

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE
BOURGES & VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH
ON
WEDNESDAY 16 JANUARY 2013**

Present: Councillors Peach (Chairman), Day (Vice Chairman) Kreling, Nawaz, Johnson, Forbes and J R Fox.

Also Present:	Councillor Casey	PCC
	Councillor Jamil	PCC
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
	Paul Phillipson	Executive Director of Operations
	Nigel Joseph	Lawyer
	Dania Castagliuolo	Governance Officer

1. Apologies

No apologies were received.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

There were no Declarations of Interest

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2013

The Governance Officer informed the Committee that the previous minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2012 had been amended and the amended copy was distributed to members for approval.

The minutes of the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 November 2012 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

5. Citizens Power Programme – Final report of the Task and Finish Group

This report was presented to the committee to provide them with the final report of the Citizen Power Task and Finish Group.

Citizens Power was a two year collaboration between the City Council, the Arts Council and the Royal Society for the Arts. The programme was delivered through six distinct strands of work:

- The Peterborough Curriculum
- Recovery Capital
- Sustainable Citizenship
- Changemakers

- Civic Commons
- Arts and Social Change

During 2011 a full review of the Citizens Power Programme was undertaken and reported to the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee in September 2011. The report and its recommendations were agreed in full and a Task and Finish Group was established as a result.

The Committee was asked to agree the conclusions and recommendations contained within the report and make any further recommendations to the Council for consideration in any future planned schemes.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members queried the total cost of the Citizens Power Programme and how many organisations had participated. *Councillor Casey advised members that the total cost of the whole project was £1,195,775 although Peterborough City Council had only contributed £250,000 towards the project. The other two main partners were the Arts Council and the Royal Society for Arts and when the project started it attracted further funding.*
- Members were concerned that the Royal Society for Arts and the Arts Council were funded by Peterborough City Council therefore the money to fund the project was generated from the taxpayer.
- Members commented that some strands of the Citizen Power Programme did not represent good value for money or positive outcomes and they were disappointed that this was not reflected in the recommendations put forward by the Task and Finish Group. *Councillor Casey reiterated that Peterborough City Council had only contributed £250,000 towards the project and they had actually encouraged other organisations to help fund the rest of the project. There were stands of the Citizen Power Project that had shown positive outcomes.*
- Members queried the outcome of a survey held in Bretton six months ago by the Royal Society of Arts regarding Community Interaction. *The Head of Neighbourhood Services advised members that the survey was not part of the Citizens Power Programme and he would obtain the results of the survey and advise the Committee of the outcome.*
- *The Executive Director of Operations commented that he was part of the Peterborough Learning Partnership and Chair of Governors of a school that was not involved in the Citizens Power programme. However he had subsequently learnt from the programme by working with some of the associate Heads of schools within that learning partnership and they were continuing to build on the change within the local curriculum. The recovery capital and the drugs programme had been imbedded within the commissioning process. He also explained that a bulk of the Royal Society of Arts funding was generated through the thirty five thousand members who financially contributed to them.*
- *The Head of Neighbourhood Services commented that the Citizens Power Task and Finish Group were most favourable in relation to the Drugs Programme, the Arts strand and the Curriculum strand and these were the three strands that were most successful and the legacy of these projects should not be underestimated. The smaller projects which were carried out as experiments engaged with a small number of people and were less successful. The future of Arts within the city had been re-established on the basis of what had happened over the past two years of the Citizens Power Programme. The Citizens Power Programme's experiment was to discover how to involve local people as change makers within the city.*
- *Councillor Jamil commented that the Citizens Power Programme was now being replicated in other parts of the country and they had learnt from what was found in Peterborough. There were things that could have been done differently but they were mistakes to be learnt from and in future projects it would all be taken on board.*

ACTION AGREED

The Committee requested that the Head of Neighbourhood Services provide information on the outcome of the survey carried out by the Royal Society of Arts in Bretton.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee recommends that Peterborough City Council when considering commissioning a similar programme to the Citizens Power Programme in the future should undertake following actions prior to committing to the programme:

1. Conduct a full investigation into whether the proposed programme would be value for money.
2. Appoint a project manager at the earliest stage to prepare a full business case and financial plan.
3. Communicate key messages of the programme to all councillors to avoid unnecessary delays or misunderstanding over the outcomes and objectives of the initiative.

6. Review of the Homelessness Strategy

The purpose of this report was to provide the Committee with an update on the progress of the Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2012 and associated outputs and the development of the Homelessness Review and Draft Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018.

