

COMMUNITY POLICY AND REVIEW PANEL

Meeting held on Thursday, 17 September 2015 at the Concorde Room, Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr M.D. Smith (Chairman)
Cllr M.S. Choudhary (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Sophia Choudhary
Cllr Liz Corps
Cllr Jennifer Evans
Cllr S.J. Masterson
Cllr M.J. Roberts

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Rod Cooper and Councillor Frank Rust.

7. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 11th June, 2015 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

8. HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2011-2016

The Panel was joined by the Head of Environmental Health and Housing (Ms Qamer Yasin), Strategy Enabling Managers (Ms Zoe Paine and Ms Sally Ravenhill) and the Housing Options Manger (Ms Suzannah Hellicar) to consider the Head of Environmental Health and Housing Report No. EHH 1510 providing the fourth update of the Housing and Homeslessness Strategy and the delivery plan. The strategic housing objectives had been established in 2011.

The Panel was reminded of the purpose of the Strategy, which was to make sure that Rushmoor's residents had access to good quality homes that were affordable and appropriate to their needs. The Strategy had four themes:

- housing supply and the delivery of good quality housing
- homelessness and homelessness prevention
- meeting the needs of specific groups
- neighbourhoods and housing standards

It was noted that during 2014/15, 149 affordable homes had been delivered, equating to a total of 431 since the introduction of the strategy in 2011. Members were informed that the Wellesley development work had started, with the first 20 affordable units available from Spring 2016. North Town regeneration was described as First Wessex's priority development, with 135 units delivered in 2014/15 and another 152 units due to be completed by 2017/18.

The Panel was informed that an old Sergeant's Mess had been developed into 45 units of temporary accommodation, with investments from Oak Housing and the Homes and Communities Agency. Some residents had been placed in the accommodation which was made up of large bedrooms that slept between 1-5 people, private kitchens and bathrooms and a large outside space. It was estimated that a £200,000 saving would be made by the Council per year. Members heard that this accommodation would only be available for seven years because of the Project Wellesley development, however, it was explained that more affordable housing would be made available before then.

During 2014/15, the Housing Options Team had given advice to over 600 households and provided 132 rent deposits to assist residents into the private sector. Rushmoor had given a £7,500 grant to go towards the Vine's Night Shelter, which assisted 28 people. It was noted that this was a very successful programme as it also encouraged people to engage with the Vine. The Panel heard that the the Vine had received an award for excellent practice.

The presentation included a number of examples of work the Council had been doing in order to meet the needs of specific groups, including consultation work with Planning on pitch provision for gypsies, travellers and travelling show people. Other work involved home safety awareness training for older Nepalese residents with Hampshire Fire and Rescue, work with registered providers to deliver specialist housing for older residents and the development of wheelchair accessible units along with 90 disabled facilities grants used for ramps, grab rails and stair lifts to help residents stay in their homes.

It was reported that reviews of registered providers had improved partnership working as the Council had been able to gain a greater understanding of the way the providers operated. Members were also informed of the Council's new partnerships with housing associations and Hart District Council.

The Panel was then advised of the challenges faced by the Housing Strategy and Enabling Team included the new rent regime, viability challenges on affordable housing and the unknown impact of the Right to Buy scheme. The Housing Options Team had continued to see an increase in demand for the services provided, including tackling homelessness and moving residents from temporary into settled accommodation; there had also been an impact on the service due to reductions in other services, e.g. Supporting People. The Private Sector Housing Team had faced challenges around overcrowding, disrepair in the increasing number of housed in multiple occupation and the ability to assist residents to stay in their own homes as there had been a reduction in disabled facilities grants.

Members were informed that the Housing and Homelessness Strategy was due to end in March 2016 and that consultation for the 2016-2021 strategy would take place in early Spring 2016. The Panel requested that an interactive workshop should be arranged to enable it to have an influence in the early stages of the development of the next strategy.

The Panel **NOTED** the update.

9. HOMELESSNESS IN ALDERSHOT CAR PARK

The Housing Options Manager, Ms Suzannah Hellicar, was invited to the meeting to update the Panel on Aldershot's situation with rough sleepers and the actions that had been taken.

The Panel heard that there had been an increase in the number of people sleeping rough or sofa surfing both nationally and in the Borough. It was noted that there were approximately 24 rough sleepers in Aldershot, although, it had been difficult to record the numbers of street homelessness due to individual situations constantly changing. The majority were men, aged between 19 and 65 and many had substance misuse issues. While there had been a number of attempts to engage with the client group, they had demonstrated an unwillingness to engage with the Council and agencies. It was believed that they had also been associated with anti-social behaviour in and around Aldershot Town Centre. 70% of the rough sleepers in Aldershot were Rushmoor residents while others had potentially come from neighbouring areas, where work would be carried out to re-connect those residents to their home areas.

The significant increase in numbers was due to individuals moving in with vulnerable residents which had then resulted in those residents losing their homes due to incidents of anti-social behaviour. Members were assured that the Council had been working with housing associations in identifying and stopping such behaviour.

Members were informed that approximately 8-12 homeless people had occupied the High Street car park which had resulted in a number of complaints about anti-social behaviour, hygiene and intimidation. Short, medium and longer term approaches were discussed with the Panel, in particular, the Council's intention to seek a legal injunction under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, which aimed to clear the car park and stop the anti-social behaviour in the Town Centre. The Panel was informed that while the injunction would exclude those named on it from certain areas in the Town Centre, the Council would ensure that they continued to have access to services they needed. It was also mentioned that the injunction would include positive steps, for example, the homeless must engage with Inclusion Services, the Housing Options Team, The Vine and other relevant services. It was explained that a multi-agency approach had been taken to tackle the issues and meetings for joint-agency problem solving had also been arranged. A multi-agency Hub had also been set up; a two-day event held at the Princes Hall which would be attended by Health, Drug and Alcohol services, Adult Social Services, the Police, Housing Services and The Vine.

Medium term options for consideration included eight existing beds to be made available to the most challenging and vulnerable individuals in Rushmoor and Hart, out of hours community support for the vulnerable client group, continued multi-agency meetings and also an investigation into whether the Council needed a more robust method of outreach.

Longer term options for 2016-2021 were also discussed, for example, to continue the multi-agency meetings and joint working to ensure emerging issues would be rapidly addressed by all of the relevant agencies.

It was concluded that while this had been a difficult and challenging issue for the Housing Options Team, the multi-agency approach had been essential and a review of the legal approach would be carried out.

The Panel **NOTED** the presentation.

10. **WELFARE REFORM TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Members received a copy of the minutes from the Welfare Reform Task and Finish Group meeting that had taken place on 23rd June, 2015.

The Panel **NOTED** the minutes of the meeting.

11. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel **NOTED** the work programme and work schedule.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm.

CLLR M.D. SMITH (CHAIRMAN)
