

Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Subject: Final report and recommendations of the Homelessness and Hardship in the Borough Scrutiny Working Group

Date: Monday 15th December 2014

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To inform Scrutiny Members of the findings and recommendations of the **Homelessness and Hardship in Gedling Borough Scrutiny Working Group**.

2. BACKGROUND

The 'Homelessness and Hardship in Gedling Borough' Scrutiny Review was appointed as one of three strategically linked in-depth reviews proposed in the 2013/2014 Scrutiny work programme. The overarching aim has been to examine progress of the Council's ambitions as a community leader, driving ongoing partnership approaches in securing social and economic sustainability within Gedling Borough. The findings of the review should therefore be considered in conjunction with those of the **Reducing Unemployment in Gedling Borough and Transport Links to, and within Gedling Borough** in depth reviews.

Working group members: Councillors Lawrence (Chair) Hope, Weisz, P. Allan, Blair, Hughes, Paling, Hewson, Bexon.

Subject to the approval of this Committee, the recommendations will be tabled at the next available meeting of Cabinet, and Councillor Wheeler, Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing will be asked to provide a response to the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee within 28 days of that meeting.

3. PROJECT SCOPE

In scoping the review, members identified the following lines of enquiry:

- Recognising that there are indications of increased hardship and homelessness in the Borough, the review aimed to evaluate the current and future impact of multi-agency service provision and to establish what further could be achieved.

- The review would also examine the implications of proposals by the County Council to reduce adult social care funding, their possible impact on key support organisations and the subsequent implications for Gedling Borough Council's statutory duty of care in the Borough.

Project Scope: Appendix 2.1

4. WORK PROGRAMME

Members undertook the following work programme:

Meeting date	Work Programme	Agreed actions
22nd October 2013	Scoping meeting: Members met with the Service Manager, Housing and Localities to receive an overview of the current legislative environment and potential impact on Housing Needs services.	Draft scope produced Representatives of Framework and Notts Housing Advice Service to be invited to the next meeting.
27th November 2013	Members met with Michael Leng, Operational Director of Framework, and Sharon Batey of the Nottinghamshire Housing Advice Service	To meet with the Portfolio Holder, Health and Housing to discover
6th February 2014	Members met with the Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing and Service Manager, Housing and Localities to receive an overview of key initiatives and approaches to address hardship in the Borough.	To arrange a day of visits to Elizabeth House and SureStart Centres around Gedling Borough.
6th June 2014	Councillors Hope, Lawrence and Hewson visited Elizabeth House, Carlton Children's Centre and Surestart Netherfield.	Feedback to be provided at next working group meeting
11th June 2014	The group reviewed evidence to date and identified interim recommendations.	To meet with the Chair of NCC Adult Social Care Committee.
2nd September 2014	An overview of Nottinghamshire County Council 'Supporting People' funding reductions, with particular reference to their impact on services in Gedling - County Councillor Muriel Weisz, Chair, Adult Social Care and Health Committee	To meet with representatives of Gedling Homes and RCAN.
11th September 2014	Members received information on rural poverty levels in the Borough and approaches used by Gedling Homes to address homelessness and hardship.	Final report and recommendations to be produced and circulated for comments.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Homelessness: Gedling Borough Council Housing Needs Service

The Housing Needs Team is currently experiencing unprecedented levels of need, mainly as a result of the impact of recent welfare reform. Gedling Homes is beginning to evict those tenants who go into arrears. There are currently approximately 10 cases of eviction by Gedling Homes per year and this could potentially escalate as a result of the reforms. Prior to eviction however tenants are given help with budgeting skills and offered options, including engaging with the credit union. Eviction is still seen as the final resort. There are some instances where generations of families have been on benefit, and there are concerns about their ability to manage the changes in benefits resulting from welfare reform. Added to this are the new rules for claimants up to 35 years of age, which particularly impact upon separated fathers with access to children as they can now only receive Housing Benefit for shared houses and are being advised to share with a friend.

The wider impact of the current economy and of competition in the private rented sector is also a factor. We may see scenarios where a person is claiming a higher rent for a 2 bedroom property in the private rented sector than they were previously claiming for a three bedroom housing association property. The Council has limited influence over rent increases, and if Gedling Homes or another Housing Association evicts, the Council has a duty of care which could result in a more expensive rehousing. However the process of eviction involves the issue of a suspended possession order, then a 2nd order before the courts would issue a final eviction notice. Judges are reluctant to do this. Another scenario could be where intentionality is involved. There is a procedure whereby if someone is deemed to have intentionally made themselves homeless, the Council would be within its rights not to accept the duty to rehouse, however would still provide advice and assistance and signposting to the private rented sector. Members were informed that the most significant area of growth has been youth homelessness, due to increased cases of parental eviction. Broxtowe youth Forum is working with schools to raise awareness and dispel myths around re housing. There is also a high demand for emergency housing associated with domestic violence. It was acknowledged that some clients respond to advice and help more readily than others, and it is often only at the last minute that clients explain the issues they are tackling. There is a right of appeal against eviction right up to Judicial Review. There are presently 2,300 people on the housing register. The Council now has a Common Allocations Policy with neighbouring authorities. There are presently 21 registered local Housing Associations to

which clients are able to bid for properties. Changes in the Common Allocations Policy allow Local Authorities more freedom to prioritise clients on their register on the basis of affordability, size and features. Now, a client must be in priority housing need in order to join the register, which potentially reduces the list by up to 65%. They must also have a connection to the Borough. Priority bandings and weightings are applied in each case, with the majority of people on the housing register seeking family accommodation. Those over 50 or on disability allowance can remain on the list. Members were informed that, as these reforms come into effect, the Council may experience an increase in appeals, however will also have more scope to rehouse those in greatest need.

