

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT 7PM, ON
TUESDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 2021
ENGINE SHED, SAND MARTIN HOUSE**

Committee Members Present: Councillors G. Casey. (Chair), J. Allen, C. Fenner, J. Fox, M. Haseeb, A. Iqbal, O. Sainsbury (Vice Chair), N. Sandford, B. Tyler and I. Yasin
Co-opted Members: Parish Councillor Neil Boyce

Officers Present: Adrian Chapman – Service Director, Communities and Partnerships
Jamie Fenton – Partnership Manager, Culture, Sport and Leisure
Sean Evans – Head of Service, Housing Needs
Sarah Hebblethwaite – Housing Needs Operations Manager
Rob Hill – Assistant Director, Community Safety
Vickie Crompton – Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Manager
David Beauchamp – Democratic Services Officer

Also Present: Stephanie Peachey, Senior Manager, Festival Bridge
Councillor Steve Allen – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities

39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor K. Knight

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

No declarations of interest or whipping declarations were received.

41. MINUTES OF THE ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 5 JULY 2021

The minutes of the Adults and Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 2 March 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

42. CALL IN OF ANY CABINET, CABINET MEMBER OR KEY OFFICER DECISIONS

There were no requests for call in to consider.

43. PETERBOROUGH CULTURAL STRATEGY

The report was presented by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities accompanied by the Partnership Manager, Culture, Sport and Leisure, the Senior Manager, Festival Bridge and the Service, Director, Communities and Partnerships. The report enabled the Committee to consider the recommendations of the new Cultural Strategy for Peterborough.

The Communities Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members asked why this was a nine-year strategy, rather than the usual five years, raising concerns the priorities of different age groups might change in this time. Officers responded that this was done to align with the Arts Council's ten-year strategy. The Strategy was not a written document to be shelved; instead it would be a live, dynamic and constantly updated website so there was flexibility for the future. Peterborough was considered a Priority Area by the Arts Council and was in a position to get more funding. There had been good engagement (31%) among young people. 100 young people between the ages of 8 and 21 had been contacted for feedback on how they would like to work with the Council going forward. A proposal would soon be trailed on giving young people a role in governing culture in Peterborough and giving advice to organisations on how to support the arts and culture offer in the City.
- Members followed up by asking if there would be a mini consultation with young people in five years' time. Officers responded that they hoped the advisory committee of young people would provide ongoing input into the strategy and help influence decision-making. It had been found that young people were currently more focussed on how to help communities in the present rather than in the longer term although this might change in the future. Creative activities would be held to keep engagement and influence high. It was hoped that young people would be interested in taking on roles because they had already had conversations through schools, youth groups etc.
- Members praised the approach of the Strategy being kept live and updated on the website.
- Members asked for an explanation of the parallel bids for Peterborough to become the U.K.'s City of Culture and for Cambridgeshire to be the County of Culture, and expressed a preference for the former. Officers agreed and stated the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) had submitted a late bid but this had not been progressed. It was still referenced in the report as it might be revisited in the future but this would not prevent Peterborough from submitting its own bid. It was felt that the City would be in a strong position to do so for 2029 once additional funding had been received.
- Work to encourage Peterborough's three theatres to collaborate to discourage harmful competition had been accelerated by the pandemic and an informal alliance had been formed. It was also important to attract audiences outside Peterborough. There would be a single programme for the City with alliances formed to lead work over the next decade.
- The University already played a large role in the strategy and a process was underway to make it a part of the City's cultural leadership. It would also lead work on creative opportunities and skills. Links were being made to schools via the local cultural education partnership and the Committee's previous request that school assets be utilised for culture was being taken forward.
- Full funding was not yet in place to implement the strategy but the Council had been assured funding would follow its development. There was a wide range of arts, cultural and heritage groups in the City to be coordinated. The Arts Council had recognised that Peterborough needed additional funding and the Strategy was required in order for this to be allocated. Funding would also be sourced from the Council, the University, Cathedral and private organisations.
- Members asked how rural residents' concerns that they were being ignored had been addressed. Officers responded that the Council was working in rural locations to identify artists. A priority for residents was showcasing green space and working with farmers to do so. An impactful workshop with Metal Culture had

taken place around this theme.

