambridge. Why was Peterborough compared to these Authorities? Members were advised that CIPFA Statistics were used and those authorities were originally part of the Best Value cohort group that Peterborough were placed within which was based on similar populations and similar make up. Peterborough had been part of this cohort group for the last ten years.*
- *What does the term 'those who hit the streets' mean? Members were advised that it was a technical term referring to people who were unable to secure accommodation either rented or with family and found themselves with nowhere to stay so 'hit' the streets.*
- *Members noted that the report mentioned that "the multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Steering Group has continued to meet and will be key to the development of the new draft Homelessness Strategy". Members felt that the word "will be key" was misleading and sought clarity that the multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Steering Group had been key. The Housing Needs Manager advised that he would change the wording to provide clarity that the Steering Group had been key to the development of the new draft Homelessness Strategy.*
- *Members sought clarification as to why under the section of the report referring to Levels of Housing Need there was statistical data which referred to single persons being unable to afford market prices. Members were advised that the reason for the data on single people had been included was because a study had been commissioned by partnering neighbouring local authorities into the local levels of housing needs particularly looking at single people and the affordability within the region.*
- *Members were concerned that the Homelessness Strategy provided a bleak picture and wanted to know if there were any positive areas of work that could be included and how*

Peterborough compared to other Authorities. *The Housing Needs Manager advised that he could include within the report more comparative data with neighbouring authorities to highlight how well Peterborough was doing in areas of work to lower the number of homelessness presentations. Other areas of work to include would be the achievements with regard to reducing the number of rough sleepers across the city, the reduction in front desk waiting times and the changes to improve access to the service.*

- Officers were asked if they could identify any positives that had come out of the benefit reform around homelessness. *Members were advised that it was difficult to find positives when households were being squeezed. Some positives were that accommodation that was being under used would become available. This would however mean that demand for one and two bedroom properties would increase. The full impact of the benefit cap had not yet been seen.*
- The Chairman commented that the report had not identified what problems had arisen from the delays in processing housing benefit and how the problems were being resolved. The Chairman informed the Committee that he had therefore contacted the Housing Benefits team to ask what was being done. The Chairman had received a response advising of the types of issues that had arisen and how they were being resolved. The Chairman sought clarification from the Officers present if they thought the interventions that the Benefits Team had in place were acceptable. The Chairman also asked if further improvement was required, whether the time that people were waiting was acceptable and what needed to be done over the next few years to improve performance. *The Housing Needs Manager advised Members that the relationship with the Housing Benefits Team was very good. Urgent issues referred to the Housing Benefits Team were generally dealt with immediately and an outcome provided on the same day. Due to the large number of applications that were now being received by the Housing Benefits Team there was generally a 6 to 8 week lead time on the assessment of an application. The major difficulty was that a lot of private landlords in the city could not afford to wait the 6 to 8 weeks and could not afford to wait to have the rent paid in arrears. This often deterred private landlords from accepting people on housing benefit. The Housing Team and Serco were working together to improve the assessment time and on line applications were being introduced.*
- The Chairman provided the Committee with a summary of the numbers of outstanding new claims highlighting that 249 were over 28 days old.
- Were the numbers of people being placed in bed and breakfast increasing? *The Executive Director of Operations informed Members that people being placed into bed and breakfast accommodation had increased which had been an impact of not being able to find the appropriate accommodation. The current spend on bed and breakfast accommodation was approximately £300K a year and every effort was being made to reduce this.*
- Members sought clarification on people living in rural areas being able to have first choice of social housing within the area they lived in. *The Housing Needs Managers advised that social housing was a scarce resource and had to be provided to the people with the most urgent housing need.*

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee:

1. Note the findings of the Homelessness Review;
2. Agree with the strategic objectives set out in the Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018.
3. Approve the Draft Homelessness Strategy and recommends it to Cabinet and Full Council for adoption.
4. The Committee recommends that the covering report be redrafted to include the following amendments prior to presentation to Cabinet:

- (i) Change the wording in the report to provide clarity that the Steering Group had been key to the development of the new draft Homelessness Strategy.
- (ii) Include in the report additional data with regard to:
 - a. local levels of housing needs and affordability for families within the region for comparison.
 - b. comparative data regarding neighbouring authorities and homelessness presentations compared to Peterborough
- (iii) Include achievements such as the reduction in the number of rough sleepers across the city which has been a nationally recognised piece of work, reduction in front desk waiting times and changes that have improved access to the service.

ACTIONS AGREED

1. The Committee requested that the Executive Director of Operations notify the Committee when he becomes aware of any other Local Authorities making enquiries to Peterborough City Council with regard to acquiring land for the purposes of building houses.
2. The Committee requested that the Housing Needs Manager provide the Committee with the following information:
 - (i) To obtain from Serco the number of people who have applied for the discretionary housing payment, how many people have been accepted and how long it takes to make a decision after application.