The following key points were highlighted:

The Homelessness Strategy 2008 – 2012

- The current Homelessness Strategy had been successful in building on the preventative approach and ensured that there were the necessary support services in place to act as a safety net for persons who were threatened with homelessness or who were facing homelessness.
- In 2011/12 the Council and its partners prevented and relieved homelessness for 258 households.
- There were continual challenges with a shortage of social housing and the impact of welfare reforms.
- In 2011/2 the Housing Needs team provided housing and homelessness advice to 14,568 people in Peterborough.
- The Housing Needs Team had seen a decrease in homelessness presentations to the Local Authority over the 2011/12 period compared with 2010/11.
- The Housing Needs Service offered a Rent Deposit Scheme which enabled clients to obtain an interest free loan to be used for the up front costs associated with securing a property within the private sector. In 2011/12 a total of 191 households were assisted in to private rented sector accommodation and so far this year, since April 2012, 276 households had been assisted.
- The Tenancy Relations Service had further developed to provide support to both tenants and private sector landlords. The service had been had been successful in establishing a framework for illegal evictions and utilised its power to prosecute under the Protection of Eviction Act 1977 by successfully prosecuting three landlords through the court system alongside supporting 194 households since January 2012.
- The Mortgage Rescue scheme had been proactively promoted and this had further enhanced Peterborough's homelessness prevention activity and increased the number of properties owned and managed by the Council's housing association partners. Since the introduction of this scheme 27 households had been successfully assisted.

- Continued assistance was offered to individuals who found themselves sleeping rough after losing their accommodation and the Rough Sleeper Outreach Officer had made great strides in ensuring that those who were on the streets were assisted before they reached a point where they were entrenched.
- By creating a successful partnership approach and through the established Rough Sleeper Task and Targeting Group a joint approach was taken with clear pathways working closely with the voluntary sector and faith groups, the police, substance misuse agencies and outreach workers.

The Development of the Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 2018

- The aims of the new strategy was to continue to build on the existing achievements and to invite all partners with an interest in housing to work together to prevent homelessness, increase access to accommodation and manage the challenges of Welfare Reform.
- The development of the new strategy had enabled Peterborough City Council to commence a review to assess how effective they had been in tackling homelessness. The review would take in to consideration
 - ❖ Profile of levels of homelessness and homelessness services in Peterborough, both qualitative and quantitative
 - ❖ National and local policy
 - ❖ Feedback from focus groups
 - ❖ The root causes of homelessness locally
 - ❖ Gaps in and duplication of services
 - ❖ Weaknesses in homelessness policy and procedure
 - ❖ Analysis of outcomes of the previous Homelessness Strategy Action Plan
- The multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Steering Group continued to meet and would be key to the development of the new strategy.
- It was acknowledged that in order to provide a cost effective and responsive service the Housing Needs Team would need to continue to deliver its services in partnership with their statutory and voluntary partners.

The committee were asked to

- (i) Scrutinise performance against the existing strategy and to contribute comments and views which would then be considered in the drafting of the new strategy.
- (ii) Comment on and agree the approach being undertaken in the development of the new strategy and agree that the final draft of the document be brought back to scrutiny for approval at the next meeting of the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee.

It was recommended that the Draft Homelessness Strategy be taken to Cabinet and Full Council for adoption.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members expressed their interest in the Mortgage Rescue Scheme and asked if it was going to be expanded on the 27 who had already benefited from the scheme and what percentage was this on the total demand for the scheme. *The Housing Needs Manager advised the Members that the Mortgage Rescue Scheme was set up as a final intervention before repossession. To be eligible for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme the homeowner would need to be able to afford the rent payments. The Government had announced that they would extend the scheme into 2014.*
- Members queried what would happen in cases where the building was listed, would it still qualify for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme. *The Housing Needs Manager informed the Committee that every property could be considered for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme though there was a cap as to what could be spent on a property and it had to*

be a reasonable amount for the area therefore as long as the property was below the cap and did not require considerable repair it could be considered for the Scheme

- Members queried if families could buy their homes back if it had been brought through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme and their situation had improved. *The Housing Needs Manager advised the Committee that families did have the right to buy their homes back.*

7. Peterborough Homes Allocations Policy

The purpose of this report was to present to the Committee the updated Common Housing Allocations Policy following a period of public consultation.

The following key points were highlighted:

- A 12 week public consultation had run from 6 October 2012 until 30 December 2012.
- A consultation questionnaire was sent to all applicants who had a live application on the Common Housing Register.
- 563 completed questionnaires had been completed and returned
- As part of the changes to the document, Peterborough City Council intended to restrict entry to the register to households who had sufficient financial resources to resolve their own housing situation
- 267 questionnaires responded that the household income limit of £60,000 was too high therefore, it was proposed to lower the limit to £40,200 except where people were aged over 55
- It was proposed to amend the current Bedroom Standards Policy to one bedroom for:
 - ❖ Every adult/couple
 - ❖ Any other adult aged 16 or over
 - ❖ Any two children of the same sex
 - ❖ Any two children regardless of sex under age 10
 - ❖ Any other child
- Changes as a result of the Welfare Reform Act 2011 meant that any household assessed under these criteria who were deemed to be occupying social housing and were in receipt of housing benefit would have a reduction applied of:
 - ❖ 14% if they were under occupying by one bedroom
 - ❖ 25% if they were under occupying by two or more bedrooms

The Committee were asked to review the final draft of the Common Housing Register Allocations Policy along with the summary of responses to the consultation and if in agreement recommend it to Cabinet for onward presentation to Full Council for adoption.

