

CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel was held on 21 November 2019.

PRESENT: Councillors C Dodds, J Goodchild, B A Hubbard, C McIntyre, J Rostron and J Thompson

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: A Metcalfe, Local Democracy Report, Gazette

OFFICERS: S Blood and D Cochrane

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Councillor R Arundale, Councillor L Lewis, Councillor D Smith.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None declared

The Chair gave a brief statement to politely remind Members and officers that the Purdah period had now commenced.

19/22 PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS IN MIDDLESBROUGH- UPDATE

The Chair welcomed Debra Cochrane CIHM, Community Support officer, Homeless lead to the meeting, who provided the Panel with an update on what the Council was currently doing to reduce homelessness across Middlesbrough.

The Panel have previously received updates on homelessness and begging in the Town, however were aware of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and its focus on preventing homelessness. As they had not received information on the impact of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, the Panel felt it paramount to understand the updated position in Middlesbrough.

The officer stated that the definition of homeless meant not having a home, if you have nowhere to stay and are living on the streets.

The Panel were also informed that an individual can also be classed as homeless if they have a roof over their heads, and are counted as homeless if you are:

- staying with friends or family,
- staying in a hostel, night shelter or Bed and breakfast
- squatting (because you have no legal right to stay)
- at risk of violence or abuse in your home
- living in poor conditions that affect your health
- living apart from your family because you don't have a place to live together.

The Council can assist and help the following:

- Applicants must normally have lived in the UK long-term and not subject to immigration control;
- Applicants must be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days
- Applicants must not have made themselves homeless on purpose; and
- Applicants should have a local connection with the borough. However, there may be exceptions to this, for example, if you are fleeing domestic abuse and have to relocate to another borough.

What does the Council do to help the homeless?

The Panel were notified that the Council have a statutory responsibility to the homeless however commission Thirteen Group to deliver the homeless service.

The Panel were provided with an extensive list of commissioned services to help and support the homeless, including for example, Project 404, single key, Rainham, Stages, Hardwick House, Community campus and Penrith road.

The Panel were also made aware of the new commissioning model for Homelessness which had been approved by the Executive in October 2019. The Panel advised they would like a further update on the effect this had had following its implementation in September 2020.

In terms of homeless numbers, the officer outlined that there are less than 100 legally homeless individuals, however the numbers increase due to the raising numbers of individuals in temporary accommodation and shared accommodation.

Rough sleepers

Whilst the Council do extensive work with the homeless, the officer thought the Panel would be interested in what the Council was doing to support rough sleepers.

The North East Region secured £1,581,958 Government funding in 2019, and from this set up a sit up service, based in Bridge House, Stockton. The sit up service works throughout Middlesbrough and Stockton, identifying rough sleepers. Officers will do a welfare check on the individual and if they are willing, put them in a taxi, which will take them to Bridge street, where they are given a hot meal, have their clothes washed and given a bed to sleep in. In the morning, the individual is provided with breakfast and taken by taxi back to Middlesbrough, where they will be taken to support services.

The Council employs a Substance misuse worker (shared with Stockton) and a Rough sleeper tenancy support worker, both are on 12 month contracts. There was also a Prison accommodation officer from Holme House who works throughout the service, however they work closely with the Neighbourhood officers. All posts are funding via the rough sleeping initiative.

The officer advised that it was very rare that rough sleepers will identify themselves and therefore the Tenancy Support officer, Neighbourhood officers and Warden will search 'hot spots', wake them up, carry out welfare checks and offer support. They cannot force rough sleepers to take up support, however since its operation, the team has identified 22 rough sleepers in September 2019, 20 Rough sleepers in October 2019 and in November 2019, 17 rough sleepers were identified and supported.

In terms of numbers, the Panel queries how rough sleepers were identified. In response, the officer outlined that every day there was a rough sleeper count, and from this, a month estimate was produced. There was also an annual count carried out where the officer, and volunteers go out to 'hot spots' between the hours of 3am and 7am. This annual count identified 9 rough sleepers, however there were a further 3 however because they were not next to their beds they could not be counted.

The Officer did outline that some rough sleepers do not want to be helped. She gave the example of a ex-service man who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), had spent time in temporary accommodation and suffered from mental health. The gentleman had assessed support in the past but this opened old wounds and therefore he had decided not to continue with the support offered.

There was also a push to change the language and perception of rough sleepers, as quite often they are misjudged by society.

Homeless Reduction Act 2017

The Panel were provided with some additional information regarding the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and the statutory responsibility on Local Authorities.

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 introduced a greater focus on preventing homelessness. In terms of supporting the homeless, the guidance states that the first option to be explored with the applicant should be enabling them to remain in their current home, where suitable.

This applies to all eligible applicants who are 'threatened with homelessness within 56 days' e.g. landlord has given tenant notice.

Local Authorities have a duty to assess and provide a personalised housing plans. The Housing officer works with the customer to develop the plan and will include steps the customer will take to try and prevent homelessness. The Panel were advised that there was currently 115 customers owed a prevention duty.

There was also Relief duty, whereby if after the 58 days homelessness has not been prevented the council must take 'reasonable steps to help the applicant to secure that suitable accommodation becomes available' this applies to all eligible applicants who are homeless. During this stage if the applicant is homeless, temporary accommodation may be provided if the applicants has a priority need. There was currently 92 applicants owed relief duty.

The Panel were made aware of the priority need, whereby individuals/families must be placed in temporary accommodation until a permanent solution can be found.

Those in priority need include for example:

- a pregnant woman or a person with whom she resides or might reasonably be expected to reside
- a person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside
- a person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness, learning disability or physical disability or other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside
- a person who is vulnerable as a result of having been a member of Her Majesty's regular naval, military or air forces
- a person who is vulnerable as a result of ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out
- a person who is homeless, or threatened with homelessness, as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster.

In terms of significant challenges the officer outlined that there were four main challenges:

- increase in the number of rough sleepers
- increase in the use of temporary accommodation
- increase in the number of people with complex needs
- lack of accommodation for the most chaotic character, e.g. individuals who have been accommodated by all providers but been evicted due to their behaviour.

Highlights included:

- secured additional funding for the sit up service, where 40 rough sleepers were accommodated during October from Middlesbrough and Stockton.
- Fantastic partnership working and a well-attended homelessness forum
- Rough sleeper Action Group

The Homelessness Forum meet on a quarterly basis and the officer would notify the Democratic Services officer of the next date of the forum so that Panel members could be invited to attend.

The Officer was thanked for her presentation and the Chair outlined that the Panel looked forward to further updates once commissioning has been fully implemented.

AGREED-

- That the update be noted
- That a further update be presented to the Panel once the commissioning of services had been fully implemented.

19/23 **FOODBANKS- DRAFT REPORT**

The Chair advised that the item was to be deferred until after the Parliamentary Election on 12 December 2019.

AGREED- that the item be deferred.

19/24 **COMMUNITY COHESION- DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE AND WORKPLAN FORM**

The Panel considered the draft terms of reference in respect to the Panel's review on community cohesion and integration.

AGREED- that the terms of reference outlined below be approved:

1. To examine the factors affecting community cohesion.
2. To determine how community cohesion is measured in Middlesbrough and to receive relevant statistical information.
3. To examine the work that the Local Authority and its partners are undertaking to promote community cohesion and integration.
4. To identify best practice and evidence-based approaches to build and strengthen cohesive communities.

19/25 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY UPDATE**

The Chair provided a verbal update in respect to matters discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny board on 14 November 2019.

AGREED- that the update be noted.