

SCRUTINY PANEL B

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Tuesday, 21st November, 2017 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Helen Hollis in the Chair;

Councillors Christian Chapman, Lauren Mitchell,
Christine Quinn-Wilcox, Paul Roberts,
Mike Smith and Sam Wilson.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Rachel Bissett and Glenys Maxwell.

Officers Present: Mike Joy, Julie Robinson and Phil Warrington.

SB.7 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

SB.8 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 18th October, 2017 be received and approved as a correct record.

SB.9 Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

The Chairman reminded Members that the Panel had previously undertaken a scrutiny review in respect of the access to homelessness services and how we work with partner agencies in addressing and preventing homelessness at the earliest possible stage, including consideration of the Homelessness Reduction Act, which at the time of the review was still a Bill. The findings and recommendations of the Panel were submitted to the Cabinet in October, 2017 for consideration.

The Cabinet consequently recognised the importance of developing effective initiatives to prevent homelessness in the District and the need to facilitate early intervention with persons at risk of homelessness and provide advice, support and guidance in order to prevent homelessness.

The Cabinet also agreed that Members of this Panel be kept informed of progress in respect of the Homelessness Reduction Act to enable the Panel to revisit the homelessness issue as part of its work programme.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Phil Warrington, the Council's Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager, who was in attendance to update Members on the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the fundamental changes to the way in which homelessness services are accessed and delivered.

He explained that the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 becomes law in April 2018 and the key changes to existing legislation/policy were summarised as follows:-

- The Act extends the period during which someone might qualify as threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days;
- There will be a duty to consider an applicant as threatened with homelessness if they present a valid section 21 notice;
- Where an applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness an assessment must be conducted and a personal housing plan agreed. The Council must work with the applicant on the agreed actions with the aim of ensuring the applicant has, and is able to retain suitable accommodation;
- For applicants who are threatened with homelessness, regardless of priority need, the Council will have a duty to take reasonable steps to prevent their homelessness. The prevent duty will last for 56 days;
- For those applicants who become homeless the Council will have a duty to relieve their homelessness. This will apply to all applicants irrespective of their priority need. The relief duty will last for 56 days;
- Free homelessness advice and information should be available to any person in the local authority area;
- There will be a duty requiring all specified public authorities to notify the Council of service users they think may be homeless or at risk of homelessness;
- There is an extension to the applicant's right to request a review of homelessness decisions in relation to the new duties.

The Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager informed the Panel that nationally Homelessness Services had a number of gaps but through the new Act early intervention will increase the number of successful preventions and ensure that those persons at risk of homelessness are supported earlier and for longer.

Members were encouraged by the early intervention strategies piloted in Wales and its impact on homelessness figures and costs. The early signs indicate that the extension of the 'threatened with homelessness' period is working well and there has been a reduction in the use of temporary accommodation in the long term.

The Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager proceeded to outline what the main implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 would be for this Council namely:-

- Greater level of assistance to be provided to a greater number of applicants;
- Front loading prevention casework including the development of Personal Housing Plans for each applicant seeking assistance;

- Greater reliance on ICT – software will need to be reviewed and replaced;
- Need to review and extend advice services;
- Potential implications for temporary accommodation;
- Fewer traditional homeless duties accepted;
- Pressure to develop and make available more affordable housing options.

The Panel were informed that typically around 500 enquiries relating to homelessness issues are received per quarter. These in turn equate to around 80 homelessness preventions per quarter and 20 acceptance of duties per quarter.

The Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager then summarised the funding streams that the Council will receive to help implement the Act, these included:-

- New Burdens funding of £114,545 confirmed until 2019/20;
- Flexible Homelessness Grant of £105,000 confirmed until 2019/20;
- ICT one off grant – anticipated to be £9,000.

At this stage additional funding beyond 2019/20 is unknown and there is an expectation that efficiencies will be achieved to cover long term costs.

To conclude, the Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager reported that since April 2017 regular meetings have been held with Mansfield District Council regarding the implementation of the Act and the impact on the delivery of homelessness services through the Housing Options Shared Service Team.

An outline action plan has been developed which has focused on the following areas:-

- Staffing resources (including Team size/structure, skills, culture and training requirements);
- Fit for purpose ICT system and exploration of automating the services where possible;
- Review of operational procedures and processes.

The Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager stressed that the next 6 months would be challenging as there was still a significant amount of work to be undertaken with regard to the implementation of the Act.

Members acknowledged that the Council's current homelessness service needs to adapt to ensure that it reflects the new requirements. The Panel also recognised the importance of developing effective prevention initiatives to facilitate early intervention with households/persons at risk of homelessness to provide more detailed advice, support and guidance thus preventing homelessness wherever possible.

Panel Members then took the opportunity to ask questions of the Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager and in doing so discussed the following:-

- Members expressed their support for the proposal to extend the period during which someone might qualify as threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, to enable Local Authorities to intervene earlier to avert a crisis;
- Working with Landlords to make them aware of legislation/policy;
- Potential that casework associated with homelessness prevention would significantly increase;
- It is essential that there is a greater awareness of the level of help and support that can be provided, including when that assistance starts;
- The need to develop a wider range of affordable housing solutions;
- The Council should continue to work in partnership with key organisations who offer expertise and support, for example Framework, to ensure the service is as effective and beneficial as possible;
- Concerns regarding unknown ICT and staffing costs as going forward additional funding has not yet been confirmed.

Following conclusion of the presentation and debate, the Chairman took the opportunity to thank the Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager for his informative update and valuable contributions towards the Panel's review.

RESOLVED that

- a) the Panel note the proposed changes to the delivery of the Council's front line statutory homelessness service, as outlined in the report;
- b) the Panel note the actions being taken to implement the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, including priorities for expenditure;
- c) the Lettings and Strategic Housing Manager be requested to take on board the views and comments of the Panel in respect of this issue and include such in any further report submitted to the Cabinet for consideration.

SB.10 Scrutiny Review of CCTV - Update

The Scrutiny Manager reported that at the last meeting Members had agreed the scope and terms of reference for a scrutiny review of CCTV namely, to gain an understanding of CCTV, how it contributes to the Council's corporate priorities and what impact it may have within the community.

As part of the discussion it was suggested that a site visit be facilitated to enable Panel Members to view the new CCTV control room at the Police Headquarters, Sherwood Lodge.

The Scrutiny Manager explained that unfortunately there had been a delay in launching the new control room due to a number of technical issues and consequently all site visits to this venue had been affected. He assured Members that as soon as the Council receive notification arrangements will be put in place to enable the site visit to take place.

The Scrutiny Manager also informed the Panel that he was in the process of arranging a meeting with the relevant Officers from Newark and Sherwood District Council to enable Members to gain an understanding of the activities undertaken in the development of their CCTV commercialism plan.

Furthermore, updates regarding the potential for securing mandatory provision of CCTV for various types of business/commercial premises through its licensing and planning processes would be presented to the Panel in due course.

The meeting closed at 7.52 p.m.

Chairman.