



Minutes of the meeting of the HOUSING AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE held at 7.00 PM on THURSDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2017

**Present:** Councillors Coventry, Eastman (substituting for Councillor D McCall) Ferrans, Ganatra, Geaney, Khan, Wallis, and C Williams

**Officer:** E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

**Also Present:** Councillors Long and P Williams, M Kelleher (Service Director: Housing and Regeneration), D Elliott (MK One-Stop Shop for the Homeless), R Wightman (MK Winter Night Shelter), M Dunn (Secretary, Fullers Slade Residents' Association) and 1 member of the public

**Apologies:** Councillors Burke, P Geary, Hosking and D McCall

**Disclosures:** None

## **HAC12 MINUTES**

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2017 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## **HAC13 SERVICE DIRECTOR: HOUSING AND REGENERATION**

**Witness: M Kelleher (Service Director: Housing and Regeneration)**

Michael Kelleher, Service Director: Housing and Regeneration, introduced himself to the Committee, gave a background resumé of his past experience and outlined what he thought were the problems currently facing the Council's Housing Service. During the presentation the Committee noted that:

- a) He had worked in local authority housing service roles since 1992, including Head of Service, some which had been very challenging;
- b) He had been with Milton Keynes Council since May and had found everyone very welcoming, both councillors and officer colleagues. He thought that there was a huge commitment from councillors, staff and the public to achieve results. The Council was looking at innovative solutions and at ways of doing things differently;
- c) Homelessness was a national problem – since 2010 there had been a 784% rise in homelessness across the UK;
- d) In 2010 the Council had 84 households in temporary accommodation, but by March 2017 this had risen to 754 – a local increase of 798%;

- e) However progress had been made to reduce the use of room-only hotel accommodation, falling from 68 households in April 2017 to 1 in September 2017;
- f) The Council was developing a robust approach to tackling the problem of homelessness at its source by working with households to prevent homelessness before the situation became critical;
- g) From 1 April 2018 there would be more duties and obligations on the Council as a result of the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. Under the terms of the Act, the Council would now have a responsibility to everyone, regardless of priority, need, or local connection;
- h) Pilots had been running in Wales for 3 years and the number of applications to local authorities for housing assistance had grown. There were implications for the Council's workload; he was looking to address these through a restructure of the Housing Service which would be presented to Cabinet later in the year;
- i) He had found the Council very insular and inward looking in the way it operated to provide housing services and he thought it had lost emphasis on its role in working with partners and other organisations;
- j) The Council needed to enable regeneration and promote growth to provide sufficient homes locally. A reduction in homelessness would only come about by building more houses;
- k) There were also issues with the Council's overall strategic capacity. It did not have an enabling function, such as a positive liaison with housing associations;
- l) Currently, the Council did not have a Housing Strategy as this had never been a statutory requirement. However, he thought one was needed in order to provide an agenda and direction for the Housing Service;
- m) There was no business plan for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) either. YourMK and Mears had been commissioned to carry out repairs and maintenance work, but they were not working to a business plan. A business plan for the HRA would identify priorities on where and how money should be invested;
- n) Within the Council there did not appear to be a sound understanding of commissioning or looking at how to deliver services differently; could another organisation do it better on the Council's behalf?
- o) The Service Director: Housing and Regeneration saw his role as being to reduce homelessness in Milton Keynes and to work with others to eliminate this.

The Committee then discussed the points raised by the Service Director: Housing and Regeneration in his presentation and raised a number of questions with him. Further to the points covered above, the Committee also noted that:

- a) Current obligations towards the homeless, based on vulnerability, housing need or local connections would disappear with the

introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act on 1 April 2018, which would bring in a completely different system. Homelessness and its prevention was more than just a bricks and mortar problem;

- b) The Council needed to work to develop a support plan for everyone who presented as homeless or at the risk of homelessness. This was likely to require a new IT system to capture the right data;
- c) So far it had not been possible to develop any policies or procedures as the Government had not yet issued the promised guidance on how local authorities should operate under the Homelessness Reduction Act. The Government, aware of the extra obligations of local authorities under the new legislation had made some additional, transitional funding available, although there was no indication as to how much Milton Keynes might receive;
- d) The Council was consulting extensively on developing a housing strategy. A list of options was being worked on for consultation by stakeholders, including the public. The results of the stakeholder consultation would be used to write a strategy, which, once complete, would be consulted on again;
- e) He hoped that within 5 years, Milton Keynes Council would have made a significant difference and reduced local homelessness;
- f) Although the private sector would come to Milton Keynes for development opportunities, the Council had a strategic responsibility to encourage development by both housing associations and the private sector. The Council's regeneration policy would be key to this;
- g) On average it cost the Council £10k to refurbish each of the properties it had bought on the open market.

Councillor Long, Cabinet Member for Housing, commented that the provision of housing in Milton Keynes was dominated by the planning process which was led by national legislation. The new Housing Strategy would need to balance the Planning Strategy.

The Committee also heard that there was a public perception that the Council did not care about those in housing need. This was offset by the belief locally that the Council could solve everything. Unfortunately, this was not the case and customer service was not at the top of the agenda, with many of the more difficult enquiries received by the Council not being responded to.

