

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Growing Barnsley Workstream
DATE:	Tuesday 28 June 2022
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present Councillors Ennis OBE (Chair), Bellamy, Bowser, Cain, Clarke, Denton, Eastwood, Green, Hayward, Lodge, Lowe-Fleelo, McCarthy, Moyes, Osborne, Peace, Risebury, Webster and Wray together with co-opted member Ms. G Carter

In virtual attendance Ms. G Carter (Parent Governor Representative)

5 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

Ms. G Carter was in attendance and, therefore, no apologies for absence were received in accordance with Regulation 7(6) of the Parent Governor Representatives (England) Regulations 2001.

6 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Cllr Eastwood declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute number 4 as she is on the Lettings Policy Review Committee.

Cllr Eastwood declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute number 4 as she is Cabinet Support for Place, Health and Adult Social Care.

Cllr Cain declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute number 4 as she is Cabinet Support for Public Health and Communities.

Cllr Lodge declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute number 4 as he is Chair of the Central Area Early Help Delivery Group and an employee of an organisation that supports care leavers.

7 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 May 2022 were received.

8 Housing & Support Model to Prevent Homelessness

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

Michelle Kaye, Group Leader Housing & Welfare, Public Health & Communities Directorate, BMBC

Linda Middlewood, Head of Service Adult Social Care, Public Health & Communities Directorate, BMBC

Paul Brannan, Head of Safer Barnsley, Public Health & Communities Directorate, BMBC

Phillip Hollingsworth, Service Director Communities, Public Health & Communities Directorate, BMBC

Sophie Wales, Service Director Children's Social Care & Safeguarding & Interim

Cllr Trevor Cave, Cabinet Spokesperson Children's Services, BMBC

Cllr Caroline Makinson, Cabinet Spokesperson Public Health & Communities, BMBC

P Hollingsworth provided a report into homelessness in response to Covid and stated how proud he was of how Barnsley responded to the government's Everyone In initiative. During Covid, 14 flats were made available to the homeless and 141 people were supported into temporary accommodation. As part of the Covid recovery plan there are now 14 self-contained units which Members are invited to have a look at.

During March 2022 the Homeless Regional Advisor visited the team to review data and interview staff. They provided positive feedback and stated that the team's commitment and enthusiasm was apparent, along with strong working relationships with partners and using good practice from the homelessness prevention toolkit. The website is user friendly, and this will be used as a reference to other local authorities as good practice.

The service have been working on identifying and engaging with rough sleepers and Members were invited to go along on early morning outreach to see this in practise. A key aspect of today's session was to highlight was that any young person presenting is a concern, when this happens the team do work with partners to address this. The team gave thanks to the Voluntary and community Sector who work alongside the housing officer team, as they are grateful for the work which is being carried out.

The ensuing discussions included: -

It was stated that when people, particularly families become homeless attempts are made to keep them in Barnsley to minimise disruption. If they are placed out of area, they are brought back to Barnsley as soon as possible. The problem in Barnsley is that hotels are becoming booked up quickly. There are currently 25 temporary accommodation units within Barnsley which are prioritised to families, and a request has been made to increase this to 30. Furthermore, if the pressures increase this may be reviewed again.

There are an additional 8 properties managed by Riverside Housing for families and the length of stay is increasing due to demand. There is a significant challenge to securing private rentals due to the cost and landlords selling properties, to ease their own financial burdens. Further options are being explored as the service does not want to put people in B&B's.

It was clarified that the 25 properties are council houses and are open cases within team, who will provide ongoing support to move people into permanent homes. The challenge is matching people to properties as there is limited family housing stock in the brough which is available and affordable. Other housing providers need to play their part, not just Berneslai Homes.

The service is trying to prepare for the cost-of-living crisis. Some temporary accommodation can be paid for with housing benefit, however issues arise when individuals are working and are not entitled to housing benefit. A Financial Resilience Officer has been appointed to provide support to people with budgeting, money management etc.– their work was commended, and Members were encouraged to visit the team to see what good work is being done.

