
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SERVICE DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 11 APRIL 2016 AT 7.30 P.M. IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNCIL OFFICES, WEELEY

Present: Councillors Griffiths (Chairman), Ferguson (Vice-Chairman), Fowler, Hones, Miles, Pemberton, M Skeels (Jnr) and Yallop

Also Present: Councillor Honeywood (Portfolio Holder for Housing) Councillor Turner (Portfolio Holder for Coastal Protection), Councillor Baker

In Attendance: Legal Services Manager (Lisa Hastings), Housing Manager (David Black) Housing Needs and Strategic Policy Manager (Peter Russell), Strategic Housing and Needs Manager (Tim C Clarke), Commercial Manager (Mark Westall), Parking and Seafronts Manager (Ian Taylor), and Democratic Services Officer (Janey Nice).

34. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed all present to the meeting and explained how he wished the business on the agenda to be considered.

35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

There were none.

36. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee, held on Monday 7 March 2016, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

38. PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

The Coastal Protection Portfolio Holder (Councillor Turner) thanked the Chairman for inviting him to attend the meeting to give an update on the matter of Public Conveniences.

Councillor Turner announced that the current Toilet cleaning contractors had given 30 days' notice of their intention to increase their charges by £75,000 per annum. .

The Parking and Seafronts Manager (Ian Taylor) informed the Committee that this was the fourth time in ten years that a toilet cleaning contractor had either withdrawn its services or increased their charges which seemed to indicate a need for a fundamental review of this contract. He said that the Council currently used the Essex County Council's (ECC) framework for the contract but that he thought that now a change of approach was called for and was looking at various options that could be considered. Mr Taylor said that an option was to look at in-house provision by the Council and when a decision was made he would bring the information back to the Committee. He also informed the Committee that it had been agreed with the current contractors to extend the toilet cleaning contract for three months, however this would be under the new rates.

The Committee asked if it was possible to have more toilets built like the new toilets at Frinton in other areas and was informed that it would be difficult and expensive to do, however it was an option and would be considered.

When asked about a possible contract with new contractors, Mr Taylor informed Members that if the work was taken in-house there maybe legislative requirements to be taken into account and added that using smaller contractors had disadvantages for the scale of work required, however, there were also disadvantages for using larger contractors who in our experience had sought to change the contracts during their term. It was also requested that if the service went in-house that the Committee would require clarification as to how it would operate including the applicable notice periods.

Councillor Miles mentioned that the toilets at Walton-on-the-Naze were due to be de-commissioned and asked if they could be saved as more and more people were now using them. Mr Taylor informed her that this was not possible and they would not be maintained by the Council, however it was a possibility that the Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) would consider retaining them for use on certain occasions. However the EWT would remain solely responsible for all arrangements.

The Chairman asked Councillor Turner if he could return to the Committee to discuss the new toilet cleaning contract and Councillor Turner agreed to return at the appropriate time.

Reports of the Corporate Director (Life Opportunities)

39. A.1 Sheltered Housing Service Profile – Occupancy Levels

The Chairman informed the Committee that the Housing Portfolio Holder (Councillor Honeywood) would give the political overview then the Housing Officers would give more information to the Committee.

Councillor Honeywood informed the Committee that there was concern that one or two of the sheltered housing schemes were having occupancy problems as they were more rural and residents preferred more urbanised places, i.e. closer to shops and other facilities. Honeycroft at Lawford, he said, was now less than half full. He raised concern that this was a sensitive issue for the residents who were living there but closing Honeycroft was under discussion.

When asked about waiting lists for sheltered accommodation, Councillor Honeywood said there were waiting lists for the more urban sites but none for the rural schemes. When asked about Spendells Court, Councillor Honeywood said that it was also causing concern with half of the available accommodation unoccupied. The Housing Manager (David Black) added that as it was an older building, residents had to walk down corridors to use the bathrooms although each flat/room had its own washbasin and toilet. Mr Black said that the Council had looked at the options for converting two flats without facilities into one flat with a bathroom.

The Housing Manager gave detailed information informing the Committee that the Council maintained ten sheltered housing schemes within the Tendring District. He said that many of the schemes were built over 50 years ago and that although maintained and managed to a very high standard, many would now find it difficult to meet modern needs and requirements.

He said there were 325 units in total with 53% of those units being bedsit studio flats with shared facilities (bathrooms/shower rooms). Mr Black added that a 'snapshot' of occupancy on 14 March 2016 showed that 82.5% of sheltered units were let and tenanted and 17.5% were void/empty.