The Committee was advised that the Housing Revenue Account was not as buoyant as it might be, although there was no need to outsource it yet. However, if nothing was done to rectify this soon, then in 10-15 years' time it might be necessary; a lot would depend on how the Housing Revenue Account business plan panned out.

Although it was not possible to start work on how the Council would deliver its obligations under the Homelessness Reduction Act as there were no guidelines from central government, the Council needed to apply more compassion to those whom it could help now. There were fewer solutions available now than in 2010, with the private sector shrinking, rents being too high and reluctance by private landlords to take on those in receipt of benefits.

Regeneration was seen as the key to a number of issues, including a previous lack of investment in the Housing Revenue Account. First indications from the current stock condition survey indicated that properties were in a worse condition than expected. The Council would need help to manage investment in the Housing Revenue Account and to inform the business plan. New homes would be built to a higher standard and be energy efficient and a large investment of resources into Milton Keynes was needed to ensure that development and growth across the city was of benefit to local people.

The Chair then thanked the Service Director; Housing and Regeneration for his attendance at the meeting and on his contribution to the Committee's discussions.

**RESOLVED -**

1. That Michael Kelleher, Service Director: Housing and Regeneration be thanked for his attendance at the meeting and his presentation on the future provision of housing services by Milton Keynes Council, and how this can be achieved.
2. That if members of the Committee have any other questions they would like to address to the Service Director: Housing and Regeneration, they send them to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer who will co-ordinate the forwarding of the questions to the Service Director and then circulate his responses back to the Committee.

**HAC14**

**WINTER NIGHT SHELTER AND THE ONE-STOP SHOP FOR HOMELESS SUPPORT**

**Witnesses: R Wightman (MK Winter Night Shelter) and D Elliott (MK One-Stop Shop)**

Mr Wightman opened his presentation by introducing Ms Elliott, who had been appointed to run the One-Stop Shop and through the Committee, thanking the Council for what they had done so far in making premises available to the Winter Night Shelter all year round and for its on-going support for the One-Stop Shop.

He went on to explain that securing a permanent location, albeit for 3 years, was enabling the Winter Night Shelter to put into operation the big picture plan of being able to operate all year round to which it had aspired for a number of years.

Mr Wightman then outlined the basic operational plans for the new Winter Night Shelter:

- a) It would be located on the ground floor of the Old Bus Station and could now open 7 days a week, 365 days a year from 8.00 am to 10.30 pm;
- b) From 5.30 pm to 7.30 pm each evening it would be a reception centre for those needing a bed for the night, although the overnight accommodation was still being provided by church/community centres on a rota basis;
- c) At 7.30 pm each evening a bus would take clients to that day's accommodation centres for an evening meal and a bed and return them to the Old Bus Station in the morning;

- d) The Winter Night Shelter planned to make effective use of the building, which would be refurbished over the next couple of months. Facilities would include lockers, showers, a laundry and a café.

However, Mr Wightman also made the point that the Winter Night Shelter was staffed by volunteers and that unfortunately 60% of those who were homeless had other problems which were too great for volunteers to deal with. Ideally, it needed the support of 1 or 2 professional welfare officers. He also made the point that the problem of homelessness had greatly increased over the last few years. For the first 4 years or so of its operation, the Winter Night Shelter had been able to secure offers of housing for everyone who came through its doors. For the last few years it had only been able to secure housing for 20-30% of its clients.

The Committee then heard from Ms Elliott about her vision for the One-Stop Shop. Establishing the One-Stop Shop was still at the consultative stage, but its aim would be to work with partners to prevent homelessness and to support those who were already homeless. Collaborative working with partners would be essential as would be signposting clients to each other's services as appropriate.

She was working on a paper setting out why people became homeless, how this could be prevented, and how to rehabilitate those who had been sleeping rough for any length of time. She would also identify the touch points that the various organisations had with the homeless and how these could be used to best advantage.

Partners working with the One-Stop Shop would be the best in their fields and a duplication of services needed to be avoided.

During the ensuing question and answer session with Mr Wightman and Ms Elliot, the Committee noted that:

- a) The plan was for the Winter Night Shelter to be operational from the Old Bus Station by 1 December 2017, but there was a lot of work to do before this could be achieved;
- b) The Old Bus Station was a Grade II listed building but discussions were already underway with the local conservation officer and architects about how it could be adapted;
- c) The timetable was as follows:
  - 2nd part of September Winter Night Shelter to sign the lease with the Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP);
  - Early October MKDP would approve the plans for the conversion works to the Old Bus Station;
  - Works to be carried out during October and November, with the Winter Night Shelter moving in at the end of November, ready for 1 December start;
- d) Neither the Winter Night Shelter, nor the One-Stop Shop could stop homelessness happening nor address the root causes, but by working with the right partners they could start to alleviate the problems;

- e) The Winter Night Shelter would be fundraising amongst its supporters to cover some of the costs of the refurbishment, estimated to be between £30-£35k. So far, whenever the Winter Night Shelter had needed it, help it had been given; each potential problem had been solved as it came up;
- f) Space was limited and there could be tensions with the competing needs of others and there would be a need to prioritise services and how they were delivered;
- g) Ms Elliot advised that she had contacted the college about it providing clients with help in compiling CVs and access to some basic education courses;
- h) The number of women who were rough sleeping had increased. In the first few years of operation, the Winter Night Shelter had only dealt with 3 women but now as many as 30% of their clients were women. Generally, circumstances which led to women sleeping rough were much more extreme than those for men;
- i) The possibility of the Winter Night Shelter / One-Stop Shop providing reception centre services for the BusShelter MK project had been considered, as well as offering facilities to the various members of the Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership.

