



To be submitted to the Council at its meeting on 16th December 2021

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

16th September 2021 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Councillor Silvester (in the Chair)
Councillors Aisthorpe, Brasted (substitute for Woodward), Croft (substitute for K Swinburn), Patrick (substitute for Goodwin), Pettigrew, Sandford and Westcott (substitute for Batson)

Officers in attendance:

- Helen Isaacs (Assistant Chief Executive)
- Carolina Borgstrom (Assistant Director Environment)
- Guy Lonsdale (Finance Group Manager)
- Spencer Hunt (Assistant Director of Safer and Partnerships)
- Zoe Campbell (Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Eve Richardson-Smith (Legal Team Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer)
- Lisa Logan (Strategic Lead for Environment)
- Katie Chadwick (Home Options and Development Manager)
- Morgan Toner (Commissioning and Strategic Support Unit Advanced Practitioner)

Also in attendance:

- Councillor Ron Shepherd (Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities)

SPC.15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were for this meeting from Councillors Batson, Goodwin, K Swinburn and Woodward.

SPC.16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in respect of any item on the agenda for this meeting.

SPC.17 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 22nd July 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

SPC.18 QUESTION TIME

There were no questions from members of the public for this meeting.

SPC.19 FORWARD PLAN

The panel received the current forward plan with a view to identifying any items for examination by this panel via the pre-decision call-in procedure.

RESOLVED – That the forward plan be noted.

SPC.20 TRACKING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF SCRUTINY

The panel received a report from the Assistant Chief Executive tracking the recommendations of the Communities Scrutiny Panel.

RESOLVED – That the tracking report be noted.

SPC.21 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT 2021/22 - QUARTER 1

The panel received a report from the Executive Director for Environment, Economy and Resources providing key information and analysis of the Council's position and performance for the first quarter of the 2021/22 financial year.

Mr Lonsdale referred to the COVID-19 grant funding streams which supported individuals and companies across the borough and which would be stopping.

Capital funding continued to focus on accelerating the growth of housing and he highlighted investments being made for rough sleepers and bereavement services. He reinforced that in maintaining capital spending, inevitably costs would rise in the next medium term financial plan (MTFP) and key dates for the comprehensive spending review were critical to the shape of the MTFP going forward.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

SPC.22 REGISTERED HOUSING PROVIDER

The panel received a report that was submitted to Cabinet on 8th September 2021 regarding the council becoming a Registered Provider and Investment Partner, which would enable it to access future Homes

England funding. The report also presented a Temporary Housing Allocations Policy.

Members queried the current number of rough sleepers across the borough. Ms Chadwick confirmed there were currently nine and she gave the panel reassurance that there was a focus on preventing rough sleeping and giving support for people who were classed as sofa surfers and on the cusp of potentially becoming homeless.

Referring to the two properties in the report, members queried if the locations had been considered, taking into account these would be vulnerable residents. Ms Chadwick confirmed housing locations were taken into account and explained that there was a multi-disciplinary approach to housing and supporting the residents who would be living there.

A member raised the outstanding council tax debts on the two properties and questioned if this was a driver in the decision to bring them back into use. Ms Chadwick explained that the main consideration was that they were suitable empty homes to bring back into use.

Ms Chadwick explained that links were made with the police to make sure there was not any crime intelligence to indicate that the houses were not the best fit for an individual and that there were support networks around them. She reassured members that a lot of due diligence was carried out to ensure that the house was in the right area for that person. She reassured members that rough sleepers would only be housed in independent living accommodation until they were ready to live independently, and the appropriate levels of support were in place.

Members queried the time scales to bring these two properties back into use. Ms Chadwick confirmed that the first property did require extremely extensive repairs, the second required minimal work and was turned around more quickly. Officers were currently looking to match a suitable household to the second property.

Ms Chadwick confirmed that rough sleepers were initially housed in the night shelter then supported accommodation before going into independent living and that the council could charge for the cost to manage the property through Housing Benefit and the support costs came from government funding.

Members asked for clarification on the success rate for housing rough sleepers. Ms Chadwick confirmed that 7 people had been successfully housed in supported living flats and it was a testament to the support they received that they were able to live in the accommodation. These were small steps but, unless they were ready to move into independent living due to additional needs, they would continue to receive support.

The Chair referred to the rough sleeper's scrutiny working group and one of its recommendations was to introduce a housing first scheme. He

asked if the registered housing provider scheme was similar. Ms Chadwick confirmed that this scheme was the local authority bringing empty properties back into use and providing accommodation whereas housing first was accommodation provided by others and as long as they were paying rent and they looked after their accommodation they didn't need to have additional support and help unless they required it.

Members were concerned about the rough sleepers who wouldn't engage. Ms Chadwick explained that we couldn't help those who didn't want to be helped but there would always be support if they required it.

The panel supported the Council applying to become a registered housing provider and felt that it was a good initiative. Members requested that they received an update at a future meeting.

RESOLVED – That a report be brought back to a future meeting of this panel on the progress with registering to become a housing provider.

SPC.23 DIGITAL INCLUSION

The panel received an update on the work going on across North East Lincolnshire around digital inclusion.

Ms Isaacs explained to the panel the aim of the project, the timescales and origins of the programme. She set out the impact and learning from COVID, which had highlighted the importance of social contact in a safe and gradual way. She gave an update on businesses, society/community, and health in terms of the impact of digital inclusion and the work that was going on across all these areas.

Members welcomed the work that was being undertaken and appreciated the challenges that there would be. Members were concerned about several residents who were hard to reach and questioned how they would be identified and how we would know if we had been successful in making sure they had access and could use digital technology. Ms Isaacs confirmed that bids for grants under the programme included groups demonstrating how they were targeting hard to reach clients. The Council had good networks with partners and the voluntary and community sectors to engage with hard to reach groups and were working with organisations to promote, help and encourage the people who access their services digitally.

In respect of evaluation and outcome measure, Ms Isaacs explained that while there were direct measures/beneficiaries in some activity within the project, it was open minded as to what success looked like with some positive outcomes being generated as the programme progressed. Evaluation of the programme would inform the recommendations when phase one concluded in 2022.

Members commented on the need to ensure that safeguarding was in place so that it didn't have a negative impact on residents accessing

services digitally. Ms Isaacs confirmed that safeguarding was a concern, particularly around fraud, but also in supporting people to access services online safely and up skilling people to find employment.

RESOLVED – That this panel receive an update on the digital inclusion rollout at its meeting in spring 2022.

SPC.24 QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER

There were no questions for the portfolio holder at this meeting.

SPC.25 CALLING IN OF DECISIONS

There were no formal requests from members of this panel to call in decisions of recent Cabinet and portfolio holder meetings.

SPC.26 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The press and public were asked to leave on the grounds that discussion of the following business is likely to disclose exempt information within the relevant paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972

SPC.27 BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

The panel considered a report from the Executive Director for Environment, Economy and Resources on the Bereavement Services Project.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted and the proposed option to be recommended to Cabinet be supported.
2. That an update be received at a future meeting of this panel.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 3.12 p.m.