7. The Impact of Welfare Reform

The Social Inclusion Manager introduced the report which informed the Committee of the impact of Welfare Reform and the work being undertaken through the Peterborough Community Assistance Scheme to tackle poverty and destitution. Also in attendance were representatives from the Citizens Advice Bureau, Department of Work and Pensions and Peterborough Food Bank / Care Zone. A presentation was given which provided context and information on the impact of Welfare Reform. Highlights included:

Main Changes:

- Council Tax benefit – replaced by local Council Tax Support Scheme
c.8,000 households now paying Council Tax for the first time
- Under Occupancy rules
1,737 households affected (1,414 by one bedroom, 323 by two bedrooms or more)
- Social Fund & Community Care Grants
£1.2m of cash support (grants and loans) removed BUT replaced with Local Welfare Provision
- Benefit cap – pilot underway in four London boroughs
£500pw for families
£350pw for single people
Expected in Peterborough from July 2013 affecting c.200 households
- Universal Credit – to replace Income Support, Income based Jobseekers Allowance, Income related Employment Support Allowance, Tax Credits and Housing Benefit
Expected in Peterborough early 2014
- Disability Living Allowance – replaced by Personal Independence Payments for new claimants (October 2015 for existing claims)
- Employment Support Allowance (incapacity benefit/income support)
Claims for those able to work limited to 1 year only

Financial Impact on Peterborough:

<i>Benefit cap</i>	<i>£0.86m</i>
<i>Personal Independence Payments</i>	<i>£4.03m</i>
<i>Incapacity Benefit element of ESA</i>	<i>£5.00m</i>
<i>ESA migration</i>	<i>£7.34m</i>
<i>ESA time limit</i>	<i>£1.80m</i>
<i>Social Fund/Community Care Grants</i>	<i>£0.46m</i>
<i>Income Support for lone parents</i>	<i>£0.42m</i>
<i>Tax Credit changes for working people</i>	<i>£0.10m</i>
<i>Under-occupancy</i>	<i>£1.16m</i>
<i>Bedroom Standards</i>	<i>£1.03m</i>
<i>Council Tax</i>	<i>£2.40m</i>
<i>Carers affected by DLA claimants</i>	<i>£1.60m</i>
	<i>£26.20m</i>

Unintended consequences:

- High Street economy
- Rent arrears/increased evictions
- Overcrowding
- Increased temporary accommodation costs
- Increased social care costs
- Acquisitive crime and shoplifting
- Domestic abuse
- Loan sharks
- Substance misuse
- Mental health
- Fuel poverty

Peterborough Community Assistance Scheme (PCAS) which provides critical, short term support for those facing unexpected emergencies and links eligible people to longer term support and assistance provided by a network of partner agencies.

Each representative from the Citizens Advice Bureau, Department of Work and Pensions and Peterborough Food Bank / Care Zone who were in attendance addressed the Committee and gave examples of how their organisation was assisting people in need through the PCAS scheme.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- What is being done to educate people regarding the changes in council tax and other benefits particularly those people with low literacy levels who previously did not have to pay council tax. *Members were informed that work had been carried out over the last year with organisations across Peterborough who assist vulnerable customers including those with learning disability, mental health, adult social care, children and connecting families to teach them about all the changes in benefits.*
- What percentage of people ask for help when it is too late? *Members were advised that there would always be a percentage of people who would only ask for help when it was too late. The percentage was be approximately 10% to 15%.*
- How do people know where to get help from? *Members were informed that anyone on benefits would be advised by the Job Centre of where to get help. Voluntary organisations and support workers were also able to advise people. Information was also available on the Department of Works and Pensions website and the Peterborough City Council website.*

- If people have no money how do they get to the food bank and Care Zone? Were people issued with a bus pass? *Members were advised that no bus passes or assistance was given to people. People attending the Job Centre for a crisis loan had been expected to get there by themselves and no one had ever failed to attend to collect the payment. The Citizens Advice Bureau, the Credit Union and one of the food banks was located near to the Job Centre. Food banks had been strategically placed around the city. If furniture was required the person would go and choose their own furniture and it would then be delivered for them.*
- How does Kingsgate afford to support the Food Bank and Care Zone? *Members were advised that Kingsgate believed in the work and therefore invested in the infrastructure and received some funding from Peterborough City Council. The furniture and food was donated by the public. It was run by a partnership of Churches of all denominations.*
- Members commented that some people were too proud to ask for help. How could these people be helped. *Members were informed that often people presented themselves for another problem and through getting to know the person they could be offered further help.*
- Councillor Day a member of the Committee who was also Chairman of the Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee informed Members that under the remit of her Committee she was scrutinising the Poverty Strategy. This strategy was relevant to the impact of Welfare Reform.

The Chairman thanked the Social Inclusion Manager and guests for an interesting and informative presentation and requested that if they identified any issues regarding the services of the council that they felt should be scrutinised they should write to the Chairman.

