

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT 7PM, ON
MONDAY, 5 JULY 2021
VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM**

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

Officers Present: Adrian Chapman – Service Director, Communities and Partnerships
Matt Oliver – Head of Think Communities
Tom Barden – Head of Business Intelligence
Jo Bezant – Prevention and Enforcement Service Manager, Housing
David Beauchamp – Democratic Services Officer

Also Present: Councillor Steve Allen – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities
Councillor John Howard – Cabinet Advisor for Housing, Culture and Communities

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor N. Sandford.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

No declarations of interest or whipping declarations were received.

3. MINUTES OF THE ADULTS AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 2 MARCH 2021

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

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

There were no requests for call in to consider.

5. APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS

The Communities Scrutiny Committee received a report in relation to the appointment of a Co-opted Member in accordance with the Council's Constitution Part 3, Section 4 – Overview and Scrutiny Functions.

The purpose of the report was to seek approval from the Committee to appoint Parish Councillor Neil Boyce as a non-voting Co-opted Member to represent the rural communities for the municipal year 2021/2022. The Committee was also asked to consider appointing

Parish Councillor James Hayes as a second co-opted member representing the rural area or as a substitute for Neil Boyce.

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and explained that the Parish Council Co-opted Member had been put forward by the Parish Council Liaison Committee via the Liaison Chair and Think Communities Team and that the appointment would be reviewed annually.

Councillor Fox, seconded by Councillor Iqbal, proposed that Parish Councillors Neil Boyce and James Hayes both be appointed as non-voting Co-opted Members for the municipal year 2021/22. This was UNANIMOUSLY agreed. The Chairman invited Parish Councillors Neil Boyce and James Hayes to join the meeting.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Appoint Parish Councillor Neil Boyce as a non-voting Co-opted Member to represent the rural area for the municipal year 2021/2022. Appointment to be reviewed annually at the beginning of the next municipal year.
2. Appoint Parish Councillor James Hayes as a second non-voting Co-opted Member to represent the rural area for the municipal year 2021/2022. Appointment to be reviewed annually at the beginning of the next municipal year.

6 SELECTIVE LICENSING

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities accompanied by the Head of Business Intelligence and the Prevention and Enforcement Service Manager, Housing. The report set out some of the achievements of the scheme and outlined the next steps for its continuation.

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

- There was an Enforcement Team who checked that all properties that required a licence had applied for one and asked the landlord to apply for one at a higher fee if they had not already done so. Approximately 15 landlords had been taken to court after refusing to become licenced although the majority would apply after being contacted in the first instance by the Enforcement Team. 180 landlords were currently under investigation.
- Members asked for an update on the redeployment of the Housing Enforcement Team to COVID-19 Hub work and the associated reduction in inspections and enforcement work. Officers responded that most of the team had been redeployed with 3 remaining in post to manage incoming cases. Landlords were compliant, there had been no instances of illegal evictions and the majority of liaison with landlords and agents took place over the phone. Good working relationships with agents had been established. The pandemic did create a backlog of HMO cases with a few hundred remaining.
- Members noted that levels of anti-social behaviour had increased in areas where selective licencing was in force. Officers responded that selective licencing could only be introduced in areas that met the conditions in section 4.2 of the report, including high levels of crime.
- Members suggested that the details of landlords could be posted on the doors of their properties. Officers responded that landlords would not be enthusiastic about this and that this information could already be looked up.