5.1.1 Current position in the light of changes to the Common Allocations Policy

Bandings

- **Band 1:** home no longer suitable for needs/disability, fleeing extreme violence, existing tenancy coming to an end
- **Band 2:** acceptance as homeless for 12 weeks (then move up to band 1) – often rehoused into 2 bed flats
- **Band 3:** People who would benefit from a move i.e. asthma sufferers/steep stairs, but not top priority.
- **Band 4:** Removed

a) Outcomes of banding reviews including exclusions from the register for the last 6 months:

There have been 33 banding reviews, of these 8 resulted in a change to the original band, but in all 8 cases additional information was provided.

b) Outcomes of homeless appeals for the last 6 months: There have been 2 requests, neither has yet been decided.

c) Break down of the number of applications in each of the 4 bands as at 15/11/2013

Band 1: 56 **Band 2:** 139 **Band 3:** 541 **Band 4:** 1308 (prior to removal of this banding)

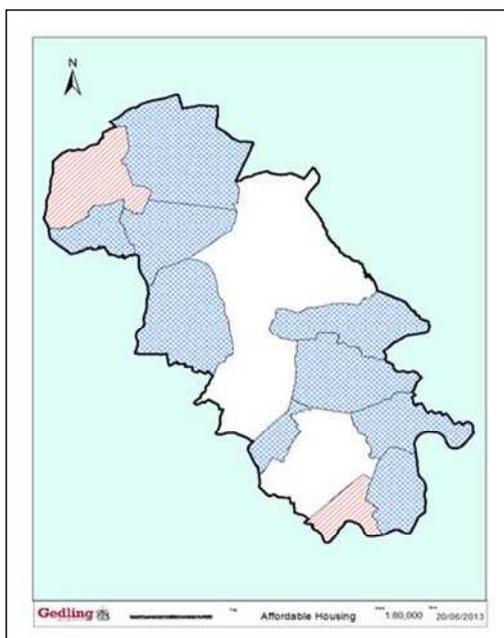
Members were particularly interested in how the Council works to ensure that as far as possible whether the right sort of homes are built to match identified local needs - for example, do we consider what is needed in Calverton alongside what

is needed Borough-wide, and are we are doing anything with the bigger landlords to enable them to link up with developers to ensure we meet housing need?

Members were advised that the Housing Needs team now work closely with the Planning team on pre application processes and discussions with developers, which is underpinned and supported by an Affordable Housing supplementary planning document. An annual Housing Market Assessment is conducted which this year has identified that we need around 300 affordable homes. The current makeup of the housing register also reflects and informs levels of demand, and feeds into that annual assessment. The Covalent performance management system has a performance indicator for affordable homes.

Gedling currently requires:

- Blue: 30% affordable housing in Ravenshead, Linby, Papplewick, Bestwood, Mapperley, Woodborough, Lambley, Burton Joyce
- Red: 10% affordable housing in Newstead Village and Netherfield
- White: 20% affordable housing everywhere else.



Map illustrating the varying percentages off affordable housing acquired across the borough.

These quotas are based on current house and land prices. Only sites of 15 dwellings or more are required to contribute to affordable housing quotas. The affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document provides more details.

The various evidence bases are then used to influence discussions with developers, whereby they are advised to provide x amount of affordable homes as a proportion of their development. There is also a growing need for 2 bedroom properties. In discussions with developers and assessment of planning applications the 'Robust Viability' model is applied. This is an industry standard which demonstrates the cost to developers of providing affordable housing. Engagement by developers with private Landlords is actively encouraged through the Gedling Developers Forum, for example Landlords are regularly invited to hear guest speakers at Developers Forum events. These events include presentations by the Nottingham Credit Union, British Gas and EON – energy efficiency and the green deal, Council Tax and CT Benefit, advice on tenancy agreements and choosing the right tenants for the right property. The overarching aim is to 'up-skill' the private rented sector and to effect influence with developers. This is already yielding benefits as the Council has built up a good relationship with some of the Landlords and persuaded them to rent out at the local housing allowance rate. Currently around 35 private landlords attend the forums. Members were interested to know who buys up the affordable housing. It was explained that the developer is required to provide so many, then, once they have been built, social housing agencies / companies enter into an agreement with developers to buy and rent out those properties.

The Council also supports various initiatives that aim to address housing need, for example by promoting supported mortgages and the 1st Buy initiative in the private sector – previously this only applied to new build however can now be old and new.

5.1.2 Hardship: process for referrals to the Food Bank

In response to Members' queries, the following information was provided about the availability of vouchers for the Food Bank:

If someone approaches the Council needing food, Housing Officer are authorised to issue a food voucher, having firstly established why the person/persons require the food voucher. It is then explained that the food voucher entitles them to 3 days' worth of food (one voucher is issued per household, be that a single person or a family of 4). The Housing Needs Team holds vouchers for Daybrook Baptist Church and Carlton Methodist Church Food Banks and the opening times are on the front of the voucher. The voucher is completed in full and details added to a centrally maintained log before being issued. If someone needs a food voucher and the food banks in the Gedling area are closed, staff are able to call 07854 690 694 to establish where the nearest food bank is and direct clients accordingly.

5.1.3 Main causes of homelessness

The figures for the previous 6 months for advice and prevention were as follows:

Reason for approach in last 6 months	Number
Loss of rented/tied accomm not due to end of AST	8
Loss of tenancy - other	6
Other reason for loss of last settled home	7
Relationship breakdown - violent	34
Rent arrears - loss of tenancy HA	7
Rent arrears - loss of tenancy PS	20
Return from abroad	1
Sleeping rough	4
Split household	1
Violence other	9
Violent breakdown of relationship involving associated persons	2
	99

In addition there had been 46 homeless applications taken in the last 2 quarters:

Reason for homeless application	Number
Parental eviction	5
Other relatives/friends no longer willing to accommodate	6
Non violent relationship breakdown	5
Violent breakdown with partner	7
Violent breakdown with partner and associated persons	1

Other forms of violence	1
Harassment, threats, intimidation	1
Mortgage arrears	5
Rent arrears RSL or RP	1
Rent arrears private sector	1
Termination of assured shorthold	8
Loss of rented tied other than end of AST	1
Left prison/remand	1
Left institution or LA care	1
Other, emergency, sleeping rough, returned from abroad	2

5.1.4 How the Council promotes the option for people to sub-let bedrooms

As part of the South Nottinghamshire Homeless Action Plan the Council has agreed that information on taking in lodgers would be produced by Broxtowe Youth Homelessness Service, which they have done in order that the Housing Needs Team can distribute the pack to appropriate candidates. The Spare Room Pack was circulated to working group members for information, along with a copy of the 2012/13 Homelessness Watch report.

