

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 8 December 2016

PRESENT: Councillors Tony Damms (Chair), Nasima Akther, Sue Auckland, Michelle Cook, Richard Crowther, Dawn Dale, Keith Davis, Tony Downing, Adam Hanrahan, Magid Magid, Anne Murphy and Richard Shaw (Deputy Chair)

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor George Lindars-Hammond.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 In relation to Agenda Item 7 (Welfare Reform Update), Councillor Nasima Akther declared a Personal Interest as she was a volunteer with the Citizens Advice Bureau.

3.2 In relation to Agenda Item 9 (Financial Inclusion), Councillor Dawn Dale declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest as she was employed by the Manor and Castle Development Trust but felt that her interest was not prejudicial in view of the nature of the report and chose to remain in the meeting during consideration of the item.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20th October, 2016, were approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no public questions or petitions.

6. CHALLENGE FOR CHANGE: THE COUNCIL HOUSING SERVICE'S PREPARATION FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Challenge for Change (C4C) Customer Scrutiny Panel's project on the Council Housing Service's preparation for the implementation of the Universal Credit (UC).

6.2 The purpose of the project was to investigate the Council's Housing Service's preparation for the implementation of UC, its impact on tenants, and to undertake

reality checks with Council staff, other local authorities and stakeholder groups to see how its performance compared.

6.3 In attendance for this item were Tina Gilbert (Assistant Manager, Communities), Linda Moxon and Ian Alexander (C4C representatives).

6.4 The objectives of the project were to establish:-

- How the Council's Housing Service work with other organisations e.g. Credit Union, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).
- Which parts of the country had been dealing with this already and what had they done.
- How effective had the Council's efforts been so far.
- What efforts had been made to encourage the use of direct debit, as this was considered to be a major public relations objective.
- What impact would this have on Housing + and the Housing Service's resources.

6.5 The findings of the Panel were that:-

- Support resources for customers were available.
- There was good networking with other agencies.
- The use of direct debit was actively encouraged, where appropriate.
- A measured approach was being taken to the uptake of UC.
- The City Council was following the best practice of other local authorities.
- There was a suspicion that awareness/knowledge about UC would not be properly developed until it was made necessary by claimants.
- There was concern that the introduction of UC may have an impact on eviction rates.
- Housing+ would be able to support customers needing support.

6.6 Members made various comments and asked a number of questions, to which responses were provided as follows:-

- The Housing Service would continue to campaign to get customers to use direct debit and integrate advice into the role of Housing+

- The Service would maintain its strong working relationship with DWP.
- UC awareness campaigns would be undertaken using the Council's communications channels.
- The Service was doing all it could to warn customers of the negative aspects of money lenders.
- Regular reviews of the impact of UC would be undertaken by the Housing Service.

6.7 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks Tina Gilbert, Linda Moxon and Ian Alexander for their attendance;
- (b) notes the contents of the report, comments made and responses to questions; and
- (c) requests that a Family Tree of the organisations involved in the implementation of Universal Credit be circulated to Committee Members.

7. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

7.1 The Committee received a report of the Director of Policy, Performance and Communications which set out the most significant current and future welfare/benefit changes and provided some information about how these had been addressed by the City Council and its partners.

7.2 In attendance for this item were Cat Arnold (Policy and Improvement Officer) and Maxine Stavrianakos, (Head of Neighbourhood Intervention and Tenant Support).

7.3 Cat Arnold introduced the report and stated that, at the moment, there were only a small number of customers in Sheffield claiming Universal Credit (UC), with full roll out due to take place from July 2018. Full budgeting and digital support was available for those moving onto Universal Credit. She added that Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) had started to replace Disability Living Allowance and, at the moment, the initial impact seemed to be manageable in Sheffield. However, evidence suggested that in other regions, the introduction of PIP had led to a reduction in the awards made. With regard to the lower Benefit Cap, Cat Arnold stated that from January 2017, it was anticipated that there would be a rise from 113 households affected, to approximately 900.