- It would be beneficial to identify areas that met multiple government criteria when deciding upon areas of the city to expand selective licencing to. These areas would particularly benefit from the scheme.
- Noting that 102 licences had been revoked, members asked for more information on this process. Officers responded that if they planned to refuse a licence, they would work with the landlord in the first instance to find a solution. Licences were sometimes revoked if a person was no longer the owner or if they no longer required a licence.
- Members stated that there was concern among some landlords about the fees required to license a property.
- The appropriate fee levels would be determined in each area although they would likely be similar to those charged at present.
- The Selective Licencing scheme has resulted in an increase in professionalism with many landlords now using letting agents and educating themselves on their legal responsibilities. There has been an associated fall in prosecutions with landlords understanding the correct legal process to follow for evictions. There were also examples of entire property portfolios been upgraded to meet the required standards.
- It was the landlord's responsibility to conduct the appropriate checks on potential tenants. If there were complaints of anti-social behaviour by a tenant, these would be dealt with by the Council in collaboration with other bodies and could be escalated to the courts if necessary.
- Lessons had been learned from implementing the Selective Licencing scheme in Peterborough, e.g., changes being required to the I.T. system and learning that it could be expensive for landlords to apply for licences for all their properties in a single tranche. Appropriate changes would continue to be made as part of the consultation.
- The main reason for legal proceedings being initiated against non-compliant landlords was that they simply did not believe the Council would follow through and commence enforcement action via civil penalties or the courts. Sufficient support was available to help landlords through the licensing process.
- Officers encouraged Members to promote the scheme in their communities. There was currently no register of rental properties and the more people reported properties to the Council, the more effective the enforcement team could be.
- There was currently no feedback form for landlords to complete. Landlords' feedback would be gathered as part of the consultation.
- Councillors had an important role to play in monitoring housing in their communities and should report any issues to the Prevention and Enforcement Service Manager, Housing.

ACTIONS AGREED:

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

1. Note the progress made in addressing poor quality housing and associated conditions as a result of the Selective Licensing scheme.
2. Receive a further report outlining the full details of a proposed new Selective Licensing scheme as part of the public consultation, should such an application be justified.

7. PETERBOROUGH CULTURAL STRATEGY

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities and the Service Director, Communities and Partnerships. The report provided the latest opportunity for the Committee to help shape the strategy, ahead of it being presented in its full and final draft at the September meeting.

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

- Officers agreed with Members' comments that young people should be at the heart of the Cultural Strategy. This would take place via workshops in the cultural education sector and among employers. Appendix 2 contained early recommendations regarding their engagement and quotes and films from young people would be included in the Strategy.
- Members asked if the Peterborough Youth Council would be involved in the development of the Strategy. Officers praised the Youth Council and noted that they were very engaged. It was proposed that there would be an independent Cultural Board which would include multiple stakeholders; potentially including young people.
- Officers agreed with Members' comments that the views of elderly people needed to be taken into account as part of the Strategy's aim to incorporate the best of the City's diversity. The five key themes of the strategy were mission, connections, money, places and people. It was hoped that the Strategy presented to the Committee in September would be all-encompassing.
- While engagement had been a challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic, it had also enabled the Council to become more creative, e.g. through the use of large Zoom calls which had given a platform for people who had not previously engaged with the Council. The end of lockdown provided opportunities to present to audiences again.
- The new University would be a key part of the Strategy. It would have links with the new Vine centre in the former TK Maxx building which would be a cultural hub for the High Street. There would be press coverage for the Levelling Up fund.
- Officers would be engaging with parishes via the Parish Forum but would also be happy to visit individual parish councils.
- Members requested that the Community Champions be added to the consultee list. The Service Director, Communities and Partnerships agreed to take this forward.
- Members requested that the Service Director, Communities and Partnerships investigate Members' concerns regarding a perceived lack of interest from the Council in the work of artists of the Peterborough Artists' open studio.
- Members commented that communities would benefit from schools being available for community use outside teaching hours. Officers agreed and commented that schools were 'anchor buildings' alongside GPs and Libraries that could be safe, neutral spaces for cultural use.
- Members enquired about the potential cost of the Cultural Strategy. Officers responded that the City was ripe for investment and meetings had taken place between the Arts Council and the Leader and Deputy Leader. While the Arts Council, like many funders, had limited resources it was felt that Peterborough was considered a priority. The Levelling Up and Towns Funds had diverted money to culture alongside Growth funding and the Council's own significant investment. The Cultural Strategy would unlock new funding opportunities.
- Members commented that the City had boasted a range of events, e.g. Diwali and the Italian Festival and it was unfair to suggest there was nothing to do in Peterborough. It was important to restart these events as part of the pandemic recovery and show people that the City was thriving. Officers agreed and stated their ambition to bring back these events in a bigger and better form than before. The City had always had regular festivals but they had never before been incorporated into a single plan to encourage their support, sponsorship and promotion.
- Members requested that a register of cultural groups be included in the Cultural Strategy, citing the success of similar project at parish level which highlighted

groups that were not previously known. It was agreed that the Service Director, Communities and Partnerships would take this forward.

