

HOUSING & HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2021 commencing at 5.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Maskell (Chairman)

Cllr. Coleman (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Dr. Canet, Clack, Perry Cole, G. Darrington, Griffiths, Harrison, Parkin, Piper and Roy

An apology for absence was received from Cllr. Foster

60. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Housing and Health Advisory Committee held on 24 November 2020 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

61. Declarations of Interest

There were no additional declarations of interest.

62. Actions from Previous Meetings

There were none.

63. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder, and Chairman reported that there were a range of pressures that the Housing and Health Team were currently facing, particularly with the impact of Covid-19 related homelessness and the increased pressures on temporary accommodation. Homelessness approaches presenting in crisis as a result of domestic abuse and family breakdowns were increasing and putting immense pressures on the team resources. There was an excellent response coming forward and the HERO Team continued to support the increase of those who needed advice. This included helping 456 with Covid-19 related referrals, 17 people had been helped to apply for mortgages holidays and the team were dealing with increasing problems with unemployment, advice on benefits and 175 emergency packs distributed. A positive response had been that 11 of the homelessness households had moved into Private Sector lettings.

Members were advised that Rebecca Wilcox had been appointed as the new Head of Housing and would be starting in March. Rav Kensrey had been in post as the new Homelessness Prevention Manager, and the new team structure was in place. A new Accommodation Team had been created, looking at the range of housing

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options offered in the District and a new team leader, Jenny Weston would be taking up this post. Jess Morgan, currently a HERO Officer had been successful in her application to the Housing Accommodation Officer role, with recruitment underway for a new HERO Officer. Having the team fully staffed would help reduce the pressures on the team.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) Next Steps accommodation programme was providing support under the Everyone In initiative which required all local housing authorities to house rough sleepers during the pandemic. The team had been successful in its application to MHCLG for £168,000 revenue funding being used for accommodation costs occurred, as part of the additional temporary additional expenditure. Additional funding had also been secured for further supporting the individuals, particularly with complex needs.

Following the renewed partnership agreement with West Kent Housing Association, work was being undertaken to maintain Vine Court Road as supported accommodation in the district and jointly funding refurbishment to enable rough sleepers to be housed there.

The Chairman advised that additional funding had been secured from MHCLG's Green Homes grants of nearly £1.5m had been secured to look at insulation measures for mobile home properties that tackle fuel poverty and make the homes more energy efficient. It was hoped that 130 units could benefit from the grant scheme.

In conclusion, the Chairman advised that the One You team were looking at online services that could be offered.

Members asked questions on the Portfolio Holder's update.

The Chairman took the opportunity to invite the Chief Officer, People and Places to address the Committee who advised that the biggest concerns for the teams were the increase of people reaching out for help at the later stages. The team were witnessing increasing high risk domestic abuse cases and more people attending in crisis as a result of lockdown, resulting in more emergency accommodation being required.

The District's Local Strategic Partnership has launched its Community Wellbeing Fund, which will focus on funding projects supporting digital inclusion, addiction, NEETs and mental health.

64. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

65. To note minutes of the Health Liaison Board

Resolved: The minutes were noted.

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66. Proposals for a New Housing Strategy

The Housing Policy Manager shared a presentation on the proposals for a new Housing Strategy, which included the background and local policy context, with the current strategic priorities. The proposed timetable was discussed, alongside the proposed approach to be taken. Members were advised that the Homelessness strategy was a legal document and going forward it would be included as a separate part of the Housing Strategy.

Members took the opportunity to ask questions.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

Resolved: that,

- a) that the proposed timetable for the development of a new housing strategy, as set out in Appendix A be agreed;
- b) a new homelessness strategy be developed;
- c) the existing and other secondary housing intelligence be used to avoid the commissioning of external consultants; and
- d) a new affordable housing target be introduced, to be monitored and reviewed by the Housing & Health Advisory Committee as a standing item.

CHANGE IN AGENDA ITEM ORDER

With the agreement of the Committee the Chairman brought forward consideration of agenda item 9.

67. West Kent Housing Association update

The Chairman welcomed Tracy Allison, West Kent Association's Chief Executive (WKHA) and Cathy McCarthy, Housing Director WKHA, to the meeting. Members received a presentation on the partnership working, the challenges for maximising social housing, the potential for partnership approach, Covid-19 recovery and response due to Lockdown 3 and the 2021 focus. Members welcomed the messages within the presentation and were pleased to hear that repair works that were postponed due to Covid-19 were in the majority caught up. Members took the opportunity to ask questions regarding Moultain Hill site, in Swanley and looking at low carbon homes.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

68. Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy

The Private Sector Housing Manager presented the report which set out in Appendix A the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy. Members were advised that following the introduction of the Housing Act 2004, local authorities must take enforcement action to deal with properties with any Category 1 and 2 Hazards, as assessed under the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and could charge for any housing enforcement action which was a key change.

Members were advised that informal resolution would always be the starting place to help them comply with the regulatory requirements, however charges could be made under 7 types of enforcement actions under the Act. Members were also advised that some of the policies included as appendices had been previously approved but were included for a completeness.

Members discussed the policy and asked questions of clarification. The Committee was advised that if the level of harm was deemed to be categorised as Level 4 then this would result in prosecution action being started. It was also noted that there was a typographical error on page 21 of the agenda pack which should read rogue rather than rouge.

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, to recommend to Council that the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy as set out in Appendix A, be adopted.

69. Work Plan

The work plan was noted with the Progress on the Housing register being moved to the meeting on 28 September 2021.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.10 PM

CHAIRMAN