

## **HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2014 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Ms. Lowe (Chairman)

Cllr. Mrs. Clark (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Ayres, Mrs. Ayres, Ms. Chetram, Mrs. Cook, Eyre, Mrs. George and Mrs. Parkin

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Gaywood, Raikes and Towell

Cllrs. Clark, Firth, Fittock and Mrs. Sargeant were also present.

### 1. Appointment of Chairman

Resolved: That Cllr. Ms. Lowe be appointed as Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

(Cllr. Ms. Lowe in the Chair)

### 2. Appointment of Vice Chairman

Resolved: That Cllr. Mrs. Clark be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

### 3. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 April 2014 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 4. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

### 5. Actions from Previous Meeting

There were none.

### 6. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder's report was noted. The Portfolio Holder advised that at the Kent and Medway Community Safety Conference in Ashford on 4 June 2014, she and the Community Safety Manager had addressed the conference on the work they were doing around e-safety in Sevenoaks.

A Member expressed concern regarding the letter to Eric Pickles about extending the Rural Designations Order to allow building of affordable housing on greenbelt land where

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local communities feel there was a need. She was assured that this only applied to rural areas and communities that wanted it, and would not apply to Swanley.

### 7. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

### 8. Confirmation of Working Groups

Members considered the previous years working groups and whether the groups were still required and if so reviewed the membership and terms of reference.

Resolved: That

- a) the CCTV Working Group not be reconfirmed;
- b) the Road Safety Working Group be reconfirmed with the original membership and terms of reference 9 July 2014 (Minute 6); and
- c) the 'Squaring the housing circle', Joint Working Group with Local Planning & Environment Advisory Committee be reconfirmed but the membership increased to 6 (3 from each) and the membership be Councillors Mrs Ayres, Mrs George and Mrs Parkin.

### 9. Anti Fraud Team Report 2013/14

The Anti-Fraud Manager presented a report which set out the achievements of a successful year for the Anti-Fraud Team during 2013/14 and outlined it's priorities during 2014/15 taking account of the significant impact of the creation of the Single Fraud Investigation Service (S-FIS) which was due to impact on fraud investigation services provided by the Council. Transfer of staff for local authorities was to start in a phased approach between October 2014 and March 2016. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) would start negotiations for transferring staff 6 months before the transfer date that had been given for this Council as 1 February 2016. The S-FIS would only investigate benefit fraud. A decision would need to be taken as to whether the Council wanted to keep any staff in order to continue investigating suspected fraud within Council Tax Support claims and the fraud work currently being conducted within Council Tax (discounts and exemptions) as these two areas would remain the responsibility of the local authority.

In response to questions he advised that if staff transferred it would involve relocating and they would become civil servants employed by the DWP, it would not be under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE) but a similar kind of scheme. The Chief Finance Officer reported that all staff were being scoped for transfer, however he hoped that it would be possible to keep some staff. The joint working arrangements had been acknowledged and therefore staff at Dartford Borough Council were on the same timescales. It was hoped that as the major beneficiary of the

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Council Tax discount fraud investigations, Kent County Council (KCC) could be encouraged to contribute to the cost of the remaining service.

A Member asked how many years into the past could be investigated and whether the Data Protection Act inhibited investigations. The Anti-Fraud Manager advised that as it was a criminal offence being investigated, under 'exemptions' there were legal gateways to obtaining the information. The evidence existed, but the main issue was that banks were only required to keep the information for 6-7 years. There were some time bars on benefit fraud legislation, but often it was possible to obtain a small extension of three months to enable older cases to be taken to court. In response to further questions he advised that it was not possible to enforce debtors to repay lump sum payments, but in most cases claimants found with large amounts of money in an account would pay up.

The section worked closely with investigative colleagues in the DWP, any fraud conviction would not affect credit rating but they would have a criminal record if a prosecution was successfully brought against them. More often formal cautions and administrative penalties were used. The Committee was advised that the Chief Housing Officer was also a Magistrate and she gave the committee some further information on the sort of cases that were heard and how they were dealt with. Formal prosecution tended to be used on repeat offenders.

The Deputy Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources addressed the Committee advising that the Council needed to plan now for the potential loss of staff and a good starting point would be to have an Anti Fraud Policy on Council Tax (discounts & exemptions). Investigations could be made into keeping a small team and selling the investigative services to other authorities. The Anti Fraud Manger suggested there should be an over-riding Anti-Fraud policy for all Council Tax matters (i.e. Council Tax Support, discounts and exemptions).

The Anti Fraud Manger in response to a question as to whether the Individual Electoral Registration (IER) would help, responded that the Audit Commission already used the electoral roll as a good starting point for highlighting fraud, but the main source of information came from individual credit information and the investigating officer's local knowledge.

Resolved: That the content of the report and the work of the Anti-Fraud Team carried out in 2013/14 and that proposed for 2014/15, be noted.

### 10. Health Agenda with specific reference to Housing

The Chairman welcomed the new members of the Advisory Committee, especially Cllr. Mrs. Cook as Lead Member for Health and Cllr. Mrs. Parkin as Lead member for older people.

Cllr. Mrs. Cook gave some background information on the constitution and terms of reference of the Health Liaison Board and the work done so far, explaining that it was an important meeting point for Councillors who were serving or attending health meetings around the District and an opportunity to collate and disseminate the knowledge collectively gained to relevant committees. She invited members to attend the next meeting on Wednesday 9 July 2014 at 2 p.m. when the Board would be addressed by an external professional on Autism and Asperger Syndrome.

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She had been asked to serve on the West Kent Health and Wellbeing Board and had attended the first meeting where they had been asked to look at the membership and discuss whether they were the right people in post and whether the Board would be able to deliver. She would report back on these meetings later in the year. The Chairman stated that it was clear that housing was critical to the health agenda and that Cllr. Mrs. Cook provided an excellent link.

Cllr. Mrs. Parkin tabled a paper providing some information on Dementia. She advised that she had only recently been given this lead but had a background in the field and she intended to work closely with Members and Officers. She hoped to do a full powerpoint presentation at a future meeting on her work, the work of the Council and achievements made. In response to a question the Chairman advised that social care was the remit of the County Council but the Council was responsible for housing and adaptations and also needed to consider becoming more dementia friendly. The better the housing stock available the longer people could live independently in their own homes.

Cllr. Mrs. Parkin showed a short video on the subject ([http://www.local.gov.uk/adult-social-care/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/6206530/ARTICLE](http://www.local.gov.uk/adult-social-care/-/journal_content/56/10180/6206530/ARTICLE)).

The Chief Officer Communities and Business advised that the Council was already doing much work on the issue and the Chief Executive had asked that the Council become 'Dementia Friendly'. The Health and Communities Manager added that 60 frontline members of staff had already received training; further training was taking place in July which would be available for staff, members and external agencies such as the voluntary sector. A physical audit of the Argyle Road reception was being undertaken and Officers were receiving advice from the Alzheimers Society. The sort of adjustments that were required were actually good practice for all walks of life and would make the area more generally accessible. The Healthy Living Project Officer had a seat on the West Kent Forum. There was to be a 'Let's talk about Dementia' event in Swanley on 7 July 2014 jointly hosted by Sevenoaks District Council, Kent County Council and members of Swanley Dementia Friendly Communities Forum. There was also a workshop at the Holly Bush Court on 19 July 2014, and the Council would be taking part in the 'Whose Shoes' campaign.

The Chief Officer Communities and Business reported that under the Health and Safety Care Act 2012 the Health and Wellbeing Boards had been set up at County level, but there were also local ones set up to mirror the Clinical Commissioning Group areas. The Marmot Review had set out six policy objectives to help reduce health inequalities, and the document before Members aimed to support and complement Kent's Health Inequalities Action Plan 'Mind the Gap,' which had been aided by Professor Chris Bentley.

The Chief Housing Officer reported that the Kent Housing Group was made up of Council and Housing Association Officers. She personally sat on the group and the Executive Board. The Council currently worked on homelessness; the allocation policy gave priority to those in the District and people could bid for suitable properties. The Disabled Facilities Grant function had been brought back 'in house', which enabled people to stay in their own homes. Officers also worked closely with occupational therapy at KCC. With regards to 'fuel poverty' they helped look at bills and help people to change supplier and apply for grants. The team had just finalised arrangements with Dartford Borough

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Council to look, with external funding, at some of the Sevenoaks District wards that abut the Dartford Borough. The housing work contributed to the Older Person Strategy because it produced enhanced schemes for people with severe needs. Housing Associations were encouraged to survey and review older person stock. West Kent Housing provided an 'emerald' service in this regard. The 'Supporting People' programme also aimed to help people stay longer in their own homes.

The Health and Communities Manager reported that the Health Inequalities Plan had been approved in April 2013 and was being developed and reviewed via the multi-agency Health Action Team, which consisted of Council Officers including Housing, the voluntary sector, Clinical Commissioning Group representatives, Social Services and other and which met quarterly. The Marmot review had identified that poor housing conditions contributed to ill health. Referrals through the HERO project were monitored. There were currently forty families accessing the food bank with another 15 that could be worked with if there were capacity. Housing needs were also monitored.

A Member pointed out that with rising interest rates and possible repossessions the District could find itself with a higher proportion of people in housing need. The Chief Housing Officer agreed and said it was being looked at. The HERO Scheme was able to signpost, there were options for Housing Associations to purchase properties so that families could remain there, there were small pots of money to help with short term debts. Prevention from becoming homeless was the key.

Councillor Mrs. Sargeant was allowed to address the Committee and appealed for help finding the food bank at Swanley more suitable accommodation, with low or no rent to pay. They were currently given use of the Leisure Centre and CAB building in Swanley. She also encouraged Members to see for themselves first hand the excellent work and recommended going to the one in Bromley to see the type of accommodation that would be more appropriate.

### 11. Work Plan

The Chairman advised that it would be necessary to change the date of the meeting in October to allow the Chief Officer Environmental & Operation Services to report back on the CCTV review. It was agreed that the update on affordable housing and update on measures to combat slavery and human trafficking to be moved to the February meeting; Strategic Assessment for Community Safety and Action Plan be added to the meeting in February; the joint working group feedback be moved to the meeting in March; and Cllr Mrs Cook and Cllr Mrs Parkin give their presentations at the meeting in March 2015.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.49 PM

CHAIRMAN