- Members commented that despite the changes to peoples' behaviour prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic such as online shopping, people still wanted to go visit the City Centre and Culture and Arts could play a key role in encouraging this.

ACTIONS AGREED:

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

1. Note and comment on the overall approach being taken to the development of, and the significance of, the new Culture Strategy for Peterborough
2. Scrutinise the Vision and Values document
3. Scrutinise the emerging recommendations
4. Request that the Community Champions be added to the consultee list
5. Request that the Service Director, Communities and Partnerships investigates Members' concerns regarding a perceived lack of interest from the Council in the work of artists of the Peterborough Artists' open studios
6. Request that a register of cultural groups be included in the Cultural Strategy

8. TAKING A THINK COMMUNITIES APPROACH TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF COVID-19, INCLUDING ON ECONOMIC, HEALTH AND WELLBEING FACTORS AND TO REDUCE INEQUALITY

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Advisor for Housing, Culture and Communities accompanied by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities and the Head of Think Communities. The report briefed Members on the approach to addressing the impacts of the pandemic on our communities, by adopting a Think Communities approach.

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

- Members praised the achievements of the COVID Coordination hub and hoped that its work could continue in the future.
- There was a communication campaign planned regarding the housing needs service and evictions. This had been identified as an example of hub work that needed to continue. The Cabinet Member added that he took part in a weekly housing meeting and evictions had not proved to be a significant issue so far.
- In response to a Member's question regarding the Council's readiness for a possible increase in the number of people requiring mental health support, officers responded that the Council liaised with 50 community organisations and had contacts with health partners to support people with their mental health. The Council was always pursuing innovative ways to help people.
- Members commented that the people most susceptible to poor mental health were often the least visible. It was therefore important to build an environment where they felt confident enough to seek support. Officers agreed and stated that this was covered in section 4.8 of the report. Community litter picking was an example of an activity that could benefit people's mental health, despite not being directly related to it.
- Officers commented that a fact sheet was available on mental health and domestic abuse concerns.
- Members commented that Armed Forces veterans often experienced poor mental health. Members also referred to the work of the Garden House in supporting military personnel via links with the armed forces and a specialist NHS service.
- It was noted that Tommy Kelly had been appointed as an armed forces outreach officer.

- Members requested that the Service Director, Communities and Partnerships checked if there were plans for the Council to develop an armed forces support programme for the Garden House, commenting that veterans had unique needs.
- The Cabinet Advisor promoted the website 'How are you Peterborough?' as a means of helping people become comfortable going out again after the COVID-19 pandemic. This had been operational for a while and was part of the mental health exemplar. Officers were not sure how many people were using the site but people had been engaged in as many activities as possible.
- Members commented that the election campaign had highlighted the mental health difficulties people had experienced as a result of the pandemic. An initiative to 'Limber away lockdown blues' had been beneficial in getting people out the house. This scheme had good engagement with people via social media.
- Members requested that the Head of Think Communities and the Democratic Services Officer review the training offered to Councillors and circulate details of the 'Mental Health First Aid' course. Officers agreed that councillor training was important as they were often expected to know about many different fields.
- Work to engage with young people had been challenging. Online services had been a lifeline for many young people who faced restrictions even after lockdown. Engagement and communications work would need to be tailored towards them. Members requested that the Head of Think Communities evaluates and provides data on the success of Youth Inspired's online activities and outreach; referenced in section 4.8.3 of the report.
- Members raised concerns that some people suffering with dementia would not be diagnosed due to spending so much time at home due the pandemic and asked what was being done to address this. The Cabinet Advisor acknowledged this concern and expressed a desire to make dementia awareness part of officer training. More needed to be done after the pandemic.
- The Cabinet Advisor stated he was happy to investigate a Member's proposal to increase dementia awareness among businesses via signage.
- Members requested that the Service Director, Communities and Partnerships and the Democratic Services Officer share information with Members from the Peterborough Information Network regarding Dementia.
- Officers added that Council services did operate in a dementia friendly way and the Leader was keen to promote Peterborough as a dementia-friendly city.
- Members suggested that the training for councillors could be improved, citing courses offered to Navy and Police personnel as examples of good practice. 'Advanced counselling' and 'conflict resolution' were noted as good courses. It was hoped that All Party Policy meetings could recommence to offer this sort of training.
- Members praised the work of Living Sport and commented that the Dementia Alliance Network should be engaged with if they were still in operation.
- Members commented that they had organised trips abroad for Peterborough Veterans and a similar project might be comforting for those with dementia. Support schemes need not be expensive.
- Members requested that Belinda Child – Head of Housing, Prevention and Wellbeing and the Peterborough Council for Voluntary Services (PCVS) circulates details of 'Eyes and Ears' training to members
- Members asked what was being done to support the families of people with dementia. Officers responded that support had been given throughout the pandemic. The Little Miracles Charity had been supported by the 90-strong network.
- Members requested that the Head of Service – Housing Needs and the Head of Think Communities provides members with a briefing note containing more information on plans for a mortgage rescue scheme referenced in section 4.6.6 of the report.

