

MEETING OF MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

At the Meeting of Middlesbrough Council, lawfully convened, and held in the Town Hall, Middlesbrough on 7 August 2019.

PRESENT: Councillors L Garvey (Vice-Chair) (In the Chair), R Arundale, A Bell, D J Branson, C Cooke, B Cooper, D P Coupe, D Davison, S Dean, T Furness, T Higgins, A High, C Hobson, B A Hubbard, N Hussain, L Lewis, T Mawston, D McCabe, J Platt, E Polano, A Preston G Purvis, J Rathmell, D Rooney, M Saunders, M L Smiles, M Storey, J Thompson, Z Uddin, J A Walker, S Walker, A Waters, G Wilson and C Wright

OFFICERS: A Allen, B Carr, S Dorchell, A Hoy, D Johnson, A Pain, T Parkinson, S Reynolds, J Robinson, J Shiel, H Watson, K Whitmore, A M Wilson

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Councillor C Dodds, Councillor J Goodchild, Councillor A Hellaoui, Councillor J Hobson, Councillor D Jones, Councillor C McIntyre, Councillor J McTigue, Councillor M Nugent, Councillor J Rostron, Councillor R M Sands, Councillor D Smith, Councillor P Storey.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None Declared

19/31 EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair of the Council chaired the meeting. Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Chair reminded members of the public that the Council meeting was a business meeting of the Council, and whilst members of the public were welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the debate, they were not allowed to call out, or disrupt the meeting.

The Chair advised that if any member of the public interrupted the meeting, they would be issued with a warning. If they proceeded to interrupt the meeting, they would be asked to leave.

Those present at the meeting were reminded that the meeting was being live-streamed.

A letter was received from five Members of the Council requesting that an Extraordinary Council meeting be arranged. The nature of the business to be transacted was to discuss the withdrawal of the Breaking the Boundaries Team of Middlesbrough Council and the impact this has had on the provision of services to support the homeless people of Middlesbrough.

The request outlined that since the service was withdrawn on 1 April 2019, 5 homeless people had died on Middlesbrough streets, this was 5 deaths too many. It was acknowledged that there had been productive discussions about this service involving the Chief Executive, the office responsible for the Community Protection Team however, there had been a number of uninformed responses to the concerns raised, circulated in the media and on social media.

The Chair invited Councillor Rathmell to speak on behalf of the signatories, in support of the request to call an Extraordinary meeting of the Council.

Councillor Rathmell advised that the reason for the meeting was to discuss the withdrawal of the Breaking the Boundaries Team of Middlesbrough Council and the impact this has had on the provision of services to support the homeless people of Middlesbrough.

Councillor Rathmell stated that since the service had been withdrawn on 1 April 2019, five homeless people had died on Middlesbrough streets, and this was five deaths too many. Councillor Rathmell acknowledged that there had been productive discussions between the Council's Chief Executive and the Head of Stronger Communities, however there had been a number of uninformed responses to the concerns raised, that had been circulated in the

media and on social media. He stated that this misinformation was not helpful.

He stated that homelessness was being bypassed because the focus was on addiction, however he stated that addiction should not be criminalised.

He advised that a study carried out by Cleveland Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner had found that of 20 addicts on Middlesbrough streets it had cost the tax payer an average of five pounds per household in enforcement action. He stated that the homeless were not homeless by choice, it was usually as a result of trauma. He advised that he was not referring to recreational use of drugs, many people used drugs to blank out trauma.

Councillor Rathmell stated that the response of the Council had been to increase the number of Street Wardens and he did not believe the increase in enforcement was sufficient. He said the Council should be offering rehabilitation and improvement.

He advised that he was not asking the Council to make a staffing policy decision. He stated that he wanted to recommend that the decision be referred back to the appropriate Executive Member with a view to considering that the service be reinstated.

He stated that the current system was chaotic, some people were homeless because they did not understand the Universal Credit system; they did not have the ability to log on and complete the tasks required to claim Universal Credit and they did not have access to the internet or a mobile phone. Because they were unable to process a benefit claim, some were evicted. He advised that there was also an increase in anti-social behaviour such as shoplifting from homeless people as they were unable to feed themselves. The only voluntary service available to the homeless people was the homeless cafe which should be acknowledged and commended.

The homeless cafe acted as a central hub for other agencies to feed into. The Breaking Boundaries service used this cafe to facilitate appointments for the homeless and amongst other things, to assist them in filling in benefit applications. It helped people access accommodation and assisted with addiction issues. There was already two services available to addicts which had been rated as outstanding by the Care Quality Commission and these were Foundations and Recovery Connections. He stated that he did not believe that enforcement alone would deal with the issues outlined above.