ACTIONS AGREED

1. The Committee note the report and request that the Social Inclusion Manager provide the Committee with data on the collection of council tax and housing benefit as a result of the impact of welfare reform.
2. The Chair requested that Councillor Forbes keep a watching brief on the work of the Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities Scrutiny Committee with regard to the Poverty Strategy to identify any areas of work that would be relevant to the remit of the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee.

CRIME AND DISORDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE SITTING FOR ITEM 8 ONLY

8. Safer Peterborough Partnership Plan 2011-2014 (2013 Revision)

The Safer and Stronger Peterborough Strategic Manager presented the report which provided the Committee with the 2013 revision of the Safer Peterborough Partnership Plan (2011-2014) prior to being presented to Cabinet. Members were reminded of the background to the Safer Peterborough Partnership Plan. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 required that a Community Safety Partnership was formed in each local authority area within England and Wales. Community Safety Partnership's bring together agencies that were responsible for tackling crime and disorder in the local area.

The Crime and Disorder Act specified 'responsible authorities'; in Peterborough those were Peterborough City Council, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, NHS Peterborough (now replaced by the Clinical Commissioning Groups), Cambridgeshire Fire Authority, and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Probation Trust. These responsible authorities also invite other agencies who are able to contribute to the work to *co-operate* and Cross Keys Homes (representing Registered Social Landlords in the City) was one of these organisations. Other agencies, particularly from the voluntary and community sector were also *invited to participate* in the work of the Partnership. At present these organisations are PCVS, Peterborough Racial Equality Council, HMP Peterborough, The One Service, and the City's Director of Public Health. Other voluntary groups are represented on other partnership groups.

The Safer Peterborough Partnership was one of the partnerships that form the Greater Peterborough Partnership.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a legal responsibility upon designated authorities to consider the community safety implications of their actions. The Committees role as the designated Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee was to review and scrutinise the decisions of all the responsible authorities that form the Safer Peterborough Partnership which was the statutory Community Safety Partnership. The Safer Peterborough Partnership Plan was in its third year and reported and recorded crime had continued to fall until last year when it reached a plateau. Efforts to reduce crime were therefore being refocused. Joint working across the partnership had been important in reducing crime.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Neighbourhood Committees were no longer in existence and Members wanted to know what impact this had had on the work of the Safer Peterborough Partnership. *Members were advised that it was too early to comment. The Safer and Stronger Peterborough Strategic Manager assured Members that the Neighbourhood Management Team which was located along side the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team, Housing Team and Public Health Team worked closely together under the leadership of the Head of Neighbourhoods and this would mitigate the impact of no longer having the Neighbourhood Committees.*
- Members noted that the Safer Peterborough Partnership Plan review document had not accounted for the fact that Neighbourhood Committees no longer existed. Great emphasis had been put on the establishment of the Neighbourhood Committees previously and the work they had done but there had been no mention of how this gap would now be filled. *Members were advised that the Neighbourhood Delivery Team and Neighbourhood Panel meetings were being revised in the way they worked to accommodate Neighbourhood Committees no longer being in existence. The Neighbourhood Management Team sat alongside the Safer Stronger team which provided more cohesive working.*
- How did the Police and Crime Plan work with the Safer Peterborough Partnership Plan? *Members were advised that legislation says that both have a mutual duty to cooperate and each have mutual intensions on how crime will be tackled. The Safer Peterborough Partnership had a good working relationship with the Police and Crime Commissioner and his staff. The Commissioner holds Peterborough to account for any funding that he invests in Peterborough.*
- The Safer and Stronger Peterborough Strategic Manager informed the Committee that funding of the Safer Peterborough Partnership may become an issue in the future. The Chairman felt that this was something the Committee should consider as part of the work programme in the future.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee note the report and recommend that the Safer and Stronger Peterborough Strategic Manager revise the Safer Peterborough Partnership Plan to reflect the change in Neighbourhood Services and the removal of the Neighbourhood Committees. This revision to be completed before being presented to Cabinet for approval.

ACTION AGREED

The Safer & Stronger Peterborough Strategic Manager to send a copy of the Police and Crime Plan to all Members of the Committee.

9. Notice of Intention to Take Key Decisions

The Committee received the latest version of the Council's Notice of Intention to take Key Decisions, containing key decisions that the Leader of the Council anticipated the Cabinet or individual Cabinet Members would make during the course of the following four months. Members were invited to comment on the Plan and, where appropriate, identify any relevant areas for inclusion in the Committee's work programme.

The Committee noted the Notice of Intention to take Key Decisions.

The Chairman noted that the decision regarding the Expansion of Gladstone Primary School onto the site of the Gladstone Community Centre – KEY/18APR13/02 had not included the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods as one of the decision makers and felt that he should be included as it affected a local community.

ACTION AGREED

The Senior Governance Officer to request a briefing note on the impact to the Gladstone Community Centre of the Expansion of Gladstone Primary School.

10. Date of Next Meeting

Wednesday, 24 July 2013

The meeting began at 7.00 and ended at 9.20pm

CHAIRMAN

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