5.1.5 Cold weather – the number of people we have housed in recent years and the number of nights

Year	no of nights	no of individuals
2009/10	29	7
2010/11	14	6
2011/12	60	5
2012/13	70	9

5.2 Framework and Elizabeth House: Taking a cross-boundary approach to emergency housing need: Michael Leng, Operations Director at Framework

Michael Leng, Operations Director at Framework, Nottinghamshire provided an overview of the history and aims of Framework and specifically the role of Elizabeth House, the organisations' emergency accommodation and support facility in Gedling. Prior to 2003 there was very little specialist homelessness support in the Borough. In the lead-up to 2003 a lot of prevention services were developed in the Borough and across districts, which led in turn to the establishment of Elizabeth House.

5.2.1 Key steps taken to establish the project

- Gedling Rushcliffe and Broxtowe Councils had all independently recognised the lack of emergency accommodation for single homeless people in their areas and had approached Framework about this.
- Nottingham City Council established the Gateway scheme which restricted access to emergency accommodation in the City from bordering authorities.
- The three Councils recognised that they could not afford to develop a direct access hostel with 24 hour staff cover exclusively for their area.
- They were also aware that their 2007/8 homelessness strategies would need to address the shortage of provision for single homeless people.
- Framework brought the Councils together and initiated discussions on setting up a joint emergency accommodation scheme. They modelled their plans on their other successful emergency accommodation projects, such as Russell House in Newark and Sherwood.
- A joint working protocol was established and signed by all parties involved to confirm who is eligible for the project and how the authorities should manage and prioritise their referrals and arrangements for move-on accommodation.

5.2.3 Potential impacts of Nottinghamshire County Council Supporting People Budget reductions.

Members were informed that the advent of Universal Credit coupled with proposals by the County Council to reduce grants to voluntary organisations from the Supporting People Budget will potentially have a significant detrimental effect upon specialist preventative and recovery services going forward. In 2010 a similar scenario left Framework, Nottinghamshire with a 45% cut in grant funding, which prompted a remodelling of the organisation and a reduction in the level and breadth of specialist services. There is concern that further reductions may result in the elimination of those specialist services, and for this reason a major campaign against the proposed cuts is underway. Likely impacts would include a

potential change of use of Elizabeth House, shifting the focus away from complex support for those with a high level of need and towards housing support for those individuals needing a lower level of risk management. Since Gedling Borough Council has a statutory duty to provide housing to eligible individuals in its catchment area, the pressure would therefore be upon the Local Authority to resolve those more complex and challenging cases. The point was made that Framework has provided a great deal of added value in dealing with drug and alcohol abuse, and, if the proposed cuts go ahead, around 168 specialist support jobs across the County may be at risk. Members were informed that the County's proposals represent a shortfall of 1 quarter of Framework's annual budget, of which £700,000 is received on behalf of other agencies. In current proposals the organisation will receive £1m to protect statutory services only, which means that all non-statutory activity would cease. The advent of Universal Credit has already seen some incidences of eviction by local housing providers. Universal Credit rules do not apply to Framework accommodation as it is classed as transitory.

5.2.4 Nottinghamshire Housing Advice Service: Sharon Batey of the Nottinghamshire Housing Advice Service

Nottinghamshire Housing Advice is a local charity. It is the only service in the county that specialises only in housing and housing related debt advice. The organisation has been in existence for over 20 years and is currently funded by Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottingham City Council, Gedling Borough council, Mansfield District Council and Rushcliffe Borough Council. The service delivers advice to a specialist quality mark level and is subject to an independent bi-annual audit by National Shelter. Advice services are centred around housing and housing related debt and advocacy, which includes advice on housing options, domestic violence, relationship breakdown, Landlord and tenant disrepair issues, harassment, rent arrears including negotiation with landlords, Housing Benefit, mortgage arrears including MRS and negotiation with lenders, court representation, debt management, income maximisation and court representation. The advice team comprises 6 advisors, 1 manager, 1.5 receptionists a part time administrator, and a team of 11 volunteers in various roles. Most of the volunteers are looking for experience to help them find employment, and training and support are given including advice on completing applications and interview skills. The majority of volunteers move either into paid employment in a similar area or further education.

5.2.5 Homelessness Monitoring Statistics 1st April 2009 – 31st March 2013

Total Number of cases dealt with	Total number of cases where homelessness was prevented	Total number of people prevented from becoming homeless	Total number of children prevented from becoming homeless
289	264	575	309

Gedling Borough Council has agreed funding until 31st March 2013. Detailed monitoring reports are submitted to the Council on a quarterly basis. Funding from the County Council had been cut that year from £80, 000 to 30,000, and the belief is that within 2 years this funding would cease entirely. If that funding position remains, the service would reduce to information provision only in line with minimum statutory requirements.

Amongst the Gedling client group there appears to be low levels of full time employment and 35% of clients from the Borough this year stated they were unemployed. Almost 50% of the clients seen so far this year live in private rented sector accommodation, and just over 28% were owner occupiers. Since 1st April 2013 all but one Client from the Borough who have presented have had problems that could have resulted in them becoming homeless. Historically, disrepair and domestic violence have been prevalent amongst the client group from the Borough however this has not been the case so far this year, with no clients reporting domestic violence and 3.45% reporting disrepair. The organisation receives referrals from a wide range of agencies. This year, almost 30% of clients have been referred from CAB, 16% from GBC homelessness section and 40% were self/friend referrals.

The funding provided by Gedling Borough Council enables the organisation to undertake proactive casework within the Borough, and without it the service would reduce to the provision of information only for Borough residents. Particular impacts would be felt in the areas of mental health, employment and those with physical disabilities. The service has supported around 50 Gedling clients over 2 years, averaging an overall total of 100 clients each year. The service has seen an increase in cases of mortgage arrears and repossession cases associated with the economic downturn. In response to the work of the advice service 75% of Gedling clients had retained their current housing.

