

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE
BOURGES and VIERSEN ROOMS, TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH
ON
WEDNESDAY 20 JULY 2016**

Present: Councillors: S Allen (Chairman), J Bull, R Bisby, M Hussain, A Bond

Officers in Attendance:

Gary Goose	Head of Community Services
Belinda Child	Head of Housing and Health Improvement
Adrian Chapman	Service Director for Adult Services and Communities
Paulina Ford	Senior Democratic Services Officer

Also Present: John Fox. Group Leader, Werrington First

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor King, Councillor Ali, Councillor Shaheed, and Councillor Martin. Cllr Hussain was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Ali and Cllr Bond was in attendance as substitute for Cllr Shaheed.

2. Declarations of Interest and Whipping Declarations

Item 5. Housing Needs & Homelessness and an Update on the Progress of the Homeless Strategy

Councillor Fox in attendance as Group Leader for Werrington First declared an interest in that he was Chairman of the Care and Repair Working Group.

3. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 10 March 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2016 were approved as an accurate record.

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

There were no call-ins for this meeting.

5. Housing Needs & Homelessness and an Update on the Progress of the Homeless Strategy

The Head of Housing and Health Improvement was in attendance to present the report which provided the Committee with an opportunity to scrutinise the Councils approach to preventing and tackling homelessness.

The Head of Housing and Health Improvement responded to comments and questions raised by Members. A summary of responses included:

- All clients contacting the service were offered help. Callers were triaged over the telephone and help and advice and assistance was offered at this stage. Those who were seen face to face were those people who were required to complete a declaration of homelessness as it was preferable to meet these people to ascertain more detail on their circumstances. The high volume of contact had been the same for a number of years and was therefore consistently high and fairly static at approximately 20,000 calls.

- Allocation of the Disabled Facilities Grants depended on the nature of work that could be undertaken under the Disabled Facilities Grant. Historically most applications had been for straightforward requests such as a stair lift or level access showers. There had been an increase recently in more complex requests and as a consequence less jobs could be completed with the same amount of money. The DCLG had allocated additional funding this year which would bring the total available for grants to approximately £2.2 million. Members were also advised that there was currently no waiting list for Care and Repair.
- The Officer confirmed that the number of new builds for social housing had declined year on year due to government funding arrangements and more starter homes being shared ownership as opposed to socially rented. It was anticipated that demand would exceed supply.
- Members were assured that the Council had a very good working relationship with the Home Office and UK Border Agency. Peterborough had always had a number of entrenched rough sleepers but it was not known why there had been an influx of rough sleepers from other cities. Attempts were made to repatriate rough sleepers with no connections to this area. The Officer was unable to provide figures at the meeting for the actual numbers repatriated.
- The Government Mortgage Rescue Scheme ceased approximately 12 months ago.
- The problem of rough sleeping and aggressive begging would be tackled using new powers under the Prevention and Enforcement Service and the introduction of a new Public Space Protection Order in the City Centre would criminalise aggressive begging. With these tools and the input of officers to provide alternative solutions it was envisaged that the anti-social behaviour and inappropriate behaviour of rough sleepers and beggars could be eliminated.
- There was a common misconception that the majority of social housing went to people who came from outside of the UK. Decisions to allocate housing was based on a person's housing need not their ethnicity. A quarterly report was provided for the Peterborough Homes Board which was broken down by ethnicity to clearly show how the allocations were made in relation to the population of the city. In response to a request from Members the officer advised that consideration would be given to better marketing of how social housing was allocated.
- The Jam Jar Scheme was set up to encourage tenants to allocate a set amount of money on a weekly basis to save for payment of bills. The scheme had proved to be successful.

ACTION AGREED

1. The Committee noted the report and requested that the Head of Housing and Health Improvement provide details of the actual number of non UK national rough sleepers who have been repatriated from the city by the Home Office.
2. The Committee also requested that in future reports a list of acronyms with an explanation is provided.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee recommend that the Head of Housing and Health Improvement explore all options available to dispel the myth and common misconceptions that surrounds the allocation of social housing by using all media outlets available to publicise the allocation process across the city.

6. Review of the Management of Unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller Encampments

The Head of Community Services introduced the report which provided the Committee with details of the management of unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller encampments in Peterborough.

The Head of Community Services responded to comments and questions raised by Members. A summary of responses included:

- It was the responsibility of the Local Authority to carry out a health and welfare risk assessment which fell under the jurisdiction of the Traveller Liaison Officer for any unauthorised encampment in the city. A daily risk management meeting was held which included partners such as the police which meant that an initial risk assessment could be carried out quickly and intervention into any anti-social behaviour problems could be achieved without delay.