Councillor Rathmell invited Members to discuss the issue.

The Mayor stated that he wanted to make it clear that there was no connection between street wardens and homelessness and addiction. Drugs was the biggest problem that Middlesbrough faced. He advised that drugs and addiction were the biggest issues that were a threat to health, crime and safety, jobs, children, adults, and the town's streets in general. He stated that it was ruining the town. He advised that people had died through drugs and addiction but this did not only affect the homeless, it could be someone's brother, or son, or neighbour, or friend, or daughter.

The Mayor advised that money was really tight and although the Council was compassionate and wanted to help, they needed to do it intelligently because the Council needed to balance budgets and make it work. He stated that he had appointed Councillor High to lead on this issue as he was better qualified than anyone in the town to try and tackle Middlesbrough's drug problem by looking at the whole picture. The Council needed to retain expertise and retain a broad oversight of all of the issues, and it welcomed input from everyone.

The Mayor advised that Councillor High was liaising with the Public Health Team, all the departments, and other people in the town involved in the issues, to create sustainable solutions. He stated that the homeless cafe was great and he championed it. He stated that Susan Gill had a great perspective on problems and challenges and she worked with the most vulnerable. He stated that he welcomed any input into dealing with the issues of drugs and homelessness.

The Executive Member for Regeneration, advised that the decision to remove the Breaking

Boundaries Team had been made by the previous administration, however he explained the reasons behind the decision. He advised that the project was a three year pilot, funded by central Government. The funding had however been withdrawn after one year. He stated that the Breaking the Boundaries Team had not been lost, they had been integrated into the Neighbourhood Safety Team. Prior to the review of the team, 3 staff members were dealing with a caseload of 11 people, at a cost of £130,000 a year. The Neighbourhood Safety Team were dealing with 1200 cases a year, prior to the 3 Breaking the Boundaries team members being integrated into the team. Following the inclusion of the additional 3 staff members, that caseload was now up to 1600 which meant that an additional 400 people were receiving assistance.

Councillor Waters advised that the Council had 12 specialised commissioned teams that dealt with the homeless and addiction. These teams had a combined budget of nearly £2m. The Council had also secured grant funding of £1.3m to assist people in the Tees Valley area, the North East and Middlesbrough.

Councillor Smiles, the Executive Member for Culture and Communities advised that community safety fell within the remit of her portfolio. She advised that she had been to visit the cafe, and it was very clear to see the role that Susan Gill played in assisting vulnerable people. Councillor Smiles stated that Susan Gill was a great example of the type of people that the Council should be working in partnership with. It was evident that the work being carried out by the Breaking the Boundaries Team was appreciated by Susan Gill in assisting with the vulnerable people, however she stated that the reality was that the area needed to be reviewed as there was a duplication of roles, and, following the review, support was still being provided to the people suffering from homelessness and addiction.

Councillor Smiles advised that she had requested evidence that the Neighbourhood Safety Team were still carrying out the good work of the Breaking Boundaries Team and she had received many examples of this. Councillor Smiles advised that Susan Gill was looking at expanding the cafe into the adjoining property. The Council could look at providing a drop in session which could be facilitated by the Neighbourhood Safety Officers to assist people in filling in forms for benefits. Evidence had also suggested that service users did not only need to access one service and the solution that Councillor High was looking at would be to commission support services that would prevent duplication and cause less confusion for the service user.

Councillor Storey, stated that the problem had originated with the withdrawal of central government funding. He stated that the Council needed to have a holistic approach to the issue by dealing with the root causes of homelessness. He stated that the Council had worked well in assisting with the implementation of Universal Credit. The local Member of Parliament had dealt with cases where people were days away from homelessness. With the assistance of the Council's Revenues and Benefits Team by providing discretionary housing payments and Thirteen housing, this had been avoided.

He referred to Andy Street, the West Midlands Metro Mayor who had written an article in relation to homelessness. He had stated that in the article that when looking at homelessness, things like hardship funds for workers, banks setting up bank accounts for the homeless and businesses employing the homeless should be considered and the Council should be looking to do these things and fund them where possible. He stated that in terms of homelessness and other issues, prevention was always better than cure.

Councillor Hubbard stated that the Council should look at things it was funding. He stated that saving money but costing lives did not look good for the Council. He acknowledged the work carried out by Susan Gill.