- Members commented that the City needed to develop a cultural niche and attract artists to the City. Officers responded that a key focus of Peterborough's cultural strategy was to bring together talent that already existed in the City, rather than looking elsewhere.
- Members commented that the Council's farms needed to be oriented towards facilitating Council policies, e.g. tree planting to help tackle the Climate Emergency. Despite being rural in nature, such policies also benefit residents of urban areas. Officers responded that they were building a list of assets that would include outdoor spaces as well as facilities. A microsite would bring together the City's artists. The Strategy would bring together cultural providers rather than having them compete with each other. The Cabinet Member added that there was a great deal of culture and heritage in rural areas and the Think Communities approach would help to access it.
- Members asked how the new governance arrangements would compare to Vivacity. Officers responded that the strategy did not represent the creation of a 'new Vivacity'. The new Alliance was instead a partnership and the strategy belonged to the City, not the Council. It was felt appropriate to have a Partnership Board to drive the cultural programme forward. The strategy would still be approved by Council due to its City leadership role and this Scrutiny Committee would continue to oversee its implementation and receive reports on request.
- Members commented that the suggested recommendations in the report implied that the Strategy would be approved by Cabinet, not Council. It was UNANIMOUSLY agreed to amend the wording to clarify that the Strategy would be sent to Cabinet for endorsement and on to Full Council for final approval.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend the Strategy, as described in this report, to Cabinet for endorsement and onward approval by Full Council

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to consider and comment on the recommendations of the new Cultural Strategy for Peterborough

44. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2021-2026

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities accompanied by the Head of Service, Housing Needs, and the Housing Needs Operations Manager. The Homelessness Strategy is a key document the Council has a statutory duty to produce every five years, which lays out how it will tackle homelessness and rough sleeping over the period.

The Communities Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- Members expressed disappointment at the lack of reference to veterans in the Strategy and asked if officers had liaised with Tommy Kelly; the Armed Forces Covenant Officer. It was noted that the Council used to employ an outreach officer. Officers responded that although the Garden House and veterans with lived experience had been engaged with, Tommy Kelly had not. Officers accepted Member's comments and agreed to ask Tommy Kelly to review the Strategy, amend as appropriate and re-circulate to the Committee before approval.
- Members praised Priority 4 which focussed on empowering rough sleepers and

asked for an example of this. Officers responded that the experience of engaging with rough sleepers during the pandemic had highlighted the importance of understanding service users' health and welfare needs beyond simply providing them with accommodation. This would empower them to make good decisions going forward.

- Members referred to page 59 of the reports pack and asked how the Council dealt with people who engaged in street life despite not being homeless. Officers responded that it was not always easy to differentiate between those who were homeless and those who were simply begging. The police had introduced a system of green, amber and red warning cards for those begging as a precursor to enforcement action, which had proved successful.
- Officers' acknowledged members' comment that too much enforcement could also be problematic and cause difficulties for genuine homeless people. The card-based warning system had struck a good balance; only 1 to 2 red cards had been issued with none progressing to the fourth enforcement stage.
- Begging was classed as a crime and the police were able to take action.
- Members and officers expressed frustration at the problems beggars created for people who were genuinely homeless and at the false perception they created among the public regarding the nature of homelessness in the City.
- Members raised concerns regarding the cycle of prisoners being released, placed in accommodation that they owed money for before they received benefits, resulting in them being made homeless again and returning to prison. Officers responded that people being released from prison were referred to the Council. There was a new scheme to find accommodation in the private sector and floating support was available to help people access benefits and support so they could retain their accommodation and thrive.
- Members asked how the Council addressed residents' concerns regarding new accommodation for homeless people in their areas. Officers responded that the Council was investigating spot-purchasing rooms for rough sleepers spread across the City to avoid clustering people together without support and the associated problems this could cause. Enforcement action would take place to deal with individual issues.
- The Cabinet Member asked officers to elaborate on plans to empower rough sleepers. Officers responded that the Council had received grant funding for 22 units of accommodation from Homes England. A person might be placed there initially, followed by Lincoln House and then on to conventional housing. A bid had recently been submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for funding for 16 units for people with medium to high needs who struggled in hostels. The range of options had improved.
- Members praised the emphasis of the strategy on preventing homelessness before it occurred, noting that most housing-related queries they received were related to young people and families. What was being done to help those threatened with homelessness, before it occurred? Officers responded that there was a well-established pathway for young people who were threatened with homelessness. Families were encouraged to contact the Council as soon as possible. Support options including discretionary housing payments, advice, liaison with landlords, finding alternative private accommodation and joining the housing register with the possibility of being able to bid for properties via choice-based lettings.
- Officers added that homelessness should not be used as a housing option as temporary accommodation and hostels could be damaging to people's outcomes. The Council would be challenging households who were making a child homeless. Some people might be disgruntled if they approached the Council and were not immediately given hostel accommodation.
- The Council was not always good at promoting its positive work to address homelessness and there was often negative media coverage and poor perceptions among the public. Individual organisations often promoted stories