5.3 Meeting with the Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing: Gedling Borough Council initiatives and approaches

5.3.1 Support to alleviate Hardship

The Portfolio holder provided examples of several initiatives currently supported by or working in partnership with the Council which contribute towards the overall alleviation of hardship. These included:

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Tackling Domestic Violence programme
- Money advice
- Drop in advice
- Support for the Nottingham Credit Union

Work is also underway to try to educate the public about the pitfalls of payday loans and to get individuals to recognise when they have a problem. It was acknowledged that people often bury their heads in the sand and are afraid of final demands. Members were interested in whether debt mediation services are available, particularly in respect of fuel poverty and liaison with the big energy companies. The Portfolio Holder reported that the local suppliers disconnect individuals, but not households, and signpost people towards agencies that provide help and support. Household budgeting is a major issue, particularly in cases where individuals or households have complex needs, i.e. mental health issues, drug and /or alcohol addiction. Drop in services provided at the Council include case based support in order to build up trust over time and to gain a full understanding of those needs. It is deemed important to make the intervention early enough, before things have spiralled out of control. Members asked whether the home visits undertaken by the Housing Needs Team are identifying those in fuel poverty. It was noted that people who pay cash pay more on their fuel bill, which tends to disadvantage poorer families. Members were informed that there is a campaign underway to cap these extra payments at £12 per year. We know that the most vulnerable people will have a key or card meter and be paying over the odds, although the service amount is the same. For people on low incomes the utility companies are required to offer a credit of £110 on the winter fuel bill. The challenge is to get the message out to people who are eligible. Some work can be done to influence the energy companies however.

5.3.2 Locality working

Members were given an overview of the Council's move towards a 'Partnership Hub' of integrated services, both within the Council and in priority neighbourhoods. The strategy involves undertaking structured and inclusive regeneration in line with agreed Locality Action Plans, additionally widening and promoting access to services such as credit unions and food banks using local 'gateways' including libraries, GP surgeries and health centres, schools, community access centres and children's centres. Food vouchers for local food banks can be obtained via these routes. Members discussed the programme 'Benefit Street' which demonstrates how entrenched learned helplessness and the benefit dependent culture can be. It was flagged up that transport costs can be a huge barrier to access to opportunities and help. The two Locality workers covering Newstead, Netherfield and Killisick are able to issue food voucher forms and are careful to inform people that it is only the voucher holder who can cash it in. A new food bank had been launched in Netherfield that week. Members discussed whether there is any evidence that these approaches work, particularly in respect of 'uplifting' a local area. It is known that once people start to recover economic stability they move out of an area and others move in at the bottom of the ladder to replace them. The Portfolio Holder reported that there is evidence of a shift in these localities however it is now more about the working poor, not just the unemployed.

Members considered the important role of volunteering as a stepping stone out of hardship and into future opportunities. At Surestart volunteering is encouraged, and individuals can begin volunteering with Surestart and move on to become qualified, paid workers. For example an individual with literacy and numeracy issues became a paid worker through this route and had also entered education. The Portfolio Holder stated that a spectrum approach needs to be applied to quantifying success with those in most need. In supporting the working poor, it can be about helping families to manage their resources adequately. It is for this reason that the Government is promoting money advice services. The Service Manager, Housing and Localities, raised the issue of repeat homelessness. There is a concerted aim to reduce this. Concomitant with repeat homelessness are some complex, challenging behaviour patterns requiring specialist interventions to resolve. If those services are reduced, it may create more problems, most prevalent in single men over 40, but a growing issue in the 16/18 year age group. Members noted that both these target groups are currently well served by Framework. What people need is 'cycle breaking' support – to make a fundamental shift and to change their expectations/aspirations. Members acknowledged the added pressure caused by wages not keeping pace with utilities and food prices. The Locality Working approach also aims to stimulate and revive a sense of community in order to improve how areas look and feel.

5.3.3 Access to Social Housing and Benefits

In trying to uplift disadvantaged communities, the Council looks for mixed tenure and balance to mitigate urban crowding. The Portfolio Holder highlighted the need to be creative and use a partnership approach, particularly in the light of potential budget reductions in the area of specialist homelessness services. When universal credit is rolled out those people who have been looked after by the state will be receiving less money than before and there will be an expectation that they are up-skilled and better able to manage. The benefit is also paid monthly rather than fortnightly, as is currently the case.

This in turn affects the position of private landlords. In the light of the above, there is concern amongst landlords as they can go up to eight weeks without being paid rent from tenants' housing benefits, before having recourse directly to the Council for payment, and the 8 week rule is going to be stopped. The Credit Union can provide a service to landlords, which has been well received by the Landlords Forum. Members asked how the rent is charged against housing associations, and were informed that there are 2 types of property: social rent at £80 – £100 per week and private rented, which is considerably higher. Other factors affecting hardship levels are the availability of social networks and access to facilities. Members asked whether there is a demand for social housing in Ravenshead. The situation had been monitored, and it was found that there was a 10% turnover of property in Ravenshead against a 2% borough-wide turnover therefore people were less likely to stay in social housing in Ravenshead. The Housing needs team is using commuted sums to do some more needs

assessment work to examine the need for retirement bungalows in Newstead. It was explained that with the advent of Localism the Council is no longer required have to secure social housing in all areas. Ravenshead can contribute to social housing across the wider Borough, as the commuted sum from Ravenshead can be used to offset social housing in Netherfield and Arnold. In the case of the development around Mapperley, residents can take intermediate steps towards ownership via the Mortgage scheme which is now a national scheme.

Members expressed surprise that the Teal Close development has a requirement for 5% social housing. The possible housing mix on Gedling Colliery site was also discussed. The Service Manager, Housing and Localities confirmed that the National Planning Policy Framework is quite challenging of councils. Development is largely driven by market forces and Councils must be innovative and work strategically to ensure, as far as possible, that social housing needs in the Borough are met. The Council's Common Housing Allocations Policy ensures parity across districts in respect of housing allocations and, whilst the Council has its' own homelessness strategy, it is closely linked to those of other authorities. Gedling BC also has an agreement with Rushcliffe to access some of their accommodation. Joint Strategic Needs Assessments are carried out across Boroughs. Broxtowe BC is the only district with its own Housing Strategy. The Portfolio Holder reported that work is underway to unblock stalled sites in order that the Council can meet its' growth targets. Alongside this the Council is actively endorsing a range of pastoral initiatives, including Men in Sheds, Dementia Friends and the Loneliness Campaign. Additional resources are available nationally to help people onto the right benefits, which will be relevant to the new look One Stop Shop which hosts the Department for Work and Pensions working alongside a range of other welfare rights agencies. Additionally The Council has recently delivered training for staff aimed at raising awareness of the needs of vulnerable adults.

