

CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel was held on 9 October 2017.

PRESENT: Councillors R Arundale, D J Branson, D Davison, J Goodchild, A Hellaoui, L Lewis, D Rooney and V Walkington

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: F Graham - Community Council Chair
J Ryles - Community Council/Accent Housing Advocate and Credit Union
C Dixon- Community Volunteer

OFFICERS: S Blood, L Kelly, S Coles, A Treloare, I Gartland and S Llewellyn

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Councillor Z Uddin.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None declared

1 MINUTES FROM THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2017

The minutes of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel held on 11 September 2017 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

In relation to the raised by Councillor Branson with regard to the Tourist Information Centre, the Democratic Services Officer had contacted the Head of Culture and Communities. The Panel were advised that there were no plans for a Tourist information Centre to be included in the refurbished Town Hall. There had not been one in the Town Hall for a number of years, and although some of their information was left behind with staff at the Town Hall to use if needed, demand from the public for this in the past 3-5 years had been negligible. Most searches were done on line, hence no provision being planned into the new facility.

2 SELECTIVE LANDLORD LICENSING- IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

This was the second evidence gathering meeting in relation to the Panel's review on Selective Landlord Licensing. The Panel heard from the following representatives to gain a wider understanding and the issues faced by North Ormesby prior to the introduction of the scheme:

- Councillor L Young- Ward Councillor for North Ormesby
- I Gartland- Tenancy Relations Officer
- S Llewellyn - Neighbourhood Safety Officer
- F Graham - Community Council Chair
- J Ryles - Community Council/Accent Housing Advocate and Credit Union
- C Dixon - Community Volunteer
- L Kelly- Selective Licensing Manager

The Panel wished to understand the following:

1. **How has Selective Landlord Licensing improved North Ormesby?**
2. **What was North Ormesby like prior to the introduction of Selective Landlord Licensing?**
3. **Has Selective Landlord Licensing helped reduce fear of crime in the community?**
4. **Have levels of anti- social behaviour/ crime decreased since the introduction of the scheme? What is the role of the Tenancy Relations Officer and Neighbourhood Safety Officer?**

5. What other factors have helped improve the area?

How has the Selective Landlord Licensing improved North Ormesby?

The panel invited Councillor L Young to provide a ward councillor perspective. Councillor Young advised that since the introduction of the scheme, positive feedback/ actions had been reported that the scheme was working. The Panel were pleased to hear that faith had been restored amongst the residents. He commented that the scheme was successful due to the dedicated team, who provided regular updates at community council meetings and who had a clear presence in the community.

Councillor Young commented that prior to the scheme, the community did not feel empowered to stand against their landlords, however since the schemes introduction, he, as Ward Councillors feels confident to say to residents: ' We will remind the landlords of their tenancy obligations, and failure to do so may result in action'.

What was North Ormesby was like prior to the introduction of Selective Landlord Licensing?

Mrs F Graham, Chair of North Ormesby Community Council addressed the Panel. She advised that having lived in the community for 70+ years, there had been significant changes within the area. She expressed that problems with drugs, substance misuse and alcohol had escalated and many residents felt disheartened as nothing was being done to resolve the problems. Mrs Graham further expressed that there were a number of rogue landlords which would rent properties to problem families which led to persistent high levels of anti-social behaviour and crime. She commented that when Selective Landlord Licensing was introduced, there was some misunderstanding from residents that the problems would disappear overnight. A year since the introduction of the scheme, she felt North Ormesby had turned a corner. Mrs Graham stated that this was down to the hard work within the community and projects funded through the Big Local (£1m lottery scheme). Members applauded the scheme, however queried strategies to continue the positive work once the Selective Landlord licensing scheme had ceased.

The Panel were assured that although the scheme would cease on 31 December 2020, there would be a comprehensive exit Strategy in place and officers would not just abandon the area. Although not determined as yet, it was likely that the Neighbourhood Safety Officer would remain to ensure persistent levels of anti-social behaviour did not return. The Selective Landlord Licensing team were hopeful that after five years, there would not be the same level of problems. The Manager explained to the Panel that the reasons behind the success of the scheme so far was due to the team being placed in the Hub, and the relationships developed with multi agency teams and the community.

A number of the Panel members commented that it would be beneficial to have a 'lessons learnt' check list in place, so that, if in the future, another area in Middlesbrough was designated residents would understand the process involved e.g. antisocial behaviour issues don't go away overnight as the process take time and those landlords who choose not to reference are encouraged to do so before enforcement action is taken.

C Dixon, Community Volunteer spoke passionately to the Panel regarding the scheme. She believed that North Ormesy was unique in their approach, and had an excellent community network which supported the whole community, from school advice, benefit advise and providing wider family networks. She solely believed that the success of the scheme was down to community ownership, who remained passionate about making a difference to their local area.

