

SWT Community Scrutiny Committee - 29 July 2021

Present: Councillor Libby Lisgo (Chair)

Councillors Dave Mansell, Simon Coles, Dawn Johnson, Mark Lithgow, Andy Pritchard, Vivienne Stock-Williams, Sarah Wakefield, John Hassall and Loretta Whetlor

Officers: Andrew Randell, Marcus Prouse, James Barra, Mark Leeman and Simon Lewis

Also Present: Councillors Francesca Smith and Steve Griffiths

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

20. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Hunt, Lloyd, Prior-Sankey, R Lees and Milne.

Cllr Whetlor attended as a substitute for Councillor Lloyd

Cllr Hassall attended as a substitute for Councillor Prior-Sankey

Councillor Griffiths was welcomed by the Chair and the Committee as a newly elected Councillor.

21. Minutes of the previous meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee held on 30 June 2021

The Committee approved the minutes as an accurate record with the following amendments

Cllr Whetlor attended the meeting and Pritchard declared an interest.

An additional point was made in the debate in relation to item 17. In relation to the budget of £125k, the committee requested if less could be spent in relation to the business case and if more work could be undertaken house to compare options.

22. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Wakefield declared an interest in relation to the Cannonsgrove accommodation being located in the ward she represented.

23. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

24. Community Scrutiny Request/Recommendation Trackers

The Community Scrutiny Committee noted the Scrutiny Request and Recommendation Tracker.

25. **Community Scrutiny Forward Plan**

An update was requested in relation to the Car Parking Strategy in the forward plan. Clarification was provided that the update in January was on the wider parking review and not just introduction of electronic permits.

The Committee noted the Community Scrutiny Forward Plan.

26. **Executive and Full Council Forward Plans**

The Community Scrutiny Committee noted the Executive and Full Council Forward Plan.

27. **Single Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy & Delivery Plan**

The Assistant Director and Portfolio Holder introduced and presented the report.

SWT had a significant challenge in meeting the accommodation needs for single homeless customers. This challenge would be exacerbated by both the need to decant Canonsgrove (homeless campus) by 2023, and the expected general increase in homelessness that was forecast as a result of the easing of Lockdown restrictions (i.e. end of furlough, end of the ban on evictions and the end of the uplift on Universal Credit payments).

To meet this challenge, SWT prepared the following:

- Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy
- Single Homeless and Rough Sleeper Accommodation – Delivery Plan

The Strategy identified the demand, which split this down by specific need, and put in place an end-to-end process of interventions, from early help through tenancy support. SWT and provider partners had significant control over much of the strategy, although strong partnership working was relied upon to deliver the necessary support services

The delivery plan looked at the accommodation and supported requirements and identified how these would best be delivered, whether that is through partner providers (preferred) or whether this is through direct intervention by SWT. The delivery plan made specific request for additional capital (£1.55M) and revenue expenditure, both of which was necessary to enable the effective delivery of the strategy.

During the discussion the following points were raised:-

- The benefits of addressing homelessness and the housing need to make the case for the strategy was considered important for ensuring an accurate message was provided to residents to provide the context of the greater issues in relation to housing need across the district.
- Concerns were expressed over the delegation of decisions to officers, and ensuring decisions were transparent. The delegation to the 151 officer was within the existing responsibilities which formed rationale behind the report.

