

**MINUTES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 11 February 2015

Councillor Mike Hope (Chair)

Councillor Gary Gregory	Councillor Paul Hughes
Councillor Sandra Barnes	Councillor Stephen Poole
Councillor Paul Feeney	Councillor Colin Powell
Councillor Patricia Andrews	Councillor Suzanne Prew-Smith
Councillor Cheryl Hewlett	Councillor Henry Wheeler

Apologies for absence: Councillor Lynda Pearson, Councillor Nick Quilty and Councillor John Truscott

Officers in Attendance: H Lee, A Bennett and D Wakelin

Guests in Attendance

66 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Councillor John Truscott, Councillor Lynda Pearson and Councillor Nick Quilty.

67 TO APPROVE, AS A CORRECT RECORD, THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 2014.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the above meeting, having been circulated, be approved as a correct record.

Councillor Powell requested that it be noted that CCTV cameras in Ravenshead were paid for by Ravenshead Parish Council.

68 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS.

None.

69 PORTFOLIO HOLDING TO ACCOUNT

Rolling Programme of Holding the Portfolio Holder to Account.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Henry Wheeler, Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing, David Wakelin, Corporate Director and Alison

Bennett, Service Manager Housing who were invited to respond to questions on the following areas of the Health and Housing Portfolio:

- Housing and Council tax benefits
- Housing strategy
- Safeguarding.

Advance Questions from Members:

1. What procedures does Gedling Borough Council have in place to ensure the safety of vulnerable adults and children?
2. Additional information on Q3 performance for the following items was also requested:
 - LI313 – percentage of families engaged with the Supporting Families Programme who will not require further support.
 - LI314 - The number of private sector households where Housing Act category 1 or 2 hazards have been remediated
 - LI099 - Percentage of those presenting for housing advice who submit a homeless application. Why is this increasing?
 - NI555 – disappointingly no affordable housing delivered this quarter. Information about the delivery of the 60 units in 2016.
3. What plans are there for ensuring that people are provided with 'housing for life' when plans are agreed?
4. As universal benefits are rolled out is there anything we can do to alert claimants to their responsibility for their council tax?
5. Does Cllr. Wheeler have a view about any closer joining of resources at County level for adult and children's safeguarding?

Question 1

What procedures does Gedling Borough Council have in place to ensure the safety of vulnerable adults and children?

Alison Bennett, Service Manager Housing outlined Gedling Borough Council's response to safeguarding both adults and children informing Members that:

- Safeguarding procedures are laid down by the County Council and it is a referral based system. All referrals are investigated and recorded on a database
- there was a major training programme carried out with officers and Members in 2014 and more training will be made available in 2015

- there were 51 one cases were referred in 2014, in the main referred by leisure centre, public protection and housing needs staff. These cases were referred to either the:
 - Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), the County Councils multi agency unit which addresses safeguarding issues
or
 - for less serious cases the Vulnerable Persons Panel (VPP) which meets monthly and discusses vulnerable persons who have not met the safeguarding thresholds for MASH. This is attended by officers from GBC, the Police, the Troubled Families programme, Adult Social Care, mental health, Police schools officers, Family Intervention Project workers, Fire and Rescue, Victim Support and Gedling Homes. In 2014, 75 cases were addressed and actioned.

An example of how this referral system works was outlined:

- an initial referral from Housing Needs staff was made to Public Protection, a visit was carried out
- this identified health (person suffering from cancer) and housing condition concerns
- case taken to the VPP, where multi-agency actions were agreed including a deep clean of property organised by Nottinghamshire County Council Social Care
- customer was relocated to temporary accommodation while property was cleared
- a support package was put in place and benefit entitlement sorted
- the customer returned to address with ongoing support
- as a pragmatic solution in view of the likely timescale for the landlord to rectify the problems with the property, the Housing Needs team found another property
- this case required joint working by officers from GBC Public Protection and Housing Needs, the GP, Mental Health workers, Social Care, Nottingham Universities Hospital, Health Visitors and the private landlord.

The Portfolio Holder emphasised the necessity for staff and Members who have any concerns about vulnerable adults and children to refer.

Question 2

- **L1313 the percentage of families engaged with the Supporting Peoples Programme who will not require further support.**

This service is administered by the County Council. Results for this indicator are one quarter behind due to the time taken for the Supporting Families programme to compile the data. Performance is poor, not only have targets been missed but the performance in South Nottinghamshire is worse than elsewhere in the county.

The programme supports children who have six headline problems:

- i. parents or children involved in crime or anti-social behaviour
- ii. children who have not been attending school regularly
- iii. children who need help
- iv. adults out of work or at risk of financial exclusion and young people at risk of worklessness
- v. families affected by domestic violence
- vi. parents and children with a range of health problems.

The first phase of the programme ends April 2015 and phase two will be an enhanced programme lasting five years. The Supporting Families Programme will become part of a new structure working with young people 0 – 19 years old.