Members heard that the Big Local fund had resulted in 32 CCTV cameras being installed. Phase 1 was designed by the local residents to cover so called 'red areas' of persistent anti-social behaviour and crime. The panel were pleased to be informed that after a 12 month review, the CCTV cameras had 100% feedback and that the community were designing phase 2 to cover other areas of North Ormesby.

C Dixon further advised that Panel that North Ormesby was fortunate to have all agencies working in the area, all situated within the Hub. Most recently Public health had delivered programmes and Everyone active had provided free swim vouchers for families. With providing Selective Landlord Licensing, workshops, advice and strong community spirit, C Dixon commented that this led to less social isolation and confidence amongst residents. A member questioned whether the area had improved solely due to the introduction of Selective Landlord Licensing. The residents advised that Selective Licensing was a positive spin off and underpins the positives already going on within the area. The scheme has been able to bring everything together in a collaborative way.

Has Selective Landlord Licensing helped reduce fear of crime in the community?

The Panel were reassured to hear from the residents that since the introduction of additional CCTV, multi-agency working with the Police, Council, street wardens and the Selective Licensing Team, they felt safer within the community. The work undergone so far, has helped reduce social isolation amongst older people. Mrs F Graham stated that prior to the scheme, North Ormesby was not a safe environment, with high levels of crime and extreme fear of crime. She expressed that the scheme and community work has helped develop independence amongst residents.

A member of the panel stated that the model in North Ormesby was excellent and could be adapted to be used in other parts of Middlesbrough.

Councillor L Young further added that there had been a cultural change within the area. Residents now felt empowered and confident to speak up when things were incorrect.

Have levels of anti-social behaviour/ crime decreased since the introduction of the scheme?

The Panel heard from I Gartland- Tenancy Relations Officer and S Llewellyn -Neighbourhood Safety Officer in relation to their role and the impact they have seen on anti-social behaviour since the introduction of the scheme.

I Garland advised that her role was to work with the tenants and signposting them to other agencies if they needed additional support. She also added that she works with and supports the landlords to reference their tenants. She outlined to the panel that this has been a positive step in reducing anti-social behaviour within the properties and within the area.

S Llewellyn further added that as Neighbourhood Safety Officer, she worked closely with the tenants/ families and landlords to ensure persistent anti-social behaviour does not occur.

The Panel were advised that since the introduction of the scheme, individuals feel more confident to report crime and anti-social behaviour. Whilst on paper, the figures may not look like they are decreasing, the team stated that they now have a battle outlook and control on issues and it is slowly improving in the area. Street Wardens and PCSO's also played a big part in reporting issues in the area. The Selective Landlord Licensing Team receive diary sheets, CCTV reports and perpetrators are known to the team. S Llewellyn advised the Panel of the steps to deal with anti-social behaviour, including initial warnings, Landlords/Managing Agents engaging in support plans to tackle ASB tenants.

What other factors have helped improve the area?

The residents and Selective Landlord Licensing team commented to the Panel that whilst the scheme has been vital to improving North Ormesby, it has complimented agency/ partnership working within the ward.

The Streetwardens spoke highly of the joint working and how they take pride in the area they cover. They reported a more positive outlook in the area. J Ryles - Community Council/Accent Housing Advocate and Credit Union, lastly added that the community spirit has assisted in making the scheme so successful. The Hub acts as a central base where residents can access multi agency working, youth sessions and the credit union.

The panel thanked all of the witnesses for their useful insight into the scheme.

Following receipt of the evidence, the Chair asked the Scrutiny Panel to consider the draft terms of reference, which were tabled at the meeting. The Chair advised that the terms of reference would be included within the Investigation Outline which would also include key witnesses and desired outcomes.

The document would be used as an internal working document of the scrutiny panel, which would be added to and amended as the review progressed.

The Scrutiny Panel discussed the draft terms of reference for the review.

In light of the evidence received, the Panel also identified the need to recommend the scheme in North Ormesby to a University/ Joseph Rowntree Foundation for studying, as they believe it was one of its kind. This would be included within the panel's final recommendations.

In terms of the next meeting, the Panel expressed a wish to speak to Landlords and to gain an understanding of the Gresham Selective Licesening Scheme.

AGREED as follows:

1. **That the information presented at the meeting be considered in the context of the scrutiny panel's investigation.**
2. **That the terms of reference, for the review, be agreed as detailed:**
 1. To examine the provisions specified by the Housing Act 2004 in respect of regulating the private rented sector and the reasons behind the designation of North Ormesby.
 2. To examine the Selective Landlord Licensing Scheme in North Ormesby and evaluate its impact on residents, tenants and landlords and consider other benefits the scheme has brought.
 3. To consider how the costs of the Selective Landlord Licensing Scheme and the incentives offered to landlords compare against other local authorities who have selective landlord licensing designation.
 4. To explore the options available to the Council in other areas of Middlesbrough, which have high levels of anti-social behavior/ low housing demand.