Councillor Cooke stated that if the Council was handing out fines, the Council was giving the same amount of support and this needed to be balanced. He stated that he had visited the homeless cafe and was surprised at the number of processes in place. He stated that the cafe was a point of contact, and as such, would be able to identify if a homeless person had not visited for a while and raise concerns. He stated that the Council could consider providing emergency housing, run by the Council. It could be located in the Gresham area. He stated

that he had met with the Deputy Mayor at the cafe and had been impressed by his ideas. He stated that the Council did need to provide a wraparound service.

Councillor Mawston stated that the Council did have a duty of care to all residents. He stated that he agreed with everything that had been said but he would like clarification with regard to the wider role of Street Wardens.

The Deputy Mayor, clarified that certain budgets could only be spent on certain areas of delivery. In terms of funding for Street Wardens, this had come from a separate stream of funding.

The Deputy Mayor stated that he admired Susan Gill, he stated that she was a community champion and the service users appreciated the work that she did. He stated that funding had been stripped by the Government and unfortunately, the people most affected, were the most vulnerable.

The Breaking the Boundaries Team had been integrated into the Neighbourhood Safety Team to provide longevity to that role. He stated that there was currently a review taking place. The review did not only include homelessness, or was not just around substance issues, or domestic violence. The review involved looking at developing a full collective approach around all of the issues that damaged the town's communities. The Deputy Mayor advised that he was working with officers with the aim of developing a new model, which involved a better offer of care for Middlesbrough and ensured that when a person accessed those services they would receive a better holistic approach.

He stated that the Council could not continue to commission services in isolation. In terms of the offer to homeless people, Middlesbrough provided an excellent service. He stated that he was sad that the process had been linked to deaths and he was concerned that this was becoming a political issue.

Councillor Higgins stated that it was important that members worked together to solve the issues. She acknowledged the work the police were doing in relation to the homeless. Councillor Higgins stated that Government austerity had caused many of the issues.

Councillor Furness acknowledged all the help and support he had received from the authority when he had been in need of assistance. He stated that the authority needed appropriate Central Government funding in order for the council to invest in people and services.

Councillor Walker stated that she had been homeless in the past and she had found Middlesbrough to be a very welcoming place. She stated that the Council had good officers and Councillors need to work together to help and assist the vulnerable. Councillor Walker stated that it was disgraceful that the town needed food banks.

Councillor Wright stated that it was great to see the work that the Deputy Mayor was doing and he acknowledged that the Council budget was tight. He stated that where there was a will there was a way and he was pleased that the issue had been raised.

Councillor Hobson stated that she was pleased that the Councillors were all willing to work together and she stated that she thought that a solution could be found.

The Chair invited Councillor Rathmell to sum up.

Councillor Rathmell stated that it had been a very positive meeting and the onus was on the Executive to make the right decisions. He stated that his discussions with the Chief Executive was a good example of joined up working. He stated misinformation was dangerous, and he stated that this misinformation came about through social media that in order to reinstate the service, it would be necessary to close a Children's Centre or Community Hub.

He stated that he would like a wraparound service to be reinstated. He stated that it was not about delivering in isolation or budgets being tight. He stated that two Directors posts had recently been advertised.

He stated that the homeless cafe was only originally going to open one day a week, and it was now opening for five days a week and it was delivering a really good service. He stated that there was a lot of knowledge and experience within the original Breaking the Boundaries team. He stated that following discussions with the Head of Paid Service and the Director responsible for delivery of the homeless service, it was discovered that information on the service had not been collated before moving the team.

He stated that the Council need to look at reinstating the service. He stated that it would not be a quick or easy fix.

He stated that the Council should be looking to see if it was getting value for the redistribution of the wraparound service.

He stated that he would like to make a recommendation that a report be brought back to full Council which would look at the wraparound service, the impact, the cost, and whether the Council could deliver on the service.

The recommendation was seconded.

Councillor Cooke queried whether it could be clarified what the report would be about.

Councillor Rathmell stated that he wanted a report on the negative impact that the removal that the service had and the benefits of reinstating the service.

The Deputy Mayor advised he was already carrying out a review of the services and he did not see it necessary to put officers under pressure to do additional work when this was already being undertaken. Councillor Rathmell stated that he would like the report on the review that was to be submitted to Executive to be brought to Council.

It was Moved, Seconded and **ORDERED** that a report be brought back to full Council which would look at the wraparound service, the impact, the cost, and whether the Council could deliver on the service.

Councillor Storey stated that he would like to suggest that a Working Group be set up from all the different parties to discuss this issue. The Chair stated that this could be sorted out outside of the meeting.

Following the meeting, the recommendation agreed by the meeting was clarified by the Chair.