From the 141 temporary housing placements it was acknowledged that around 30-40 individuals revolved around the service during Covid, being placed several times due to complexities. Many of these are now settled but still receiving support.

Of the 179 16–24-year-olds who were owed a homeless duty between April 21 and May 22, most of them were already known to Children’s Social Care prior to presenting as homeless. When young people present a present at 16, a joint assessment is carried out to support them. Cllr Lodge referred to item 3.6 of the report noting that it encourages young people to stay at home but stated that this may cause more trauma, so it is not always possible. To combat this work is carried out with other organisations such as Centrepoin and options including the supported housing pathway and holding tenancies in trust are explored. The care system is also an option.

Cllr Ennis questioned how much of a problem is it that a tenancy cannot be given to 16- or 17-year-olds. It was stated that this can be done as long as the council or social services hold it in trust so that it can be transferred over to the tenant at 18. However, this is not currently in place at, because it is not always the best option as it could lead to compromising or setting the young person up to fail for future tenancies.

B&B usage is a last resort as this can cause trauma, impacting on social and emotional health, exacerbating problems further down the line. Furthermore, it is massive challenge for cooking, even with communal areas due to the cost. The way in which the work is being carried out is being reset to stop families coming through initially. This will avoid the pressures on local communities when identifying new properties.

The recent visit from the government advisor identified that the work which the homelessness teams are doing is the best in South Yorkshire. Barnsley has the lowest numbers of people in temporary accommodation and B&B across the sub region. The goal in Barnsley is to have less people in temporary accommodation and focus more on the prevention of homelessness.

The private sector rental market is the biggest opportunity and risk with rents going up affecting affordability. Furthermore, it’s difficult to convince landlords to work with the council due to the negative perceptions they can have around homeless tenants. However, most tenants are people who have fallen on hard times, there is now a worker in place to link in with the private sector to resolve issues between the landlord and tenant which promotes good relationships. Furthermore, there will shortly be a new landlord incentive scheme in place.

Cllr Denton stated that we need to model other countries who are investing time and resources into long term systemic support and address economic discriminatory

legislation. It was acknowledged that the team have gone through crisis management during Covid but are now exploring data to see where resources should be targeted. There has been a lot of investment lately to manage, along with supporting those with complex needs to prevent revolving homelessness.

In regard to St Mary's flats there has been some vandalism and the council is making sure that people are visible and present to combat this. There has been some interest from housing organisations who have suggested it could be used as general needs accommodation. There is a conversation coming up shortly which will explore this, with attention on building strong relationships to minimise impact and deliver what the community requires.

Cllr Ennis noted that given the high profile of the flats, the problem needs to be resolved as quickly as possible. Cllr Hayward stated that it would be useful if the council tried to purchase the flats, to remove the issues experienced in the past with landlords. An options appraisal was carried out to see if they could be purchased and brought into use, but it was cost prohibitive, and the value could not be met. The ownership has since changed from an offshore party, with the new owners being more mainstream providers so this might prove positive.

Cllr Green has noticed over the last 6/7 months that more people are sleeping rough in the town centre during the weekend. He wanted to know what Members could do to help as he is aware that they can go to the Civic, but they are sleeping rough again the next week. The team stated that many of these people are beggars and not rough sleepers. There is a new programme coming into place which will address rough sleepers and the team are keen to target the 'new to the streets' individuals so that it does not become entrenched.

The issue of violence against partners, predominantly women was raised, and it was acknowledged that this is one of the top reasons for homelessness. Obviously if there are children this then becomes a total package, and the new Domestic Abuse Act puts a requirement on the council to have a strategy to address this. Work has been carried out with commissioners to identify better options as the local refuge is always full.