The Committee was committed to facilitate what the Winter Night Shelter and One-Stop Shop were trying to achieve, requesting that Mr Wightman and Ms Elliott kept it updated on progress and to let it know if they needed any further assistance to make the service a reality.

#### RESOLVED

- 1. That the representatives of the Milton Keynes Winter Night Shelter and the One-Stop Shop be thanked for their updates on the progress of this project.
- 2. That Mr Wightman and Ms Elliott, via the Overview and Scrutiny Officer, keep the Committee up to date with further progress and, when necessary, request the Committee's assistance with any unforeseen difficulties which may arise.

**HAC15**

#### **MENTAL HEALTH PROVISION FOR THE HOMELESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

##### **Witness: Councillor P Williams, Chair of the Mental Health Provision for the Homeless Task and Finish Group**

Councillor P Williams updated the Committee on the work the Task and Finish Group had carried out to examine the provision of mental health services to the homeless and outlined the recommendations the Task and Finish Group would be making in its report which would be presented to Cabinet on 3 October 2017.

#### RESOLVED

- 1. That Councillor P Williams and the other members of the Task and Finish Group be thanked for the work they had done on this issue.
- 2. That Cabinet be advised that the Committee endorses and supports the recommendations made in the Task and Finish Group's report

and requests the support of the Cabinet in ensuring that these recommendations are achieved.

## **HAC16**

### **UPDATE ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH FULLERS SLADE RESIDENTS BY YOURMK**

The Chair tabled, as an information item, a briefing note from YourMK about its activities in relation to the Fullers Slade estate, as he considered the mismatch of what he and other councillors were hearing from the residents of Fullers Slade and the official statements from YourMK on their engagement activities, to be of particular concern.

The briefing note provided background about how YourMK and the Mears Group had been appointed by the Council, the general governance principles for the regeneration programme and a detailed list of its engagement activities with the Fullers Slade residents which had started on 24 June 2017.

The meeting was attended by a representative of the Fullers Slade Residents' Association, who, on behalf of the local residents, expressed concern at the level of engagement by YourMK detailed in the briefing note. She explained that the residents of Fullers Slade were desperate to engage with YourMK in order to discuss the regeneration of their estate but were feeling disempowered because, in their view, they were only being fed crumbs as YourMK was not sharing information with them as promised. She went on to say that residents had been advised that they would be told about the results of the stock condition survey at the public event on 25 August, but that this had not happened; residents were therefore feeling very frustrated by the whole process. On behalf of the Fullers Slade Residents' Association, she invited the Committee to visit Fullers Slade to talk to residents about their concerns.

Councillor Long, Cabinet Member for Housing, commented that he had not received any information from YourMK for some time either. It was obviously not a top down process and this made it difficult for the residents to engage. Councillor Long said that having heard from the residents' representative, he was now very concerned about the process and would need to discuss this with YourMK.

The Committee was concerned that dates for publication of the stock condition survey did not appear to have been met and felt that there were lessons to be learnt about how YourMK engaged with residents that needed to be taken on board before the next tranche of community engagement activity started on the Lakes Estate.

#### **RESOLVED**

1. That the Housing and Community Committee were disappointed that information with regard to the Fullers Slade Stock Condition Survey was not yet available. The Committee noted the proposal to share this information at a public meeting on 19 October 2017 but considers that this information should be made available for inclusion on the agenda of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 3 October 2017.

In order to achieve this, the Stock Condition Survey needs to be sent to the Cabinet Committee Manager, Shelagh Muir, by 12 noon on 19 September 2017.

2. That in accordance with their request, arrangements be made with the Fullers Slade Residents' Association for the Committee to undertake a site visit to view the area for themselves and to gain a better understanding of the residents' concerns in relation to the proposed regeneration programme and how this information was being communicated to them.

**HAC17**

**UPDATE ON FIRE SAFETY IN HIGH-RISE FLATS AND OTHER  
SIMILAR BUILDINGS IN MILTON KEYNES**

**RESOLVED**

That the Committee receives and notes the following updates on fire-safety in high-rise flats and other similar buildings in Milton Keynes:

- i. Information from Milton Keynes Council to residents in Stephenson House;
- ii. Position Statement Update from Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority on fire safety in Stephenson House;
- iii. General Fire Safety Information for Residents issued by the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service;
- iv. Response from the Place Directorate on fire safety issues in planning applications.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 09.00 PM