- All sites that travellers had visited within the last twelve months was being reviewed to look at the defences that were in place to make sure they were as robust and secure as possible.
- Most travellers who visited the city were regular visitors and were aware of where the emergency stopping place and transit sites were located and used them. Further work needed to be done to look at additional locations for transit sites. A lot of work had already been done by a task and finish group which had previously been set up to look at transit sites. The Officer therefore recommended that this be re-introduced as there was a great need in the city to identify sites and increase the provision. Travellers were only allowed to remain for 28 days on an emergency stopping site which often lead to the recycling of travellers around the city.
- Most travellers did not like to use the emergency stopping sites and therefore did not stop there long. Those who broke the law were dealt with robustly.
- Clarification was provided regarding the Prevention and Enforcement Service and more joined up working with partner agencies and between authorities across the Eastern Region to allow the sharing of information between police forces. Further information on the progress of the Prevention and Enforcement Service would be provided to the Committee at a future meeting.

The Head of Community Services requested that the Committee consider re-establishing the Task and Finish Group that had previously been set up to look at the viability of transit sites in the city. The Committee unanimously agreed to the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to look at the provision of emergency stopping places. The Chairman sought nominations to the Task and Finish Group and the Committee agreed that Councillor John Fox who was in attendance in his capacity as Group Leader of Werrington First should be a member as he was a member of the original task and finish group. Councillor June Bull also put her name forward. The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised the Committee that she would write to Group Secretaries to seek further nominations.

Members also discussed the subject of unauthorised fly-grazing of horses near the parkways from Folly Bridge, along Carr Dyke, Werrington Bridge Road, and Gunthorpe Road to Eye. Members were concerned that untethered horses could cause a serious accident. The area most used for grazing had great potential to be converted into a facility which could be available to several groups. Members considered uses such as a bridle path for the riders of Newborough where there were several stables, an extension of the Green Wheel or a pleasant walkway which at the moment was not feasible due to the horses and the mess they left. The ownership of this area of land was unclear although it was suggested that it might be owned by the Council and the Environment Agency. It was also unclear if the horses that grazed there had permission and if not should be removed.

The Committee agreed unanimously that officers should look into establishing who owned the land from Folly Bridge, along Carr Dyke, Werrington Bridge Road, and Gunthorpe Road to Eye and in doing that establish if it was being illegally used for grazing of horses. Once ownership of the land had been established investigate the possibility of using this area of land for recreational purposes such as a bridle path, extension of the Green Wheel or walkway.

ACTION AGREED

The Committee noted the report and requested that the Head of Communities email all councillors a copy of the one page Flow Chart summarising section 77 and 78 of the Criminal Justice Act showing the process for managing unauthorised encampments for reference.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee recommended that:

1. A Task and Finish Group be established to look into Emergency Stopping Places and that the Senior Democratic Services Officer write to Group Secretaries to seek nominations to the group.
2. Officers should look into:
 - a. Establishing who owned the land from Folly Bridge, along Carr Dyke, Werrington Bridge Road, and Gunthorpe Road to Eye and in doing so establish if it was being used illegally for horses to graze.

- b. Once ownership of the land has been established and depending on the outcome investigate the possibility of using this area of land for recreational purposes such as a bridle path, extension of the Green Wheel or walkway.

7. Review of 2015/16 and Work Programme for 2016/2017

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which provided the Committee with a review of work undertaken during 2015/16 and sought approval of the draft work programme for 2016/2017.

Members considered the draft work programme for 2016/17 and discussed possible items for inclusion.

ACTION AGREED

The Committee noted the report and agreed to the draft work programme for 2016/2017. Members requested a detailed progress report on the Prevention and Enforcement Service and were informed that this was already scheduled into the work programme for November.

8. Forward Plan of Executive Decisions

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

Questions and comments were raised around the following areas:

- A member sought further information regarding the decision for Offtake Arrangements for Power from the Energy Recovery facility – KEY/25DEC15/01. Members were informed that this decision fell within the remit of the Sustainable Growth and Environment Capital Scrutiny Committee. Members expressed a view that there might be a crossover of responsibilities with the Strong and Supportive Communities Scrutiny Committee.

ACTION AGREED

The Committee noted the Forward Plan of Executive Decisions and requested briefing notes on the following:

1. Offtake Arrangements for Power from the Energy Recovery – KEY/25DEC15/01.
2. Request for Public Consultation for Public Spaces Protection Orders.
3. Empty Homes Strategy including a copy of the current Empty Homes Strategy.
4. Vivacity Premier Fitness Invest to Save Scheme. With regard to projected funding.

9. Date of Next meeting

Wednesday 14th September 2016.

The meeting began at 7.00pm and ended at 8:16pm

CHAIRMAN