Observations and questions were raised around the following areas:

- Members were concerned that housing offered to the armed forces would not be up to standard. *The Housing Needs Manager informed members that a choice based system would still be operated therefore people had the right to express an interest in properties before making a decision, they could bid for up to three properties per week and could refuse up to three offers. The Strategic Housing Manager added that Social Housing within the city met the decent homes standards, within the private sector nobody would be placed in accommodation that had not been inspected first.*
- Members queried part 4.7 of the report on page 62 and whether bullet point two was strict enough. Which read:
 - ❖ By having immediate family members who live in the area and have done for the last five years.

The Housing Needs Manager advised the Committee that the criteria within the Housing Allocations Policy was part of the Local Authority agreement that the Council had to work to as part of the homelessness legislation. There would be investigations made in to anybody who claimed that they had immediate family members in

Peterborough with colleagues in Council Tax and Electoral Services to ensure that those family members had been resident in Peterborough for at least five years.

- *Members commented that the household income limit of £40,000 and assets of £16,000 for access to the Housing Register were too high for Peterborough families. The Housing Needs Manager advised members that the reason the income level was set at £40,000 was because they were looking at what other availability for housing there was in the city as it was very difficult to obtain accommodation by other means. Many private landlords would look at doing an income and expenditure assessment with an income limit of £25 -35,000 in order to access a suitable property within the private sector. Provision had to be made for the people who may have had an income of £40,000 but had found themselves in financial difficulty due to their outgoings being extremely high.*
- *Members commented that a lot of people who completed the consultation questionnaire were in support of the new Bedroom Standards Policy and asked what the practical implications of this were and whether the housing associations were going to have properties for families to transfer to if they had to move. The Housing Needs Manager advised the committee that the current tenants of social housing would be encouraged to move to more suitable accommodation in terms of the Bedroom Standard Assessment. Many tenants had already agreed that rather than moving house they would stay in their home and find the additional 14 or 25 percent to pay towards their rent. People over retirement age would not be affected by the under occupation charges. There was an estimate of around 1200 households that would be affected by the under occupation charges and Cross Keys were offering cash incentives of up to £500 per bedroom for people to downsize their houses although the uptake was still quite low because people wanted to stay in their homes.*
- *Members queried that due to the shortage of housing there would be a lot of families who would not be able to find smaller houses and would this mean that the benefit reduction could be waived until they could find a suitable property. The Housing Needs Manager informed the Committee that part of the policy would be to give priority to people looking to downsize their property as this would increase the demand further on smaller properties. From April 2013 the Local Authority would have received a much larger discretionary payment pot which they could use to assist families that would be affected by the under occupation charges as a transitional measure while they were being assisted in to more suitable sized accommodation.*
- *Members queried whether people would be forced in to private rented accommodation if there was not sufficient Social Housing available. The Housing Needs Manager advised members that if somebody fell in arrears the Housing Associations could take action in the County Court to seek possession of the property, it would then be up to the court to decide the outcome but nobody would be forced in to privately rented accommodation.*
- *Members queried what the view from the Housing Associations was. The Housing Needs Manager advised the Committee that the Housing Associations were concerned as they were entering in to an element of the unknown, they did not know what the impacts of the changes were going to be and they did not know how their tenants were going to find the money to keep up the rent payments. They also had the introduction of universal credit and direct payments to deal with and they were going to have to look at their rent collection practices and would maybe have to alter them.*
- *The Housing Needs Manager informed the Committee that if agreed the draft Common Housing Register Allocations Policy would go to Cabinet in February.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning that the household income level of £40,000 to allow a person to access the housing register is reconsidered as the Committee considers it to be too high for Peterborough households.

The Committee recommends to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Planning that Section 9.9 of the Peterborough Homes - The Common Housing Register Allocations Policy which refers to Local Connection and in particular bullet point 3 be closely monitored to ensure that it is being implemented correctly:

9.9 Local Connection

iii. The applicant or a member of their household has immediate family (parents, children, brothers, sisters and other family members if there is a particularly close relationship) who have lived in the district for at least the past 5 years,

8. 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.

ACTION AGREED

The Committee noted the Notice of Intention to take Key Decisions and agreed that there were no items for further consideration.

9. Work Programme

Members considered the Committee's Work Programme for 2012/13 and discussed possible items for inclusion.

ACTION AGREED

To confirm the work programme for 2012/13.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The Governance Officer advised the Committee that the date for the next meeting would be changed due to a clash of meetings; this would be emailed around to the Committee as soon as it had been decided.

The meeting began at 7.00 and ended at 8.20 pm

CHAIRMAN

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