It was noted that if feasible and safe, women and children should not have to leave the family home. IDAS and MARAC are in place to support woman and children. The lack of housing options for people feeling violence has been explored, and it is envisaged that some new housing will be available shortly. It can be problematic getting women into a refuge, just due to the number of spaces available and the fact that women are staying longer due to limited move on options. The team do look to national support from Woman's Aid, to secure a refugee place anywhere in the country. The new strategy will hopefully explore this with the possibility of a crash pad being put in place.

With regard to projects supporting women in the communities, often run by individuals. The council can link these individuals up with IDAS because they are commissioned to look for gaps in provision. The team will liaise with Cllr Hayward following the meeting to ensure that any know community groups are identified and supported.

In response to a query about women fleeing from domestic violence and having to return to the perpetrator due to services not being able to accommodate her, the team stated that if something like this comes to their attention, the individual would be put in a B&B or the service would work with other borough's if there is a lack of options locally.

There are powers to remove perpetrators from the home but as a council, these options are not always been used. Furthermore, as the perpetrator would then be homeless, they would also need support. Additionally, as the perpetrator knows where the women is, they would return to the property so this would need to be monitored. There is help for men if they are the victim including temporary accommodation or access to the few specialist refuges in the country. As a council, we need to consider what support there is available for men as male victims are on the rise – and teenage boys in families fleeing from domestic violence are not allowed in existing refuges.

With domestic violence being on the national agenda there will be more properties for abuse victims, and the service will link up with partners on this.

Cllr Osborne wanted to discuss two points regarding rent arrears and if there is any link with the change from housing benefits being paid directly to the landlord to being paid directly to the individual as part of Universal Credit payments, particularly for those with chaotic lifestyles. Furthermore, is there any value in working with the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) to identify and support those at risk as they will know the “hidden homeless”.

It was again stated that we need to refocus on prevention. If there are any vulnerable individuals involved with the team, then an application can be made to the DWP to have the rent paid direct to the landlord. They are trying to work with social landlords and commissioned and non-commissioned providers to determine if someone is getting close to eviction, so that they can they work in partnership to prevent this. They do work closely with the DWP. A number of organisations have a legal duty to refer at risk of homeless people to the team for support and the DWP are one of the top referrers. Prior to covid there was a housing officer based within the Jobcentre and as the team is moving to Wellington House, they will have the opportunity to link up with them again.

It was questioned whether it may be useful to get in contact with the prison service to find out when people are being released and where to, officers explained that funds have been secured for a specialist housing worker to link up with the prison service. Furthermore, the team have developed a housing pathway with Doncaster prisons. They do work with Shelter and Nacro, along with other agencies but this work needs to be done early and not the day before release day.

The team will be managing their own supported housing for rough sleepers and those with complex needs. it was explained that it will be a smaller there will be a smaller accommodation unit with lower caseloads, 1 caseworker to 6 individuals. The scheme will work in a physiologically informed way, trying to address previous trauma.

Cllr Clarke noted that there are a lot of houses being left empty and was there a strategy in place to address this. It was clarified that there has been a successful empty homes scheme running for the past couple of years. This has helped with moving people on from temporary accommodation and giving support to those who need further help. The empty homes programme now sits within the same service as the homeless team, which will help reduce the number of empty homes. However, as the houses are left for a long time, costs need to be explored when looking to bring them back into use. Cllr Hayward asked for clarification on how long is temporary. It was clarified that the average stay is up to 6 months.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) Witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution; and
- (ii) Members note the report
- (iii) Witnesses to provide figures for the proportion of children and young people presenting as homeless who were already known to children's social care for the 2021-22 data collection period
- (iv) Witnesses to consider holding tenancies in trust for 16/17 year-olds where suitable
- (v) Witnesses to consider providing a 'crash pad' facility to support those fleeing from domestic abuse
- (vi) Witnesses to liaise with members to identify and support individuals in the community who are providing support to those fleeing from domestic abuse
- (vii) Witnesses to consider a return to providing housing officers at the job centre to support prevention and early help for individuals

Chair