

Overview Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 13 June 2019

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Jordan Meade (Chair)
Cllr Steve Thompson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Conrad Broadley
Baljit Hayre
Leslie Hills
Elizabeth Mulheran
Alan Ridgers
Christina Rolles
Peter Scollard

Note: Councillors: Jenny Wallace (Cabinet Member for Housing Services), Lee Croxton (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Operational Services), Lenny Rolles (Cabinet Member for Commercial) and Leslie Hoskins were also in attendance.

Kevin Burbidge Director (Housing & Regeneration)
Wale Adetoro Assistant Director (Housing)
Chris Wakeford Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny)

109. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Ruth Martin; Cllr Baljit Hayre appeared as her substitute.

110. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held 4 April 2019 were signed by the Chair.

111. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

112. Call in: Cabinet Item 7. Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy

The Chair explained that in calling in this item; he had no intention of criticising the strategy and the good work that had been done. The item had been called in to look at the following:

- To explore further how the implementation of the strategy will be managed.
- To understand the cost implications for the Council.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the consultation period.
- To determine if the strategy will provide adequate scope for the borough to fulfil its duty to protect Gravesham's most vulnerable.

The Director (Housing and Regeneration) presented the Committee with the council's draft homelessness and rough sleeping prevention strategy, which has been circulated widely for consultation with stakeholders. The aim of this strategy is to set out the Council's approach for tackling homelessness in the district and how, over the lifetime of this strategy, the council will achieve this working with key partners.

The Director (Housing and Regeneration) drew Members attention to Appendix 2: *Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy 2019 – 2024* and Appendix 3: *Action plan for the Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2019 – 2024*.

Cllr Jenny Wallace (Cabinet Member for Housing Services) highlighted the following areas:

- Following a motion at Annual Council on 6 March 2018 a cross-party working group was established to tackle homelessness in the Borough.
- The cross-party working group met around twenty outside agencies who deal with homelessness and all had a great input into the homelessness strategy.
- Sanctuary have gone for charity registration and are now 'Gravesham Sanctuary'.
- The communal room linked to the Council owned sheltered accommodation at Longferry Court is now going to be used by Gravesham Sanctuary.
- £1,700 worth of equipment is being donated for kitchen and shower facilities
- Gravesham Sanctuary can be the spearhead to show the Council as a leading light in Local Authorities for helping homeless people.
- House of Mercy have launched a fourth house this week in Pelham Road with 13 rooms. Since 2004 the House of Mercy have helped over 500 homeless people.

Following questions from the Committee, the Director (Housing and Regeneration) and Assistant Director (Housing) highlighted the following:

- The Gravesham Homelessness strategy does sit alongside our neighbouring Boroughs strategies. All authorities have a strategy that has to be aligned with the Homelessness Reduction Act, etc.
- The format of the Strategy will be tidied up and made more concise
- Budgets have been increased in recent years in order to comply with the Homelessness Reduction Act. The Council also went through a bidding process and successfully secured £150,000 for rough sleeping initiatives in 2019/20.
- The Council has alerted outside agencies to the Public Health England fund that is available for mental health issues.
- Homelessness was identified as a 'red' issue in the Audit and Counter Fraud report because of the delay in bringing forward the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy. The four audit recommendations are being dealt with and will therefore no longer be 'red'.
- The action plan at Appendix 3 mentions there is an intention to create a local 'lettings agency' where GBC will work with local landlords who are willing to let GBC manage their properties. GBC are looking at several partners but are currently working closely with Medway on this matter.

The Assistant Director (Housing) agreed to amend the wording to replace 'lettings agency' with 'hub' or other suitable term.

- The 'front door and IT access' refers to the housing advice desk in the reception area of the Civic Centre and providing the privacy that people need.
- GBC will not be using standard templates for people's personalised plans. The template is just a guide.
- The Assistant Director (Housing) agreed to invite all partner organisations to provide a briefing on their work to all GBC Members.
- The impact of the strategy will be monitored via reports to the Housing Committee.
- The Assistant Director (Housing) agreed to move the competition date for a full health needs audit using the Homeless Link Tool forward to October 2019
- The format of recording Homelessness has changed and accurate statistics are currently quite hard to find in order to compare GBC to neighbouring Boroughs
- GBC are considering how to manage a media launch for the strategy and Gravesham Sanctuary.

Cllr Jenny Wallace (Cabinet Member for Housing Services) explained that she would be willing to seek cross-party support moving forward to tackle homelessness and she would liaise with the Director (Housing and Regeneration) and Assistant Director (Housing) to discuss how to formalise this approach.

Cllr Jenny Wallace (Cabinet Member for Housing Services) explained that she would be willing to revisit the wording on the 'Foreword from the Portfolio Holder for Housing/Leader' and amend / remove the words 'exciting time'.

Resolved that the Overview Scrutiny Committee note the Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Prevention Strategy and the Cabinet decision and request that Cabinet reflect upon the above-mentioned comments of the Committee.

113. Scrutiny Review Programme - Future work plan

The Committee Services Officer (Scrutiny) invited Members of the Committee to consider what topics they would like to put forward to be reviewed.

Councillor Leslie Hills suggested the following topic:

- **Access to Health Services in Gravesham**
 - Concern about closure of surgeries
 - Increasingly difficult to get an appointment with a GP
 - Could compare the previous Scrutiny review on this matter in 2014 with current day findings.
 - Development of medical hubs is leading to a decline of the 'family GP'
 - Kent Sustainability and transformation plan; build medical hubs and have 7 day medical provision – this will reduce the GP facility and may lead to more closures.
 - Examine Integration of primary care services with hospital care and after care.
 - Concern about 'bed blocking'
 - Concern about proposed closure of the walk in centre in Gravesham
 - Concern about increase in local population and strain on medical facilities
 - Doctors complete training in UK then decide to work in other countries – there's a retention issue
 - GP's retiring early due to work pressures.

- Urgent cancer referrals: national targets not being met.
- Concern about declining social care after treatment.

Councillor Conrad Broadley suggested topics:

- **Review of Planning Conservation Guidance**
 - Conservation area action plans – are they still fit for purpose?
- **Review of Open Spaces/ village greens and GBC's guidance / policies in this area.**
 - Is the guidance fit for purpose?
- **Review of GBC's Maritime Strategy**
 - Huge stretch of Gravesham border is on the river – do we have a strategy for; the Sea Cadets? Cruise liner?
 - Is there a strategy for what should go on the river front?

Councillor Steve Thompson suggested topics:

- **Review of the Town Centre / Asset based regeneration of the High Street**
 - What can GBC do to improve the lot for businesses in the town?
 - Look at empty / underused premises
 - Consult stakeholders, KCC, Gravesham MP, conduct survey of failed businesses.
 - Outcome: an improved High Street environment.
- **Review of Fly-tipping / Littering in the Borough**
 - Major problem in Borough / County / Country
 - Review current working practices
 - Look at best practice benchmarking / other Boroughs
 - Outcome: cleaner Borough and community collaboration

Resolved that the Overview Scrutiny Committee agreed that the topic review suggestions will be more thoroughly explored outside of the meeting, and discussed with the Chair, prior to coming back to a future meeting of Scrutiny for agreement with the Committee.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm