

Housing Cabinet Committee

Wednesday, 13 February 2019

7.30pm

Present:

Cllr Harold Craske (Chair)

Cllrs: Colin Caller
Lyn Milner
Leslie Pearton
Alan Ridgers (Sub)
John Caller (Sub)
Jenny Wallace
Michael Wenban (Sub)

Wale Adetoro
Ben Clarke

Assistant Director (Housing)
Committee & Scrutiny Assistant (Minutes)

52. Apologies

Apologies of absence were received from Cllr Greta Goatley (Vice Chair), Cllr Peter Scollard and Cllr Anthony Pritchard.

53. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2018 were signed by the Chair.

54. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

55. Draft Homelessness Strategy

Members were consulted on the council's draft homelessness prevention strategy. The aim of the draft strategy was to set out the Council's approach for tackling homelessness in the district and how, over the lifetime of the strategy, the council will achieve that working with key partners.

The Assistant Director (Housing) advised that the council's current homelessness strategy expired in 2016 and the production of a new strategy was delayed to allow for the Homeless Reduction Act to receive Royal Assent during 2017 and for subsequent guidance to be issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government in the form of a revised Code of Guidance. It contained key information around Government expectations for Homelessness Strategies and their production. The revised code of Guidance was issued in November 2017 and the Government consulted on it early in 2018.

The draft Strategy is the first one developed under the framework of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and is vital as homelessness and poor housing conditions continue to blight lives, damage health, reduce opportunities and negatively impact on communities in profound ways. Preventing homelessness has become a priority for the Council and the Council remains committed to preventing homelessness, helping people find housing that meets their needs and providing the support needed to prevent them from going back into homelessness.

The draft Strategy attached in the report pack reinforces the council's commitment to preventing homelessness rather than dealing with households at the point of crisis. That is particularly important during a time where resources available to the Council have become more limited and the Council is seeing an increase in numbers requiring support to sustain their existing home, or secure new accommodation.

An error was pointed by a Member within the recommendation in the report; it should read 'Approval of the **draft** strategy'.

The Assistant Director (Housing) fielded questions and comments from the Members of the Committee explaining that:

- The total cost to Gravesham and funding received from central government for the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 will be circulated to Members. As required, this will include the cost of temporary accommodation to clients
- Referencing page 13, '*Intervene in a timely manner for those at risk of homelessness*' – That bullet point does not mean a set period of time; it varies depending on the circumstances of the individual. Each person would be met with first and their case reviewed with a personal housing plan being drawn up and which will include measures to be taken to prevent them from becoming homeless.
- Gravesham has a number of partners who have statutory responsibilities to the homeless and therefore by law, have to work with the Council to combat homelessness within the Borough. An example of those partners is the social services department who work with Gravesham to help the homeless or those threatened with being homeless and whom the Council may have no responsibility for.
- Gravesham also works with and supports a number of voluntary organisations such as Sanctuary and Porchlight; their aims are to help the homeless in the Borough and the Council also provides a grant to the CAB and other agencies who assist those threatened with homelessness.
- The strategy itself does not go into great detail on the specifics of how homeless households will be helped or families prevented from becoming homeless; the strategy is an overarching document which lays out the Council's commitment to helping prevent homelessness. It identifies how the Council will provide help and the Council's responsibility to any person or family that approaches them
- The Assistant Director (Housing) then outlined to the Committee the methods in which the Council provide help, the two stages of prevention and relief duties and the procedures that are followed to ensure every person is given assistance as required. An integral part of that is meeting with each person and drawing up an individual housing plan tailored to their requirements that sets out what the Council will do and what the person needs to do.

- The Homelessness legislation and the proposed new strategy do not change Gravesham Borough Council's Housing Allocations Policy

The Committee was keen that all Members have their say on the document and be able to give their views, especially the Members that were a part of the cross party working group that was formed by a motion from a Full Council meeting. The Assistant Director (Housing) assured Members that all Gravesham Members would have access to the draft strategy when it goes out to consultation; during that time period they can voice their opinions on anything that had been missed or required amendments.

Resolved that Members:

- Approved the draft strategy
- Agreed to commence wider consultation with the strategy ensuring that all Members are included

56. Corporate Performance Update - Quarter Three 2018-19

Members were presented with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as set out within the council's Corporate Plan 2015-19, for Quarter Three 2018-19 (October to December 2018).

The Assistant Director (Housing) went through the report page by page giving Members a summary overview of each performance measure and performance indicator under each of the six policy commitments (pages 32-37).

The Assistant Director (Housing) fielded questions from the Committee Members as he summarised the Corporate Performance update for Quarter Three:

- **Page 34, PM5** – For residents that want to transfer from one Council house to another, they have a clear incentive to keep the property in good condition. Once a transfer request is received, an officer will inspect their property to make sure everything is in order; if there is anything wrong or modified without the council's permission, then they will have to fix it themselves or pay the Council to fix it for them before the transfer can occur. The officers have pictures taken of the property before new tenants move in so that they can refer to them as evidence.
- **Page 35, Policy Commitment 4** – The Assistant Director (Housing) agreed to speak to his colleagues at Brookvale in order to determine why customer satisfaction was not at 100% although it was agreed that that achieving 100% satisfaction rate was unrealistic.
- The Housing Repair Team agrees all appointment dates and times with tenants. Those pre-booked appointments have helped reduce a number of missed appointments and Saturday appointments are also now offered where possible. Those have contributed to an increase in customer satisfaction.
- **Page 36, PI 17d** – Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation is only used as temporary accommodation if it is an emergency and fortunately those cases are very rare. Instead of B&B's, the Council uses nightly paid accommodation which is admittedly more expensive.
- Hypothetically, if a resident from Gravesham was sent to another borough for temporary housing and couldn't live in the property anymore then they would be sent back to Gravesham for rehousing

- Length of time households could be in temporary accommodation before they secure permanent housing is subject to availability of alternative accommodation, how flexible the applicant is regarding areas / type of accommodation and the type or size of accommodation required. 2 bedroom properties remain the most sought after size of accommodation. If a customer also wants that particular property in a particular ward or road etc then they would have to wait even longer than someone who would accept the first property that becomes available
- **Page 38, PM4 & PI 10** – Members commented that the rollout of Universal Credit has not ceased although there is no indication that those who have already switched over will have the decision reversed. The percentage of Gravesham residents on Universal Credit will be circulated to Committee Members outside of the meeting

Referencing an earlier point made about customer satisfaction at Brookvale, a Member informed the Committee that Members of the Overview Scrutiny Board were invited to view the new operation at Brookvale. Staff were introduced and Members were given a tour of the building and the work that goes on there; it was very revealing and showed a very hard working, reliable team. The rest of the Committee was encouraged to make an appointment to go and view Brookvale in the same capacity.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8:21pm.