5.4 Members visits to local initiatives and access centres

Councillors Lawrence, Hope and Hewson undertook a day of visits to local SureStart Children's Centres and to Elizabeth House, run by Framework. The following feedback was provided:

5.4.1 Carlton and Netherfield Children's Centres

Members reported that eligibility to access to Children's Centre services is triggered by registration of birth. The target age group for the service is children from 0 – 12 years, their parents and families. Services provided at Carlton and Netherfield Children's Centres include health outreach and nutritional support, the provision of children's groups and breakfast clubs, midwife services, drop - in access to Jobcentre Plus employment advice and vocational training in a range of skills in the area of childrens' services. Their main targets and objectives are to support those in most need, including domestic violence cases, teenage parents

and workless households. Jobcentre plus undertakes casework and provides help with C.V's and signposting to jobs and training. The service is split between Carlton and Netherfield, delivered at each venue on alternate Fridays, and deals with a combination of drop in and scheduled appointments.

Members were informed that Children's Centres in the City operate a policy of automatic registration triggered by registration of birth, whereas in Gedling the policy is one of voluntary registration. Some parents are deterred from accessing services as they feel a stigma is attached to this. The Children's centre co-ordinator reported that a recent Ofsted had identified that the centre's contact rate was 40% below target, however made the point that the numbers registered may be less significant than what is done to support those who are registered. It was noted that different Ofsted inspectors can have a focus on different priorities. Contact rates can also vary according to area. Members observed that as Health Visitors are required to carry out post natal home visits as well as undertaking a two year child health check, this would be an opportunity to pick up those in need who haven't yet registered. The co-ordinator reported that SureStart would like to publicise their services more widely and have been offered use of the digital screens at the Civic Centre and in local leisure centres. Gedling BC Contacts magazine is another opportunity to raise awareness of what Children's Centres can provide. The centre provides outreach at Richard Herod Leisure Centre, which costs £4, 000 per year however Members were informed that the hire fees had recently increased by 15%. SureStart had previously been eligible for a reduced rate, however this no longer applies. The lack of FE provision in the Borough can be an issue as the requirement for further education is high amongst SureStart clients. An ideal scenario would be if Gedling residents had access to a year round calendar of courses and personal development opportunities. This would be useful for organisations as well as individuals, providing opportunities for outreach and service promotion.

Members discussed the perceived stigma associated with SureStart registration and the fact that there are a significant number of parents groups in the area which are very enthusiastic and could help to change the message. Some individuals have developed skills and confidence through participation and moved on to forge careers. The Local Area Forum in Netherfield has an Education and Training Sub Group on which SureStart is represented, and this helps to increase access. The Locality Coordinator for Killisick and Newstead attends Surestart meetings. It was reported that attendance by representatives of primary schools, another potential route for increasing take-up, is low.

5.4.2 Elizabeth House

Elizabeth House is a 21 unit Direct Access Hostel based in Gedling that was developed in 2008 for single homeless people from the local authority areas of Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe. The project accepts anyone over 16 who are currently homeless, unless they pose an unmanageable risk. It is a medium to

high support service that will accept people with substance misuse or mental health issues. The service has 24 hour staff cover and an active key working approach that involves access to education, training and tenancy preparation. The project is run by the voluntary sector agency Framework, who provided the capital funding to establish the project alongside money from the Housing Corporation (now Homes and Communities Agency). The revenue is provided by 'Supporting People' Grants and Housing Benefit from the three authorities involved who all have seven bed spaces within the service. Each Council completes application forms with the clients, and manages a waiting list of up to five people. If a bed becomes available and a council has no one on their list, referrals are accepted from one of the other councils. Service users moving on from Elizabeth house are prioritised for vacancies in move-on accommodation in the area that they were referred from.

At the time of the visit Elizabeth House provided accommodation for 7 Gedling referrals, 7 from Broxtowe and 5 from Rushcliffe. Accommodation is categorized in terms of Primary and Secondary facilities – primary being highly dependent, available for 5 - 6 months up to a year and secondary being more independent. A third stage, which is ideally move - on accommodation, is becoming difficult to arrange as there are less and less one bedroom accommodation units available, and the 'bedroom tax' means that clients cannot take 2 bedroom accommodation. This means that in practice Elizabeth House will not be able to move on more difficult clients and would therefore deal more and more with those with minor problems. Registration at Elizabeth House means that a client is also automatically registered with Social Services. Once clients are set up with accommodation, an appointment is made with the GP and the client is accompanied by a member of staff to the appointment. A non-judgemental approach is taken with individuals.

Manager Karen Maze reported significant gaps in provision in respect of the quality and effectiveness of moving on services for their clients. The two GP practices to which clients with alcohol dependency are referred do not seem to be geared up to dealing with complex needs, i.e. a combination of mental health, drugs and alcohol problems. In the past, from the previous GP, Dr Michael Varnham, a whole range of services were available, however there no longer appears to be any programme of support. Members had since raised the issue with the CCG Local Advisory Group in Calverton, who have indicated a wish to undertake outreach and community care, however it does not seem to be happening in practice. Another issue is the interface of clients with the DWP. As it currently stands, if a client misses an appointment or is late, they can be sanctioned with loss of a week's benefit, if two appointments are missed the sanction is 3 weeks benefit, and three appointments missed can mean up to a year's loss of benefits. This means that people with dependency issues, whose lifestyles are very chaotic, are in a constant cycle of extreme hardship.

5.5 Nottinghamshire County Council Adult Social Care Budgets

At a meeting with Councillor Muriel Weisz, Chair, Adult Social Care and Health Committee, Lyn Farrow, Commissioning Manager and Nottinghamshire County Council, provided the following briefing on the Countywide Supporting People budget decision:

5.5.1 Planned Savings

The budget setting Council meeting on 27th February agreed a £3.2 million reduction to the countywide Supporting People budget. In addition, different elements of this budget will be transferred to be managed within other parts of the Council and other elements will be picked up through the realignment of Public Health Grant. This briefing note sets out how the agreed savings will affect services in Gedling over the next two years.

Drug & Alcohol Accommodation Services (£125,645 countywide)

There are currently 38 properties across the county that are used for supported accommodation for people on drug and alcohol recovery pathways. Of these, at least 4 are located in Gedling. Public Health Grant has been identified to pick up this area of work from April 2014. The requirement to address and support the housing needs of this client group were set out in a Public Health tender for community based substance misuse recovery services and contracts have now been awarded to CRI (Crime Reduction Initiative) and Stonham Housing to commence from October this year.

The needs met through these services at present will continue to be met through alternative arrangements being put in place by Public Health from October 2014.

Domestic Violence (£456,420 countywide)

Domestic Violence services have been the subject of a review carried out by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The review report is due imminently. The Supporting People budget for domestic violence refuges, supported housing and floating support has been picked up by Public Health from April 2014, along with funding for domestic abuse services from other parts of the Council. Public Health will now hold the strategic responsibility for domestic abuse and manage the budgets and contracts in their entirety from this year.

There are no proposed changes to the current Domestic Violence Refuges, Supported Housing or Floating Support, although these will be funded and managed within Public Health from April 14 and are likely to be re-tendered in 2015.

Homelessness & Offender Accommodation Services (approx £132, 000 in Gedling)

Elizabeth House provides 21 units of Quick Access supported accommodation to the boroughs of Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe. In addition there are a number of properties providing a lower level of support as move-on accommodation and offender specific accommodation located in Gedling.

Adult Social Care funding for move-on and offender accommodation support will cease from 1st April 2015, however NCC intend to combine these services within the contract for Elizabeth House thus allowing the provider to pool resources and maximise opportunities to maintain the full range of services. Adult Social Care funding for Quick Access services are scheduled to cease from 1st April 2016, however the allocation of £1M of Public Health budget provides an opportunity to explore what service can and should be retained from April 2016.

Homelessness Prevention Support Services (£309,540 across BGR)

£310k is currently spent in the south of the County on support to prevent homelessness and to support people to establish sustainable independence after a period of homelessness.

Adult social care funding for Homelessness Prevention Support Services will reduce by 40% from April 2015 and cease at 30th September 2015, however Public Health funding will be used to maintain services during 2015-16. The continuation of services from April 2016 will be determined through the use of the £1M available from that date.

Mental Health Support Services (£407,650 across BGR)

Services are accessed via Community Mental Health Teams and provide support to people in their own homes, crisis support, carer support and promote social inclusion. Whilst it is intended that services will be retained, the service budget will be reduced by 22% from April 2015 and a further 11% from April 2016. It is currently expected that around half of the 2016 savings requirement will be met by health. and the services delivered will therefore be reviewed to ensure that the funds available are used in ways that are most effective and that services are targeted at those at most risk of requiring statutory social care services. Originally, the proposal had been for the reduction to take effect from October 2014 but this area has benefited from the agreement by February Council to use short term funding to slow the pace of change.

Funding for Mental Health Support Services to be reduced by 22% from April 2015 and a further 11% in April 2016, leaving a total investment in

Mental Health prevention support of £273k across BGR. It is anticipated that some of this reduction will be met by health.

Older People's Services (£310,000 across BGR)

Formerly funded by the County Council for those on low incomes, community alarms are now only available on a self-funded basis.

Gedling Homes is by far the greatest provider of accommodation and support to older people in Gedling, but in addition, there are 7 housing associations and an Almshouse provider that also have contracts with NCC to provide older people's services. These contracts are due to end on 30th November this year. Each provider has determined, through consultation with service users, the level of service it will continue to provide.

It remains the intention to use the retained budget to commission prevention support, targeted at those most at risk of losing their independence. Plans to achieve this are now being reviewed to take account of:

- The 'Redefining Your Council' programme;
- The new Adult Social Care Strategy
- New requirements under the Care Act 2014;
- The health and social care integration agenda.

- Community alarm contracts ended from April 2014
- Older people's support service contract will end on 30th November 2014
- Future prevention service proposal are currently being reconsidered

A range of other services remain in place commissioned by or financially supported by the County Council, including: benefits advice through the Customer Service Centre, HPAS, First Contact scheme, Community Outreach Advisor (Gedling CVS), befriending services (Age UK and Gedling CVS), Cornwater lunch club and BME groups for older people (Gedling Asian Elders and Indian Community Centre Association).

Vulnerable Adults Service (£51,100 across BGR)

A Vulnerable Adults Floating Support service is currently commissioned as a separate service sitting alongside Homelessness Prevention services. Work will be done to redefine services for vulnerable adults in line with the new Adult Social Care Strategy and requirements of the Care Act 2014. Based on this there are likely to be changes to the access criteria and service model, although overall there is intended to be an increase in budget allocated to support vulnerable adults. In addition, there is a Deaf Floating Support Scheme that can support up to 28 hearing impaired adults across the county

Members were concerned about the increased contracting out of adult care services to the third sector, in that voluntary sector organisations, agencies and contractors may not pay minimum wage, therefore by outsourcing how does the County encourage the living wage? Members were informed that in bigger homecare contracts the County has introduced a phased reduction of zero hour contracts and the introduction of a statement that agencies must sign supporting a move towards provision of the living wage, and Tupe has applied on 9 of the contracts.

Countywide 52% increase in overall budget for vulnerable younger adults (18-65 years), including those with hearing impairment, from April 2016.