Mr Black said that the Appendix attached to item A.1 of the Corporate Director (Life Opportunities) gave detailed information of the different schemes along with financial details. He said that grant funding from Essex County Council (ECC)

was being withdrawn, however the schemes would continue to be maintained as usual whilst looking at the problem of occupancy and re-iterated that tenants did not generally wish to live in accommodated with shared facilities. He added that Honeycroft needed a lot of refurbishment and it was now a matter of whether it was worth doing or perhaps rebuilding.

The Committee discussed a number of options which included:

1. Asking if residents in Spendells would wish to be transferred to another scheme and Mr Black said the residents there would need to be consulted on such an idea;
2. Were residents given an option of where they could live, Mr Black said that new Applicants registered where they wished to live, i.e. area;
3. Sheltered accommodation in general in Clacton, was there a demand Councillor Honeywood said he had spoken to private sector developers and said it was indicated that there was no future in Clacton as there was no demand and even private schemes were struggling to fill their accommodation;
4. Was there an option for multi-use of the schemes as in the Colchester borough, Mr Black said at one time accommodation at Honeycroft was leased to ECC for people being discharged from hospital. They were also looking at working with a social care team (Tendring) with opening up the schemes as a hub. He said that many older people did not want sheltered accommodation these days and were even asking for wi-fi internet access;
5. Bringing in consultants to look at Honeycroft and Spendells who could perhaps give options for improvement, with a proper scoping report;
6. Councillor Miles suggested bringing in more younger people into the schemes, such as the more vulnerable which could bring a different approach to the older residents and Councillor Miles added that she would like to be involved in any consultation that concerned Spendells;
7. When asked about age requirement for sheltered accommodation, Mr Black said it was intended for the 60+ age group but younger people could be brought in as tenants depending on needs and circumstances;
8. When asked how long it would take to bring in a consultant to give a report Mr Black said a consultant could inform the Council it would be a cheaper option to knock down the buildings and rebuilt, however he could get a specialist to look at the buildings and he would allow 2 – 3 months for a consultation but he would look at costings and it could take 3 – 4 months for a report;
9. Councillor Baker would like to be informed of any visits to Honeycroft as it was in his Ward and the Chairman added that Councillors V E Guglielmi, Miles and Poonian should also be informed of any visits to the Schemes in their Wards.

After further discussion on this issue it was **RESOLVED** that:

- (a) The Portfolio Holder for Housing and the relevant Officers commission a report on the viability of the schemes at Spendalls Court and Honeycroft that included the future for the two sites with a report being brought back to the Committee for a meeting in September;
- (b) Councillors Miles, Poonian, Baker and V E Guglielmi be invited to the September meeting as Ward Councillors to discuss the report and
- (c) A Working Party visit the sites once the report is completed;

That Cabinet **NOTE** the following considerations notwithstanding the contents of the report;

- (d) That the Council move towards modernising Spendells Court and Honeycroft to include ensuite bathroom facilities;
- (e) That the Council consider a more holistic approach toward residents in sheltered accommodation and working with partners to achieve this; and

- (f) That the Council engage with multi-agency partners in order to create a scoping document that outlines options and ideas for further usage of the two above-mentioned sheltered housing schemes.

40. A..2 Accommodation for the Homeless

Councillor Ferguson declared a non-pecuniary interest that she works with a housing charity.

The Council's Housing Needs and Strategic Policy Manager (Peter Russell) informed the Committee that homeless was not a major issue in Tendring in that the Council were pro-active in assessing needs, with perhaps the odd one or two people who actually wished to remain homeless.

When a Member asked if it was illegal for a person to sleep on the streets, Mr Russell said "no it was not" and a person could not be forced to move on. He added that for some, begging on the streets was a career option for those who had a roof over their head, this was a separate issue that needed tackling. It was commented by a Member that there was evidence that beggars were being brought into the District at weekends in a very well organised operation.

After a Councillor commented that he had seen beggars on the streets at 2.00 – 3.00 a.m. Mr Russell gave various examples on street beggars and confirmed that the Police were not really able to move the beggars on. He added that there was a community forum held each month with the Council's contact being Leanne Thornton who was the Council's Community Safety Officer.

