

**CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL**

A meeting of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel was held on 25 July 2019.

**PRESENT:** Councillors R Arundale, C Dodds, L Garvey, L Lewis, C McIntyre and J Thompson

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** 1 member of the public

**OFFICERS:** S Blood

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** Councillor J Goodchild, Councillor J Rostron, Councillor D Smith.

**DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

None declared

**1 MINUTES - 25 JUNE 2019**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2019 were read and accepted as a true record.

**2 SELECTIVE LANDLORD LICENSING - LETTER FROM MRS H WHEELER MP**

In March 2019, the former Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Board had written to Rt Hon, James Brokenshire MP in respect to Selective Landlord Licesening in North Ormesby and Newport. The letter queried whether there was additional support and investment to act as the 'start- up' capital for the schemes.

The Democratic services officer presented a reply which had been received from, Mrs Heather Wheeler MP, Minister of Housing and Homelessness. Mrs Wheeler MP outlined that in terms of start up costs, the expectation was for the local authority would factor this into the fee structure.

The panel was pleased a response had been received.

**AGREED** as follows- that the response be noted.

**3 SETTING THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20**

The Democratic Services Officer presented a report that invited the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel to consider its work programme for 2019/20.

The scrutiny panel was encouraged to select two topics where scrutiny could make an impact, add value or contribute to policy development. To assist with in determining possible Work Programme topics, the Director for Culture, Communities and Communications, Adam Allen had been in attendance at the previous meeting to provide an overview of the main services within the panel's remit and an outline of priorities, key issues and challenges for the year ahead.

A list of potential topics, which were anticipated to be of particular interest to the scrutiny panel, and the suggestions received in respect of the scrutiny panel's remit were contained in the submitted report. The suggestions within the report were merely proposals and the content of the work programme was entirely a decision for the panel to make.

The report was spilt into 3 sections: Topical and local issues, Cleveland Police, possible updates and suggestions.

Within topical issues, the panel were alerted to four areas of potential interest:

1. Financial inclusion
2. Reducing homelessness
3. Strengthening our communities
4. Tees Valley City of Culture Bid

From the above list, the panel identified two areas which they thought would add value:

1. Financial Inclusion- Universal Credit had been rolled out in Middlesbrough in October 2018, however there had been difficulties in obtaining information from the Department of Working Pensions (DWP) in relation to the number of claimants in receipt of Universal credit. The panel had requested an update on the roll out of Universal credit earlier this year, however the panel withdraw its request due to the difficulties outlined above. Aside from this, the panel were aware of the wider financial inclusion issue of food bank usage. It was apparent from the media that there was an increasing demand on foodbanks. The panel were made aware that there had been a 22% increase in usage since 2018 and during peak periods (school holidays) there had been a 50% increase. The Mayor had recently made a statement that he wished Middlesbrough to be a hunger free town as foodbank referrals were not just universal credit claimants but also those on low income. The panel showed a keen interest in exploring this topic.
2. Reducing Homelessness- The Homeless Reduction Act commenced in April 2018 and set new duties on English local authorities with the aim of preventing homelessness. The issue of homelessness was flagged as red under the, hat was 'Supporting Communities' outcome delivery plan 2016-2020, and the Council introduced the Middlesbrough Preventing Homelessness Strategy in 2015. Due to reports of homelessness, e panel outlined that would like to receive an update on the Strategy and what initiatives are in place to assist in with the homeless, either Council or voluntary.

In terms of Cleveland Police, the Democratic Services Officer alerted the panel to two areas of interest. The first being the Police's efforts to combat anti-social behaviour and the second being Operation Phoenix, a 3 month campaign to prevent crime, protect communities and tackle serious crime (domestic violence).

The Panel have responsibility to address certain issues each year and to request updates where necessary, domestic violence/abuse being one of these issues. At the previous meeting, the Director had advised the panel that the domestic abuse services were being recommissioned and with that in mind, the panel thought it would be timely to receive an update from our services and Cleveland Police towards the end of the year.

In terms of suggestions, there were five areas put forward for consideration:

1. Arts organisations and Artists
2. Enforcement
3. Engaging Communities
4. Community Cohesion- support for Asylum seekers and Refugees
5. Integration of all communities

The panel considered each suggestion in detail, however two areas were highlighted as potential topics:

**Enforcement-** the panel were aware that there was to be a new approach to enforcement in due course. The Mayor had recently launched a public consultation on introducing a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) in the TS1 area. Public Spaces Protection Orders were one of the tools designed to stop individuals or groups of individuals committing anti-social behaviour in a public space. The measures would build on the recent boost to the number of Street Wardens equipped with body-worn cameras, and an increase in the number of fixed penalty notices (FPNs) issued for a range of offences. The PSPO along with the Mayor's

discussion with the Combined Authority to potentially fund 40 more street wardens could help to reduce anti social behaviour within the area. The panel were keen to hear the outcome of the consultation once available and the steps proposed to introduced the PSPO.

**Community Cohesion- support for Asylum seekers and Refugees-** at the previous meeting, the Director made the panel aware of significant work undertaken by the North East Migration Partnership. At present there were three significant areas of work:

1. New Asylum seeker contract- this would commence in September 2019. The contract would see a new provider, a possible new housing provider and opportunity for better partenrshop engagement.
2. National discussions on dispersals- the Home Office was responsible for dispersals, however there has been concern that there are not equal dispersals across the Country. Due to this, the Local Authorities, Local Government Association and the Home Office are meeting regularly in order to improve the equity of dispersals nationally. The panel were also made aware that a Memorandum of understanding had been agreed and work was being progressed on Equity and data sharing..
3. Place based project- this project maps the journey of Asylum seekers entering the country and brings together agencies involved to better understanding the pathways involved. This work would feed into national work to better understand the cost of Asylum seekers to Local Authorities.

From the meeting, a panel member had expressed a desire to examine this issue. The panel, whilst supporting this also wished to look at the wider community integration issue of how Asylum seekers and refugees are welcomed in Middlesbrough, what support is in place (e.g. school placement , and whether the community feels part of the Middlesbrough community e.g a school of Sanctuary

The Democratic Services Officer further outlined to the panel have responsibility to address certain issues each year and to request updates where necessary, apart from Domestic abuse, the panel have responsibility for:

- Community Safety Partnership.
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA).
- Preventing Terrorism.

The panel received updates on the topics last year and therefore advised they would receive 2 yearly updates unless a specific issue came to their attention. In terms of PREVENT, the Democratic Services Officer outlined that there was an e-learning module and would circulate to all Councillors.

In terms of updates from previous reviews, the panel expressed a wish to receive an update on Selective Landlord Licensing due to the recent roll out in Newport and updates on the reviews undertaken in 2018/19.

**AGREED** as follows:

That the topics listed below be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval and inclusion in the scrutiny work programme of the Culture and Communities Panel for 2019/2020:

- Financial inclusion- Foodbanks, and
- Community Integration- including the dispersal of Asylum and Refuges into Middlesbrough and their welcome to Middlesbrough.

4        **PROPOSED MEETING SCHEDULE 2019/20**

The proposed meeting schedule for 2019/20 was submitted to the panel.

**AGREED-** that the proposed meeting schedule for 2019/20 be approved.