5.6 Meeting with Gedling Homes and RCAN

5.6.1 Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire (RCAN)

Jenny Kirkwood of RCAN explained that the organisation supports rural groups and parish councils to undertake development plans in rural communities. They also deliver a number of time limited externally funded projects including IT Champions, which provides voluntary mentoring placements and training for the over 50s in IT, Travelling Together, a Gypsy and Traveller supportive intervention programme, Wheels to Work, a project which supports rural residents with access to a moped for 6 months in order to access work and training, and the Ignition Scheme, which provides help with bus fares to work and education and targets 16 – 18 year olds. There is also CAST, a vibrant youth engagement project which engages young people at year 10 and 11 through fishing and countryside activities and provides 50 places at any one time. Young people achieve an Open College Network Qualification. Community led plans have been developed for Lambley, Newstead, Burton Joyce and Bestwood Village. The plans help to identify and take action on local issues, i.e. in Bestwood Village the high demand for school places and an overflowing school. Other actions identified include access to health services and transport. RCAN is also the lead partner in the Newstead Country Park, a rural park which featured on the Village S.O.S TV programme. RCAN works closely with the Locality Coordinator for Newstead. GBC had applied for Newstead to take part in the Frontrunner programme, to be a pilot for a Neighbourhood Plan however the Parish Council opted against it. Members noted the fact that despite Calverton being in the top 5 multi deprivation areas, the village currently receives no targeted support. Members also noted that with the forthcoming boundary changes, Netherfield, already a deprived area, may score more highly on the indices of deprivation than previously. Members were informed that a big issue in rural communities is the outward migration of young people, which is resulting in an increasingly aging population.

Jenny informed members that as funding levels are reducing, so too are levels of partnership working, particularly at local action planning level.

RCAN funding

Nottinghamshire County Council: £20,000

Rushcliffe BC: £38,000

Newark and Sherwood BC: £17,000

Gedling BC: £10,500

5.6.2 Gedling Homes

David Price of Gedling Homes provided an overview of their approaches to alleviate homelessness and hardship. He reported that the organisation commits a lot of time and money to this, driving forward a number of initiatives underpinned by a 'firm but fair' approach, including the Moneywise Team, which provides in-house debt advice and counselling. Currently 2 members of staff serve around 3,000 tenants, about 1/3 of which are in sheltered schemes.

David reported that in the last 18 months around £142,000 in benefits had been accessed that would not otherwise have been claimed and some large scale debt had been significantly addressed as a result, some of which centred on payday loans. This had highlighted to the organisation how vulnerable Gedling Homes's residents are, and, prior to this, the issue had not been on their radar. The issue of under occupation had also come to the surface, and two years previously the organisation introduced the Special Welfare Action Team who identified in advance those tenants that may be vulnerable to the bedroom tax. Incentives have been offered to encourage downsizing, however there is a lack of 2 bedroom properties in the Borough, and there were still 250 tenants not in receipt of full housing benefit due to under occupation. Those who took on a tenancy knowing of their under occupation are managing better than those who find themselves in that position. Members were informed that there were different pressures on the elderly around cash-flow. Currently 153 tenants are in arrears of some sort, 14 are clear of arrears and 88 are in credit. Tenants were also advised in advance about changes in local and national legislation including welfare reforms and Supporting People Budget changes, and being aware that there now were fewer organisations out there to refer people to for help, established in – house preventative measures. These included drop-in advice services around the Borough and at the Civic Centre. Gedling Homes also employs support workers funded by the NCC Supporting People budget, and the aim is to continue that funding. Members noted that some housing associations are encouraging residents to build up credit to mitigate their transfer to universal credit and in preparation the monthly payment of benefits, and work is underway to encourage claims for discretionary housing benefit payments although these are set to reduce.

Members asked whether Gedling Homes is still looking to increase its housing stock and were informed that 2 new schemes were underway however it is becoming more difficult to locate both funding and sites. Members were

interested whether Gedling Homes is able to have dialogue with developers and planning officers as part of pre-application discussions to request 2 bedroom properties. Members were informed that these discussions are dealt with by GBC Housing Needs officers and Gedling Homes then have the option to buy directly from developers, using funding provided for that purpose.

Members reported an approach being taken in Netherfield where there are 22 housing providers. Locality Partnership is looking to establish an owners' forum to encourage property swaps and potential buying up by Gedling Homes of individually owned properties, often on the same streets, in order to improve investment in the area and ensure a more uniform appearance and standard of accommodation. Members noted that a number of large scale developments are on the horizon and it will be crucial that Gedling Homes are involved in informing the local plan, specifically the mix of housing stock on those sites.

CONCLUSIONS

During the course of the review, Members examining a wide range of information about current and future services, changes in the funding landscape and benefits legislation, opportunities for growth and ways in which the Council and its partners work to maximise these opportunities, both locally and at a strategic level. Members understood that that NCC Supporting People funding changes represent a further development to a significant shift that started in 2012, moving to an enabling culture and encouraging people to be as independent as possible. This includes changed ways of working, providing packages of support and an aim to improve services as well as reduce costs. The approach has involved realigning parts of services and the resources associated with them, rather than having one pot of money and a defined process as in the past. Public Health monies are also now in the mix and the focus of the remaining Supporting People budget will be upon vulnerable adults, including older people and those with mental health issues. Members noted that the Chair of Adult Social Care and Health Committee is seeking ongoing dialogue with districts and with third sector providers about contract management with an element of collaboration in respect of Vulnerable Adult Services going forward.

In respect of the future of Elizabeth House and Nottinghamshire Housing Advice Services, the implication is that funding is secure from April 2015, but that it may cease in 2016 unless an alternative solution is found. NCC is working with Framework to assist Elizabeth House in financial remodelling, focussing on homelessness prevention accommodation and offender accommodation and finding alternative funding streams. Framework is currently the contract holder for Crisis Mental Health services.

Members noted that there is a need to engage the involvement and potential investment of CCGs, who have a potential role to play in supporting Elizabeth House, particularly due to their focus on care in the community and in the light of the NHS Trust's targets to reduce the pressure in the acute sector. The key to

this is the provision of sufficient aftercare, which Framework is well placed to deliver. Additionally, unitary authorities like the City Council have the statutory responsibility for housing with Nottingham Homes, and Gedling must look to Gedling Homes and consider how that organisation's role might impact more on homelessness prevention in the future. Members were made aware of a change in approach with regard to older peoples services, moving away from the traditional warden aided complex approach as the service provided had no direct link to need. Members noted that the reason homelessness was not made a priority in the NCC Supporting People Budget restructure is that the statutory responsibility lies with the districts.