- The Cabinet Member made reference to the website 'How are you Peterborough?' and highlighted the importance of the Council listening to the response of residents to that question.
- The Cabinet Member commented that the Think Communities philosophy was about what you could do for your community, not what your community could do for you.

ACTIONS AGREED:

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

1. Note and comment on the contribution of the Think Communities approach to tackling the impacts of Covid-19
2. Note and comment on the work preparations in place to deal with projected issues of evictions and equality
3. Consider how the Think Communities approach can support the wider needs of individuals and communities
4. Request that the Service Director, Communities and Partnerships checks if there were plans for the Council to develop an armed forces support programme for the Garden House.
5. Request that the Head of Think Communities and the Democratic Services Officer review the training offered to Councillors and circulate details of the 'Mental Health First Aid' course.
6. Request that the Head of Think Communities evaluates and provides data on the success of Youth Inspired's online activities and outreach; referenced in section 4.8.3 of the report.
7. Request that the Service Director, Communities and Partnerships and the Democratic Services Officer share information with Members from the Peterborough Information Network regarding Dementia.
8. Request that Belinda Child – Head of Housing, Prevention and Wellbeing and the Peterborough Council for Voluntary Services (PCVS) circulate details of 'Eyes and Ears' training to members
9. Request that the Head of Service – Housing Needs and the Head of Think Communities provides members with a briefing note containing more information on plans for a mortgage rescue scheme referenced in section 4.6.6 of the report.

9. REVIEW OF 2020/21 AND WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021/22

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which enabled the Committee to consider the 2020/21 year in review for the former Adults and Communities Scrutiny Committee and consider at the work programme for the Communities Scrutiny Committee for the new municipal year 2021/22 to determine its priorities. The report also asked the Committee to consider if further monitoring of recommendations made during 2020/21 was required.

Members made the following comments:

- The opportunity for the Committee to contribute to the Cultural Strategy was welcomed by Members.
- Members requested that the Committee be given the opportunity to discuss community issues. It was agreed that this could be proposed at the Group Representatives meeting.

ACTIONS AGREED:

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

1. Consider items presented to the former Adults and Communities Scrutiny Committee during 2020/21 and make recommendations on the future monitoring of these items where necessary.
2. Determine its priorities and approve the draft work programme for 2021/2022 attached at Appendix 1.
3. Note the Recommendations Monitoring Report attached at Appendix 2 and consider if further monitoring of the recommendations made during the 2020/2021 municipal year is required.
4. Note the Terms of Reference for this Committee as set out in Part 3, Section 4, Overview and Scrutiny Functions and in particular paragraph 2.1 item 2, Communities Scrutiny Committee and paragraph 3.4 Crime and Disorder as attached at Appendix 3.

36. 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.

There were no further comments from Members.

ACTIONS AGREED:

The Communities Scrutiny Committee **RESOLVED** to consider the current Forward Plan of Executive Decisions.

38. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

28 September 2021 – Communities Scrutiny Committee

CHAIRMAN

7pm – 8.49pm