

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 28 March 2013

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Weldon (Chair), Penny Baker (Deputy Chair), Nikki Bond, Shelia Constance, Richard Crowther, Denise Fox, Martin Lawton, Peter Rippon, Chris Rosling-Josephs, Clive Skelton (Substitute Member) and Diana Stimely (Substitute Member)

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received and substitutes attended the meeting as follows:-

Apology

Substitute

Councillor David Barker
Councillor Simon Clement-Jones
Councillor Jayne Dunn

Councillor Clive Skelton
Councillor Diana Stimely
No substitute nominated

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 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 10th January 2013, were approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no petitions submitted or questions raised by members of the public.

6. BED AND BREAKFAST ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

6.1 The Executive Director, Communities Portfolio, submitted a report on bed and breakfast accommodation used for homeless households in Sheffield, including details of plans to introduce a Supported Accommodation Pathway for homeless households in the City. The report attached, as appendices, a schedule of requirements, requested by the City Council's Housing Solutions, of providers of bed and breakfast accommodation, together with the various forms regarding the terms and conditions of bookings.

6.2 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- Whilst the requirement in terms of the accommodation was to provide bed and breakfast only, the Council used one bed and breakfast establishment, particularly for families, which had a kitchen, providing the users with the opportunity of cooking their own food.
- The average length of stay for a homeless person or family in bed and breakfast accommodation was reasonably short. The Government has set a maximum length of stay for families in bed and breakfast at six weeks. The average length of stay in Sheffield was 6.94 days for singles and 6.42 days for families.
- The Housing Solutions Service received very few complaints in connection with the provision of bed and breakfast accommodation and if a complaint was received by a provider, they would be expected to inform Housing Solutions and provide details of the complaint.
- Whilst it was not possible to provide precise figures at this stage, it was envisaged that, out of the 245 units of temporary accommodation used by Housing Solutions, only a relatively small number of units would be out of use at any one time. Details of the figures would be provided to Members. On average, there were 28 units vacant, either because they were unready to let or have recently become ready to let and were awaiting for a household to move in.
- In the unlikely circumstance of all the units being full and where the Council needed to refer a homeless person or family, steps would be taken to free a place up at one of the units. Alternatively, if the Council had prior notice, arrangements would be made to reserve a place in advance.
- The Mortgage Reserve Scheme was a homeless prevention tool for homeowners who were at risk of losing their home through repossession. It enables households to remain in their homes by transferring ownership to a housing association. The Housing Aid Team assisted many more households to remain in their properties by negotiating with the lender, referring the households for money and debt advice and exploring affordable repayment options. The Team had just completed its 100th mortgage rescue.

6.3 RESOLVED: That this Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the additional information now reported and the responses to questions now raised;
- (b) thanks Belinda Gallup, Service Manager, Housing Solutions, for attending the meeting to speak to the report, the contents of which have allayed some of the concerns expressed by the Committee with regard to the suitability of the bed and breakfast accommodation used by the Council to house homeless households; and

(c) requests:-

- (i) the Executive Director, Communities Portfolio, to submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee on the draft Schedule of Requirements to enable Members to comment on its contents; and
- (ii) Members of the Committee to contact the Policy Officer (Scrutiny) in connection with proposed visits to a sample of the bed and breakfast accommodation presently being used by the City Council to house homeless households.

7. COMMUNITY SAFETY UPDATE 2013

7.1 Inspector Phil Shaw, Local Authority Liaison Officer, South Yorkshire Police, and Sarah Banks, Head of Safer and Sustainable Communities, gave a presentation on the Community Safety Update 2013. The presentation provided information on the Police and Crime Commissioner, Police and Crime Panels, the Safer and Sustainable Communities Partnership's priorities and the Joint Strategic Intelligence Assessment.

7.2 In terms of performance, it was reported that levels of anti-social behaviour were down, showing a 13% reduction as compared to 2011/12, levels of the reporting of hate crime had increased, with specific increases relating to disability hate crime and although burglary had shown an increase of 2%, a number of targeted actions were being taken to address this increase. There had also been a steady decrease in levels of victim-based crime in the City from 2008 to July 2012.

7.3 Reference was also made to the achievements made, specifically the Partnership Resource Allocation Meeting (PRAM), Community Justice Panels and the facility for reporting hate crime at the First Point Reception at Howden House, as well as details of the budget, future challenges and future targets.

7.4 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- In connection with the reduction in overall levels of domestic violence, whilst there were no statistics relating specifically to rape available at the meeting, the Police were in the process of establishing a dedicated unit to deal with rape.
- In connection with the disability aspect of hate crime, consideration had been given to assisting those victims who were not able to access the reporting centre at the First Point Reception at Howden House. A number of talks had been made at events and meetings attended by disability groups, with more planned, where help and advice had been provided to people with disabilities who had either been victims of hate crime, or could potentially be victims. Work had also been undertaken to encourage people with disabilities and their relatives, friends and carers, to report any incidents of hate crime. Arrangements were being made to attend a future meeting of the Learning and Disability Board to highlight the issues.

- Whilst the Police would continue to direct resources into reducing levels of shoplifting, which included the Retail Crime Unit working closely with retailers on this issue, the Government had requested that more resources be directed to targeting victim-based crime.
- A new operation had been introduced in terms of burglaries, whereby following a burglary, officers would undertake intensive house to house questioning, with the aim of raising people's attention, as well as seeking evidence to solve the crime. It was hoped that this approach would force people living within the vicinity to consider improving the security of their homes. The Police were also undertaking high visibility and covert patrols in areas with high burglary rates.

7.3 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the information reported as part of the presentation now made, together with the responses to the questions raised; and
- (b) thanks Inspector Phil Shaw and Sarah Banks for the presentation now made.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8.1 It was reported that the arrangements in terms of the future of the Scrutiny and Policy Development Committees would be decided at the Annual Council Meeting on 15th May 2013.