Members were nevertheless encouraged by the assertions of the Chair of Nottinghamshire County Council's Adult Social Care and Health Committee that the County is committed to working together with Gedling Borough Council in the financial remodelling of specialist services to relieve homelessness and hardship.

Key areas for consideration in Gedling are therefore:

- Vulnerable people
- How GBC and NCC can work together
- Joint services, i.e. commissioning prevention services for CCGs in the South of the County.

Members would like to thank Cllr Weisz in advance for agreeing to take up with the Health and Wellbeing Board issues identified by the review of apparently limited drug and alcohol treatment programmes in the Borough.

In visiting Elizabeth House and local Surestart Children's Centres, Members were impressed with the level and range of support and signposting available within the Borough, noting however that more could be done to strengthen referral mechanisms, ensure the quality of longer term support for those with complex needs (i.e. the treatment of drug and alcohol dependent residents) and to more effectively publicise the gateway services available in local communities through access centres, children's centres, GP practices and Health Centres.

Members, being aware of a number of large scale developments underway in the Borough, were of the view that Gedling Homes and Localities coordinators must be involved in informing the local plan and the mix of housing stock on those sites. The danger of providing the wrong balance of housing being that too many people attracted in from outside the Borough could potentially force Gedling residents into hardship.

Members were satisfied that the Council is taking a strong lead in drawing together partnership approaches to mitigate hardship and homelessness, however felt that we would benefit from examining good practice across the

country in order to ensure continuous improvement in coordination, communication and problem solving around those partnerships and approaches. Members commended the Council's support for national and local pastoral initiatives, and would like this ethos to translate further into the ability to be as flexible as possible to help individuals to overcome specific barriers and resolve 'one off' problems, as well as longer term issues.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Working Group makes the following recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing and associated partner organisations:

Homelessness and Housing

1. Gedling Borough Council, in partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council and our district collaboration agreement partners, to broker dialogue with Nottingham North East CCG and other CCG Leads via the Health and Wellbeing Board to help secure future funding for Elizabeth House services beyond April 2016, focusing on high need individuals that have a high impact on local health services.
2. Gedling Homes to consider providing a ring fenced number of supported accommodation flats for complex move-on cases referred from Elizabeth House.
3. The potential for Framework /Elizabeth House services to receive Crime and Disorder Partnership funding should also be explored.
4. The Council to explore previous good practice and good practice of other local authorities in influencing developers to ensure the most appropriate housing mix on new developments in the Borough. (Members cited an occasion when the Council worked proactively with a developer on Teal Close (Pepper potting, New Housing Markets).)
5. The Council and partners to consider holding a stakeholder event to address inclusive development and the maximisation and streamlining of specialist advice and support; to include CAB, Credit Union, registered housing providers and anyone with a stake in financial inclusion. – see Tayneside Money Inclusion Network (MINTC) best practice.
6. Ensure that the aspirations and plans of Gedling priority neighbourhoods and Neighbourhood Planning areas and the knowledge of local social housing providers are taken into account in pre application discussions on major development sites.

7. The Council to revive the reporting back mechanism for representatives on key outside bodies, i.e. Gedling Homes, which was in place when we had the Committee System.
8. Seek to influence the development of more one and two bedroom properties in the Borough.

Hardship

9. The Council to continue to raise public awareness and advocate against the dangers of payday loans and encourage more people to invest in the credit union as well as to borrow, which improves sustainability and increases access.
10. The Council to lobby on the issue of energy poverty and support a reduction in the higher tariff costs to individuals associated with pre-paid meters.
11. Greater publicity to be given to the services and facilities provided by local Surestart Children's Centres in order to increase registration. Suggestions include:
 - Concessionary access provided for Children's Centre staff to use our Leisure and Community Centres to conduct outreach sessions.
 - Use of the digital screens in Leisure Centres and the Civic Centre to promote Children's Centre Services.
 - Health Visitors to promote registration with Children's Centres at the two year child health check.
 - GP Surgeries to be more proactive in publicising and referring patients to Children's Centres.
 - GBC Housing Needs Service to strengthen referral links from their customer base to Surestart services.
 - Gedling BC Contacts magazine to run a feature raising awareness of what Children's Centres can provide.
12. Alongside vocational development work currently underway within the Gedling Employment and Skills Group, communities and localities to be encouraged to access external funding for the provision of community based training and life skills. An ideal scenario would be for Gedling

residents to have access to a year round calendar of local courses and 'first step' personal development opportunities.

13. Improve the level of specialist medical and social support available to those at risk of, and moving on from, alcohol and drug dependency and homelessness.
14. Training and awareness to be made available to GPs and frontline staff in alcohol /drug dependency issues, sources of referral and treatment.
15. The Health and Wellbeing Board to reinstate / enhance availability of drug and alcohol recovery programmes that clients can attend locally, supported by Elizabeth house staff and Framework support workers.
16. The NNE CCG to consider commissioning informed health advocacy for those in hardship and dependency situations.
17. Under our commitment to the Armed Forces Community Covenant, enhance support for ex-military personnel at risk of dependency, hardship and homelessness by strengthening referral links to SAFFA and other Service benevolent organisations.
18. Consider the provision of DWP outreach at Elizabeth House.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Members would like to thank the following councillors and officers for their input to this review:

- Councillor Muriel Weisz, Chair: NCC Adult Social Care and Health Committee
- Councillor Jenny Hollingsworth: Portfolio Holder, Health and Housing (until May 2014)
- Alison Bennett: Service Manager, Housing and Localities (until Oct 2014)
- Tracy Lack and Penny Castle: Carlton and Netherfield Children's Centres
- Michael Leng, Operations Director, Framework, Nottinghamshire
- Sharon Batey, Nottinghamshire Housing Advice Service
- David Price: Gedling Homes
- Jenny Kirkwood: Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire

8. APPENDICES

- **Appendix 1:** Project Scope