Mr Russell informed the Committee that the Council had a duty of care to the homeless if accommodation was needed. Eligibility was to do with migrants to the District from other areas and listed the eligibility criteria for accommodation:

- (a) There was a dependent child who resided with them or was reasonably expected to reside with them;
- (b) A member of the household was pregnant;
- (c) A member of the household was vulnerable through age, mental illness, physical illness, time spent in the armed forces, prison or the care system or the person was vulnerable as a consequence of experiencing violence including domestic violence;
- (d) They were a care leaver aged 18 – 20; and
- (e) They had been rendered homeless by a fire, flood or other natural disaster.

He said that the duty to provide interim accommodation continued until the Council decided if a full housing duty was owed to the household. He added that the Council mainly used bed and breakfast accommodation as interim accommodation and that the Council had to ensure that households with children were not placed in bed and breakfast accommodation for more than six weeks. Mr Russell then informed the Committee that the duty to provide accommodation ended after a number of considerations.

He said that the Appendix attached to item A.2 of the Report of the Corporate Director (Life Opportunities) provided Members with data showing the number of households in temporary accommodation in the last three years, the costs to the Council and the numbers assisted to find accommodation before the full housing duty was owed.

Questions raised included:

1. People from out of the area requesting accommodation, Mr Russell said that if the person or family came from another area it could trigger an alarm bell, they

- could have been rejected by other Local Authorities, some want to come here because of family connections, Mr Russel said the application was examined to see if any local connection, if not, they would be turned away;
2. If evicted from Council property what happens? Mr Russell said they would have to be assessed to see if they had a priority need, if intentional, again they would need to be assessed;
 3. What happens if private accommodation found? Mr Russell said that then they were taken off the Housing list;

Mr Russell added that homeless were always given priority but must have been in the area for at least three years, he added that there were cases where people had been refused assistance as they had been helped in the past but had not taken sufficient advantage of the help offered.

Mr Russell said that the Council did not have the facilities to help the single homeless, they would generally offer some form of assistance and could help with a deposit even when there was no duty to do so and said the Council would also help if the person had some other local connections. He said that not all applicants were honest with their applications and needed to be investigated carefully, he added that as there were over 1,000 people on the Tendring housing list, Tendring people had to be put first.

Mr Russell said that he was happy with the current requirement for an applicant to be in the area for three years, however there was a possibility the Government may increase the requirement to five years. He added that an applicant had to complete a pre-assessment form and if refused assistance for accommodation, had the right of appeal. He said that analysis had shown that one in five applicants had been refused accommodation as they had not been in the area for three years.

The Committee congratulated the Housing Department on its hard work and being voted by its tenants as being the best Housing Department in the country.

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

Report of the Corporate Director (Corporate Services)

41. A.3 Review of the Year 2015/16 and Work Programme for 2016/17

Mr Westall presented the work the Committee had undertaken in the last municipal year and the proposed topics for the Committee to work on in the next year. He explained that two dates had been left empty of items so that items the Committee requested could be added.

In June, he said, Licensing would be bringing along some Licencees to address the Committee. The Monitoring Officer (Lisa Hastings) informed Councillor Hones that if he wished to be part of that meeting he would need to request a Dispensation from her.

Mr Westall went through the list of items attached as Appendix B to item A.3 to the Report of the Corporate Director (Corporate Services). He suggested it would be possible to have an extra meeting in September to discuss the issue of Sheltered Accommodation further with perhaps, the Toilet Cleaning contract to be also added.

During discussion with the Committee it was **RESOLVED** that:

- (1) Review of refurbishment of Swimming Pools be moved back from 18 July to 23 November 2016;

- (2) Dog fouling (with a dog warden to be invited) added to 18 July 2016'
- (3) Impact of Dispensing of Black Sacks Delivery moved from 10 October 2016 to 18 July 2016;
- (4) The Council's IT Manager (John Higgins) to be invited to report on the Impact of New Computer System on Service on 10 October 2016;
- (5) Review of the new Toilet Cleaning Contract to be added to a special meeting in September (at a date to be agreed);
- (6) Sheltered Housing Accommodation to be added to the September meeting; and
- (7) In January 2017 with the item on Update on Careline Services that other services provided by Barnes House and the CCTV out of hours be added.

42. FORWARD PLAN

The Committee reviewed, and noted, the new items relevant to the terms of reference of the Committee, contained in the Forward Plan 174, in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 13.

43. ANY NEW ITEMS TO BE ADDED TO THE WORK PROGRAMME

There were none other than discussed in the item Review of the Year 2015/16 and Work Programme for the year 2016/17.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Chairman confirmed that the next scheduled meeting of the Committee was to be held on Monday 1 June 2016.

The meeting was declared closed at 9.34 p.m.

Chairman