

SCRUTINY PANEL B

**Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,
on Tuesday, 8th November, 2016 at 6.30 pm**

Present: Councillor Helen Hollis in the Chair;

Councillors Lee Anderson, Lauren Mitchell,
Lachlan Morrison, Christine Quinn-Wilcox,
Paul Roberts (substitute for Cathy Mason) and
Mike Smith (substitute for Chris Baron).

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Chris Baron, Cathy Mason and
Sam Wilson.

Officers Present: Mike Joy and Julie Robinson.

SB.7 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary 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 20th September, 2016 be
received and approved as a correct record.

SB.9 Scrutiny Review - Access to Homelessness Services

The Chairman introduced the item and explained that the topic had been
placed on the Scrutiny Workplan to enable the Panel to consider access to
homelessness services and how we work with partner agencies in addressing
and preventing homelessness at the earliest possible stage.

The Chairman explained that this initial scoping meeting was to enable the
Panel to discuss the priorities and establish the methodology for the review.
At the next scheduled meeting the Housing Strategy Team Leader and the
Senior Environmental Health Officer would be in attendance to assist the
Panel.

The Scrutiny Manager informed the Panel that the report aims to provide
Members with an overview of the topic, including how the Council's
homelessness service works, national legislation and requirements and details
of the current Homelessness Reduction Bill following its recent second reading
in Parliament.

The Scrutiny Manager briefly outlined the definitions of homelessness, statutory homelessness and 'priority need groups'. He emphasised that homelessness is a problem faced by people who lack a place to live that is supportive, affordable, decent and secure. Each local housing authority is required to consider housing needs within its areas, including the needs of homeless households. Priority need groups include households with dependent children, pregnant women and people who are vulnerable (mental illness/physical disability).

The Scrutiny Manager explained that Ashfield and Mansfield District Council have been operating a shared service delivering their front line homeless services since March, 2015. During 2015/16 a total of 93 people approached the Council for assistance.

The Council are developing priorities for 2016-2020 to support those deemed homeless and those groups particularly at risk of becoming homeless. The Council are therefore working in partnership with other agencies to assist a number of vulnerable groups.

The Scrutiny Manager then referred to the Homelessness Reduction Bill which was passed through to the next stage of Parliament on 28th October, 2016. The Bill, which has cross-party support, enhances the legal duties placed on Local Authorities to prevent homelessness.

Amongst the Bill's measures the following points were proposed:-

- Recognising a household is 'threatened with homelessness' if they are at risk of losing their accommodation within 56 days, rather than within 28 days as is currently the case;
- A stronger duty on Councils to provide information and advice on homelessness and ensuring advice services are designed to meet the needs of people who are at particular risk of homelessness, including people with mental health problems;
- A duty on Councils to provide a meaningful assessment and personalised plan for everyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness and eligible for assistance;
- A duty on Councils to help prevent anyone threatened with homelessness from losing their accommodation, providing they are eligible for assistance;
- A duty on Councils to help secure accommodation for anyone who is already homeless, providing they are eligible for assistance;
- A duty on other public authorities, such as hospitals and prisons, to refer cases of homelessness to the local housing authority.

Members were also informed that a new £40 million programme to provide an innovative approach to tackle homelessness and prevention was recently announced by the Prime Minister and Communities Secretary. This includes a new £10 million rough sleeping prevention fund to help individuals which will also provide rapid and targeted interventions for new rough sleepers.

In addition, the Prime Minister and Communities Secretary have also announced details of £20 million for local authorities to trial new initiatives, responding to the specific needs in their communities and focusing on prevention at an earlier stage. A further £10 million Social Impact Bond Programme has been launched to help long term rough sleepers to address such issues as poor mental health or substance abuse.

The Scrutiny Manager emphasised that it was important for the Panel to make clear their intentions for the review and set out the methodology detailing what information and assistance was required. In light of recent incidents whereby both a Member and Officer experienced dealing with a vulnerable homelessness situation it is evident that distinct guidelines need to be established to ensure that processes are followed in a safe and efficient manner.

Panel Members then took the opportunity to discuss the following:-

- The need to understand the priorities in addressing homelessness and what we as a Council can influence;
- In the event that additional funding is available what areas would this be best spent on?
- The importance of Members being aware of the process to be followed should a person present themselves as homeless outside of office hours (ensuring that relevant contact numbers are available);
- Shared Sanctuary Scheme with neighbouring authorities;
- How will placing a duty on Councils to recognise earlier those who are at risk of becoming homeless (changing the period from 28 days to 56 days) impact on the Council?
- Lack of suitable properties in the Rurals to accommodate homeless persons;
- The importance of locating individuals when referred in areas where they can access support networks;
- Establishing what the priority need/local need is;
- Expert witnesses to assist with the review.

To conclude, Members agreed that the topic would be beneficial to enable a thorough review of the access to homelessness services to be undertaken and develop a better understanding of how we work with partner agencies in respect of this area of work.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the following terms of reference be agreed for the Scrutiny review of access to homelessness services:-

“To undertake a review of access to homelessness services and how we work with our partner agencies in addressing and preventing homelessness at the earliest possible stage;”

- (b) the Scrutiny Manager be requested to undertake the following in readiness for the next Panel meeting in January, 2017:-

- extend an invitation to the Housing Strategy Team Leader and the Senior Environmental Health Officer to attend the next meeting to assist the Panel with the review;
- extend an invitation to a representative from Shelter or another homeless charity to obtain their views on this issue;
- a draft briefing pack be prepared and submitted to Members for consideration detailing the procedures to be followed and relevant contact points for dealing with individuals presenting themselves as homeless;
- consideration of current and future designated homelessness information points.

The meeting closed at 7.18 p.m.

Chairman.