Members were concerned that the number of families in Gedling turned around is not as good as other areas and the value of the data and requested further clarification regarding:

- what is being measured – what the % figure relates to
 - what improvements are made for young people, what measure is used to cease engagement with the Supporting People programme
 - why performance in Gedling is not as good as other areas
 - what is being done to improve performance?
- **L1314 – the number of private sector households where Housing Act category 1 & 2 hazards have been remediated.**

Members learnt that this is a new indicator and it attempts to measure how much enforcement has been taken to ensure people in private sector housing category 1 & 2 - those with the worst property defects - have had their home returned to an acceptable condition. Enforcement has increased as a consequence of the indicator which has refocused staff on private sector work and brought about a more robust enforcement culture. Over time the number of properties in this category fluctuates, as some properties are improved others will fall into a poor state and require enforcement to improve. As there has not been a whole housing stock survey for some time it is difficult to accurately calculate the number of properties in this condition. Owner occupier properties in a poor state may be an indicator of other problems and may require interventions from other agencies.

Members were concerned about the possibility of tenants being evicted because of enforcement to improve properties and asked for data to be made available.

- **L1098 – percentage of those presenting for housing advice who submit a homeless application, also L1046 Preventing Homelessness.**

There is a whole raft of support and assistance available to try and prevent people becoming homeless. This includes mediating with the landlord or mortgage lender, using the homeless prevention fund or referring to partner agencies for support; all with the aim of helping people stay in their current property. An increase in caseload and the complexity of cases has had a detrimental effect on progress towards target. The impact of budget efficiencies, the decrease in the County Council Supporting People programme plus housing associations becoming more risk adverse have all had an influence on the effectiveness of the service which can receive up to 4200 calls per month.

This has impacted on the team's performance in terms of their ability to complete preventative work, instead the balance has shifted to homeless applications, but the Service Manager has introduced a series of measures to return the focus of the teams work on preventing homelessness, as this is the best solutions for clients.

- **NI 155 – number of affordable homes delivered (gross).**

There have been a low number of net completions in Quarter 3; however there are plans for this to increase. Tendering has been completed for two sites to deliver 60 new affordable homes in summer 2016. In addition the Service Manager is working with Gedling Homes and 12 Housing to progress two other sites in the borough and is planning a further tender round to take place later in the year

Question 3

What plans are there for ensuring that people are provided with 'housing for life' when plans are agreed.

New housing developments are expected to achieve the 'Lifetime Homes' standard. This covers issues such as a downstairs WC, wider doors to enable wheelchairs access and level entry to the property etc. This would deal with the physical aspects of the property, but often a greater factor is affordability. This is being addressed by the requirement that all new homes meet the Code of Sustainable Development level 3; this requires a set level of energy efficiency, making homes more affordable to run and protecting residents from fuel poverty, and the associated health risks of living in cold damp properties. An additional factor that can necessitate people to move is due to the changes in housing benefits. This is evident in the borough following the

under occupancy change (bedroom tax) which was included in the current welfare reforms. The need to downsize has increased the demand for one and two bedroomed properties. The increased demand for smaller properties has been a factor in deciding how best to develop the two sites and commuted sum in the recent tender exercise. The sites involved will deliver predominantly one and two bedroomed homes to address this need.

Question 4

As universal benefits are rolled out is there anything we can do to alert claimants to their responsibility for their council tax?

New claims for Universal Credit will commence in May 2015. This will be administered by the Department of Work and Pensions with Gedling having a supporting/advisory role. Universal Credit claimants will have to make a separate claim for the Council Tax Reduction scheme. It is possible an awareness raising campaign alerting people of the need to claim could be arranged.

Question 5

Does Cllr. Wheeler have a view about any closer joining of resources at County level for adult and children's safeguarding?

Councillor Wheeler explained there was already a close working relationship with the County and that this would continue into the future. Safeguarding training provided by the County was available to the authority and training for taxi drivers is being jointly developed. Gedling Borough Chairs the Vulnerable Persons Panel and makes referrals to the County Council Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. The Care Act and the Children's and Families Act will require a strong working relationship and improved use of resources.

Members considered that the loss of the Credit Union representatives based in the Civic Centre was a great loss and that Credit Unions should be promoted to staff and Members. They concluded that even though it was no longer in the building it should still be available to staff and queried if it would be possible for contributions to be taken from salaries.

RESOLVED to:

- I. To thank the Portfolio Holder and Corporate Director for their attendance
- I. Request additional information regarding the Supporting Peoples Programme

- II. Request information concerning L1314 the number of private sector household where Housing Act category 1 and 2 hazards have been remediated and data regarding the number of evictions due to enforcement to improve properties
- III. Request information regarding the Credit Union.

70 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

The Chair informed Members that the conclusions and recommendations arising from the:

- **Reducing Unemployment in the Borough**
- **Homelessness and Hardship in the Borough Scrutiny reviews**

would be discussed at Cabinet on 12th February and a written response to these reports would be available at the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee 13th April 2015.

The Transport Links to and within Gedling Borough Scrutiny Review would be having a further evidence gathering meeting prior to developing the conclusions and recommendations arising from the working group.

RESOLVED:

To note the report.

71 ITEMS REFERRED TO THE THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AS REQUIRED UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OR LAW

RESOLVED:

To note the report.

72

ANY OTHER ITEM WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT.

None.

The meeting finished at 6.30 pm

Signed by Chair:

Date: