

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2015 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Ms. Lowe (Chairman)

Cllr. Mrs. Clark (Vice Chairman)

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

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

36. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10 February 2015 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

37. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

38. Actions from Previous Meeting

The completed action was noted.

39. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder's update was noted.

40. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

With the Committee's agreement agenda item 8 was considered before the remaining agenda items.

41. Community Safety Strategy & Action Plan 2015-16

The Chief Officer Communities & Business introduced a report which reminded Members of the Council's obligation under the Crime & Disorder Act 1998 to undertake an audit of crime and disorder in the district and to co-operate in the development and implementation of a strategy and action plan to tackle it. The most recent Strategic Assessment in November 2014 had identified the priorities as: domestic abuse; burglary; anti-social behaviour including environmental offences; substance misuse; vehicle crime;

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road safety; theft; and young people's issues. The report sought approval for the 2015-16 Community Safety Strategy & Action Plan, which responded to these priorities.

Officers advised that the clearing of fly-tipping currently took place through the Clean Kent Campaign, which was being dissolved. The Chief Officer Environmental & Operational Services was investigating how fly-tipping would be approached in the future.

The Community Safety Manager explained that the Community Policing team would be proactive in visiting Speed Watch sites and assisting in enforcement. Although the number of speeding offences in the district was not high, it was a priority for residents and the district had the most Speed Watch volunteers in the county.

Although early intervention was not a separate heading in the Action Plan, the Community Safety Manager confirmed that early intervention was included in the actions found in the Plan and several projects were based around early intervention for young people on the cusp of offending. In response to a question, Officers added that the Council had worked to engage with the Gypsy and Traveller community in particular by establishing a weekly advice surgery at its Hever Road site, using the HERO project and the 8 to 12s project, while West Kent Housing was active, particularly in Swanley.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that the Community Safety Strategy & Action Plan for 2015-16 be approved.

42. Report on Health

The Committee noted the report of the Chairman of the Health Liaison Board, which informed the Committee of its recent work. The Board had concerns at the increases in obesity, dementia in an ageing population and incidents of autism. It had particularly focussed on matters of child and adolescent mental health, autism and in looking at the work of those Health and Wellbeing Boards which covered the district. It was a forum to share ideas and findings. The report also highlighted the importance of integrating health and wellbeing with housing, leisure and arts.

43. Older/Vulnerable people update

Cllr. Mrs. Parkin tabled documents explaining the Dementia Challenge and how to become Dementia Friendly communities. The Committee viewed a video from the Local Government Association entitled "Making a difference for those living with dementia". Cllr. Mrs. Parkin drew Members' attention to the document concerning the Kent Wide Action Alliance which had a number of ideas for making an area more Dementia Friendly. She noted that although dementia was receiving a lot of attention, sufferers should not be stigmatised.

The Chairman updated the Committee on the Dementia Friendly initiatives the Council was taking forward and supporting. She was aware that Dartford and Gravesham Borough Councils were running a Shop Safe, Stay Safe card scheme. She hoped that the

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Council could tie this with the Council's CCTV and the existing programme of radio contact between shops. Dementia Cafes were spreading. Although a Dementia Village may not be possible the Council was working closely with MOAT Housing Association to look at the possibility of having a dementia housing scheme. The Chief Executive was working to make the Council Dementia Friendly and training had taken place for Officers and Members

Members discussed the impact of dementia. The Chairman noted that support needed to be given to young carers of those with dementia. Several Members raised concern that some doctors appeared reluctant to diagnose dementia, that the tests used for diagnosis appeared to be inadequate and they considered that maybe mental health services were not given the same priority or financial support as physical health services. A Member of Sevenoaks Town Council suggested that 50 percent of older people lived alone and a high proportion in the town lived in private housing perhaps without the good support networks found in social housing and so were vulnerable to crime.

44. Joint Working Group with Planning

Cllrs. Mrs. Ayres, Ayres and Mrs. Parkin gave a presentation on the Housing Challenge within the Sevenoaks district and reconciling the planning restrictions with the need for additional affordable accommodation. There were shortages of appropriate housing for both older and younger people. The district's population was slightly older than the South East average and the period 2010 to 2026 would see a 31 percent increase in those residents over the age of 65 years. Housing generally needed to be made available to younger people and families for them to stay in the district. The report suggested four options to meet the challenge: the use of previously developed land in the Green Belt; increasing the density of new housing developments; the better use of land; and the development of retirement homes and villages to provide a better choice for older people to downsize and free up family homes.

The Committee had a wide discussion on the options available to the Council. Some Members indicated that any change to the Green Belt would be a "slippery slope" and any land removed would immediately rise significantly in price. Some said that empty rooms above shops would be good for housing because of their central location, although access could be a problem. Those looking to downsize would want to remain in their local area so they would not lose their existing support networks.

The Chief Housing Officer advised that potential homelessness was dealt with proactively to avoid eviction and as a result Bed & Breakfasts were hardly used for housing and the Housing Register had reduced from over 2,000 to about 700. A Strategic Housing Market Assessment was due to be carried out later in the year which would comprehensively identify types of housing needed in the district. To address under-occupation, The Council and West Kent Housing each funded half of the salary of an Under-Occupation Officer which had been very successful in providing more family homes. There was a financial incentive scheme too called Small is Beautiful. The KCC No Use Empty funding Scheme was accessed by the Council to help owners put empty properties back into use. Mutual swap-days were organised by West Kent Housing and under and over occupied tenants can consider swapping.

Action: The Chief Housing Officer to circulate to Members the number of family sized accommodation units which had been freed up.

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The Chairman considered that dementia and housing needs were the two top priorities within the remit of her Portfolio.

45. Work Plan

The Chairman reported that the Strategic Housing Market Assessment may be ready to present to the Committee at its meeting in early 2016. Cllr. Mrs. Parkin expressed interest in personally bringing further information about addressing housing needs to that same meeting.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.42 PM

CHAIRMAN