7.4 Members made various comments and asked a number of questions, to which responses were provided as follows:-

- There were about 400+ Council tenants, mainly single, working-age people, affected at the moment by the introduction of UC. Once the full digital service was introduced in July 2018, the number of those affected would become clearer and the Council was working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to ensure that the most vulnerable

customers received as much support as possible. It was anticipated that when the full migration onto UC had taken place, there could be at least 30,000 residents affected across the city by 2021-22.

- With regard to Council tenants in debt, there was an independent dedicated debt worker based at the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) is funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), to help those in need. Some other social landlords in the city provide a similar service with the CAB.
- Joint meetings are held with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs') and representatives of the CAB to ensure that the message was getting through, and that there was an equal level of support given to tenants by these landlords. As well as supporting tenants, it was important for the RSLs' income collection and their business models.
- It was not known exactly how many single tenants under the age of 35 lived in Sheffield, but information on this could be compiled and would be circulated to Committee Members.

7.5 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) thanks those attending for their contribution to the meeting;
- (b) notes the contents of the report together with the comments made and the responses provided; and
- (c) requests that (i) a report on the costs incurred by the Council when carrying out an eviction, including rehousing after the eviction, be submitted to the Committee in March/April, 2017 and (ii) a report on how the recently announced Autumn Statement was affecting tenants and the financial impact of these changes on the HRA, be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

8. FINANCIAL INCLUSION

- 8.1 The Committee received a report of the Director of Policy, Performance and Communications on Financial Inclusion. This was supported by a presentation given by Cat Arnold, (Policy and Improvement Officer), which provided an outline of early thinking on the development of a new financial inclusion strategy for Sheffield and a brief overview of the evidence for financial exclusion and a potential framework for building greater financial resilience.
- 8.2 Also in attendance for this item was Maxine Stavrianakos (Head of Neighbourhood Intervention and Tenant Support).
- 8.3 Cat Arnold took the Committee through the circulated presentation, making reference to what Financial Inclusion was, the drafting of the Financial Inclusion Strategy, what was being done locally and nationally, understanding financial inclusion in the UK and Sheffield, the plan for a financially inclusive City and aspects under consideration.

8.4 Members made various comments and asked a number of questions, to which responses were provided as follows:-

- People don't tend to trust the Council or private landlords and would rather struggle than approach anyone for help, and there was a need, possibly through financial education in schools, to prepare people as to what they might face as adults.
- The vision for the Financial Inclusion Strategy was that financial inclusion was a continuum which helped in considering how financially resilient individuals or households were in order to understand the different challenges people face and the type of support needed to become financially included.
- The Council and the CAB offered advice on ways of getting the best deals from the utility companies.
- Grants were available to enable people to purchase white goods and this information was available by phone or on the Council's website. The voluntary sector also offers support, as do some social landlords.

8.5 RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the presentation and thanked Cat Arnold for her attendance.

9. HATE CRIME TASK GROUP

9.1 The Chair reported that the investigation into Hate Crime had finished and that a report would be submitted to the meeting of the Committee to be held in February, 2017.

10. WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

10.1 The Committee received a report of the Policy and Improvement Officer which set out the Committee's Work Programme for 2016/17.

10.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the Work Programme 2016/17 as set out in the report;
- (b) notes that, as requested earlier at the meeting, items on the cost of evictions and the impact of the Government's Autumn Statement on tenants and the Housing Revenue Account, be added to the Work Programme for consideration at a convenient date; and
- (c) requests that consideration be given to the creation of a pending tray in which non-urgent items would be placed and subsequently considered if they become a priority.

11. HATE CRIME AND HATE INCIDENTS: 1 NOVEMBER 2014 - 31 OCTOBER

2016

- 11.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the Hate Crime and Hate Incidents 1st November 2014 to 31st October, 2016 report.

12. WRITTEN RESPONSES TO PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- 12.1 RESOLVED: That the Committee notes the contents of the Written Responses to Public Questions report.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 13.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Thursday, 16th February, 2017, at 4.00 pm, in the Town Hall.