about their work but outcomes were actually the result of the whole Safer off the Streets Partnership and there were actions in the Strategy to improve public awareness of this.

- Members commented that many homeless people lived with friends and family temporarily, not the streets. Face-to-face interaction with Council staff was an important part of supporting people during a difficult time rather than having online forms as the only option. Officers responded that the lack of the usual 'front door' during the pandemic had been challenging although new ways of working had also provided benefits with feedback being received that many people were happy to interact virtually. It was recognised that some people did need to be seen face to face however. The design of the service was being developed and it seemed likely that there would be a hybrid model once buildings re-opened.
- Members suggested that media communications should utilise the JPEG, rather than PDF format as it was more easily seen and shared on social media.
- Members commented that homelessness represented a complex mix of issues and lack of knowledge of the housing market was one potential contributory factor. Former armed forces personnel might not be familiar with the housing system.
- Councillor Fox, seconded by Councillor Yasin proposed that the Committee recommends that the relevant Cabinet Member and Lead Officer liaises with the Armed Forces Covenant Officer for input in how to assist veterans with issues that affect them and consider adding this to the Strategy. This was UNANIMOUSLY agreed.
- Members commented that the suggested recommendations in the report implied that the Strategy would be approved by Cabinet, not Council. It was UNANIMOUSLY agreed to amend the wording to clarify that the Strategy would be sent to Cabinet for endorsement and on to Full Council for final approval.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Communities Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Endorse the Strategy and Action Plan to be taken forward to Cabinet for endorsement and onward approval by Full Council
2. Recommend that the relevant Cabinet Member and Lead Officer liaises with the Armed Forces Covenant Officer for input in how to assist veterans with issues that affect them and consider adding this to the Strategy.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note the contents and scrutinise the report and the accompanying Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan.
2. Request that the Head of Service, Housing Needs asks Tommy Kelly to review the Strategy, amend as appropriate and re-circulate to the Committee before approval.

45. DOMESTIC ABUSE SAFE ACCOMODATION STRATEGY

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities, accompanied by Head of Service, Community Safety and the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Manager. The report allowed the Committee to scrutinise the Safe Accommodation proposed strategy which is required by Statute as part of the Domestic Abuse Act 202.

The Communities Scrutiny Committee debated the report and in summary, key points raised and responses to questions included:

- The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership was helping to ensure outreach staff were deployed where they were needed, including in rural areas.
- The Partnership would soon be providing training to all Cross Keys Homes staff. Other providers were undertaking domestic abuse accreditation
- Members asked how COVID-19 had affected domestic abuse and support services for its victims. Officers responded that although the pandemic had been difficult, services were stepped up at an early stage and face to face meetings had recommenced as many people needed these. The pandemic exacerbated, rather than caused, domestic abuse and more referrals had been received in Peterborough compared with Cambridgeshire. The pandemic had improved public awareness of the issue.
- The organisation Refuge was distinct from the four refuges in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Refugees were primarily used by people from other areas because people were fleeing abuse.
- Members asked how the perpetrators of domestic abuse were supported to reform themselves, especially those committing one-off incidents as a result of pandemic-induced stress. Officers responded that although mental health might cause more conflict, it did not create more abuse. There was not much evidence to suggest that programmes for perpetrators were effective although the Partnership had worked with Peterborough City Council to produce interventions for stalking and instances of children abusing parents. As perpetrators might end up in the homelessness system, support was provided to help the other parent and children stay in the same area.
- Online abuse was considered part of Domestic Abuse if it involved former intimate partners or family members. Abuse might continue virtually after the end of a relationship.
- In the case of victims with no recourse to public funds who needed access to a refuge, the Partnership's frontline staff would process applications for the Domestic Violence Concession from the Government. This could take up to 10 days with people sometimes having to be housed temporarily in hotels, although this was avoided where possible. The Partnership worked creatively with the resources available to it.
- The Partnership would do all it could to help victims who were not eligible for support.
- The Partnership has proved successful in securing funding as funders could be confident it would be used well. Further information on the continuation of funding would be provided when the Government's autumn Budget was announced.
- Work to engage young people with the Council by the YMCA had only just begun but officers were confident of its success.
- Historical data on police call-outs for domestic abuse and sexual violence incidents extended back 20 years. Officers urged caution on drawing conclusions from this data as there had been considerable change in this time. It was more useful to analyse the most recent years.
- Incident rates now appeared to be stabilising.
- Members request that the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Manager provides a training session to Members.
- Members noted that a great deal of domestic abuse referrals came from the police which suggested that the abuse had become sufficiently severe for their involvement and asked what was being done to intervene at an earlier stage. Officers responded that this was correct and the majority of victims found support information themselves and sought the help of family and friends; only calling the police when they feared for their immediate safety. Officers aimed to ensure there were support services available for people without them having to use statutory services.
- Members asked how well the Council promoted support services and what

Councillors could do to assist with this. Officers responded that people needed to know where to go as a first step and be directed appropriately but needed to be aware that funding would not necessarily be immediately available as this needed to be targeted at those with the most risk. Individual interventions were not effective in isolation and a bespoke support package needed to be developed for each person to help them as much as possible.

- It was agreed that the Head of Service, Housing Needs and the Partnership Manager would provide information to Members on the sources of support available.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to endorse the Peterborough Safe Accommodation Strategy for approval by Cabinet

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to

1. Scrutinise the Peterborough Safe Accommodation Strategy.
2. Request that the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Manager provides a training session to Members.
3. Request that the Head of Service, Housing Needs and the Partnership Manager provide information to Members on the sources of support available

46. MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which enabled the committee to monitor and track the progress of recommendations made to the Executive or Officers at previous meetings. It was noted that the Task and Finish Group had rejected the Committee's recommendation regarding buddy voting due to this being impossible under the current legislation for Council meetings. This recommendation was therefore marked as completed.

Members queried why the recommendation on Selective Licensing from 12 March 2019 was still being monitored. Officers responded that this reflect the continuing development of the policy over this time.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee considered the report and **RESOLVED** to

1. Note the responses from Cabinet Members and Officers to recommendations made at previous meetings as attached in Appendix 1 to the report.
2. Mark the two recommendations from 2 March 2021 as completed.

47. FORWARD PLAN OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

The Chairman introduced the report which invited members to consider the most recent version of the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions and identify any relevant items for inclusion within the Committee's work programme or to request further information.

Members requested that the Committee received a report on plans for the Peterborough Market before a final decision was made. It was agreed to this would be discussed at the next Group Representatives meeting and added to the Work Programme.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to

1. Consider the current Forward Plan of Executive Decisions
2. Add an agenda item to the Work Programme on the future plans for Peterborough Market.

48. WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the item which gave members the opportunity to consider the Committee's Work Programme for 2020/21 and discuss possible items for inclusion.

Members commented that the agenda for 2 November 2021 was currently very large and would need to be reduced at the Group Representatives Meeting.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to add an agenda item to the Work Programme on the future plans for Peterborough Market (requested under minute item 47 above - Forward Plan of Executive Decisions).

49. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

2 November 2021 – Communities Scrutiny Committee
17 November 2021 – Joint Scrutiny of the Budget

CHAIRMAN

7pm – 8.53pm