- It was acknowledged that some smaller decisions were made operationally at the appropriate level.
- Consideration was given around the data around the Cannonsgrove accommodation and addressing the needs set out in the equality impact assessment such as the lack of female only accommodation across the districts along with the life expectancy of rough sleepers.
- Adults Services and Adult Social Care at Somerset county Council were part of the conversations in relation to the Strategy and Delivery Plan. Piloting solutions to provide accommodation and considering best practice from other areas of the country was part of the consideration.
- It was questioned if there was certainty of funding until 2025 and beyond the creation of the new Unitary Council. The commitments would be honoured by the new council with all partners across the county committed to finding the best solution.
- Organisations had been in touch to consider supplying properties which could be included in the accommodation mix.
- Data around rough sleepers set out they were a small cohort and the costs to the NHS was large so addressing homelessness in the strategy benefitted both society and partners organisations.
- Clarification was provided that most of the capital funding was from the better Care Fund.
- Issues around delegation to the 151 officer were driven by the challenging time constraints and the need to support the most vulnerable across the district.
- Providing additional accommodation solutions to address homelessness was a target to ensure the best accommodation and the right support could be procured and create prevention measures for those at risk of homelessness.
- Female only accommodation was referenced in the strategy amongst the needs profile, funding to support victims of domestic abuse aimed to introduce an offering of further accommodation to ensure support where needed.
- Uses of empty buildings alongside hotels and offices was encouraged to be utilised to provide additional accommodation. Management Agreements with hotels were being considered as an alternative to B&B's, although it was recognised that there would always be a need for short term accommodation through B&B's.
- There was a commitment to end the existing Cannonsgrove rough sleeper arrangement by March 2023.
- There had been successes as a result of Cannonsgrove, with residents who had moved to sustainable accommodation, there was evidence and case studies demonstrating the project had been a great success in terms of outcomes and lives which had benefitted from this.
- Landlords were being worked with and supported with incentives to work with the Council to provide housing for members of the homeless community.
- Expectations around government funding to end rough sleeping was questioned. There was Homes England funding to bring accommodation forward, alongside rough sleeping accommodation funding from central government. Bids were in place for capital funding which needed to be match funded for accommodation. Revenue funding was also available until 2024.
- Officers were commended for their work involved in creating the strategy and delivery plan.
- The Committee welcomed this as a way forward but shared concerns around the end date and uncertainty of ongoing homelessness accommodation provision and funding but were broadly supportive of the Strategy and Delivery Plan.

The Scrutiny recommended the following to be considered by Full Council:

- a) Adopt the Single Homelessness & Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy (SHRSAS) (Appendix 1) and associated Delivery Plan (Confidential Appendix 2).
- b) To approve a supplementary General Fund capital budget from a virement of the Better Care Fund, of £1.55m as set out in section 6 and Confidential appendix 2.
- c) To delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer to make the final funding decision for any capital budgets used in the GF or HRA, including any reallocation of part of the capital budget (b) from the General Fund to the HRA.
- d) For members to note the predicted increase in revenue costs 2022-2025, and to delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer to agree the revenue funding allocations 2022-2025 through a combination of homelessness earmarked reserves, future successful bids for government grant, and Better Care Fund grant (subject to Health and Wellbeing Board approval on 16th September 2021).

28. **Access to Information - Exclusion of Press and Public**

Resolved that the press and the public be excluded from the meeting for the items numbered 10 on the Agenda as the items contained exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and the public interest in withholding the information outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information to the public.

29. **Single Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy & Delivery Plan - Confidential Appendix 2.**

The Community Scrutiny Committee considered and noted Confidential Appendix 2 of the Single Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Accommodation Strategy & Delivery Plan.

30. **Executive Cllr PFH Session - Cllr Fran Smith (Housing)**

The Portfolio Holder provided an update which set out progress and developments around housing across the district

During the debate the following comments and questions were raised:-

- 29 single placements and 3 families were accommodated in Bed and Breakfast. This presented significant progress with comparison in relation to the figures 2 years ago, the improvement was commended by the committee.
- Concerns remained from Councillors following changes in the homefinder application process.
- The operations of the estates team was positive and significant improvements had been made in the previous two years. The progress was indicative of the directorate improving with the progress of the organisation.
- Homefinder alongside the costs of supplies and difficulties in recruitment. remained ongoing challenges. The Housing Directorate were thanked for their efforts.
- MHCLG outreach schemes were questioned alongside the benefits they provided residents.
- The Portfolio Holder was thanked for her update and attendance.

The Committee noted the update

(The Meeting ended at 8.40 pm)

