

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.00PM 12 JANUARY 2012

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors K Norman (Chair); Phillips (Deputy Chair), Buckley, Gilbey, Peltzer Dunn, Turton and Wealls

Co-opted Members: Robert Brown (BHLINK)

PART ONE

34. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

35A Declaration of Substitutes

35.1 There were none.

35.2 Cllr Mike Jones sent his apologies.

35B Declarations of Interest

35.3 There were none.

35C Declarations of Party Whip

35.4 There were none.

35D Exclusion of Press and Public

35.5 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

35.6 **RESOLVED** – that the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

35. DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 03 NOVEMBER 2011

36.1 RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 03 November 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

36. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

37.1 The Chair told members that the scrutiny panels on vulnerable adults and on the budget were nearing their conclusion.

37.2 The Chair informed members that the scrutiny workshop on community meals and the community meals tasting session had both taken place. A report back will be presented to ASCHOSC at its next meeting.

37. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

38.1 A public question from the Brighton & Hove Local Involvement Network (LINK) was received (see minute book). This was debated as part of the agenda item on Homelessness.

38.2 Officers agreed that a written response on the issue raised would be sent to the LINK.

38. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

39.1 There were none.

39. NOTICES OF MOTIONS REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

40.1 There were none.

40. PRESENTATION FROM CLLR BILL RANDALL, CHAIR OF THE BRIGHTON & HOVE STRATEGIC HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

41.1 Cllr Randall spoke to the committee about the working of the Strategic Housing Partnership (SHP).

41.2 Cllr Randall outlined some of the major housing challenges facing the city. These included:

- Homelessness – with the number of people applying for temporary accommodation and the number of rough sleepers both up significantly in the past few months.
- Social Housing – inadequate to meet demand, particularly in terms of family homes. The SHP is actively engaged with city Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), but the new national rent regime requiring RSLs to charge 80% of market rates for rent will make RSL properties unaffordable for many local people.
- Student Housing – family homes being converted to student accommodation; nuisance problems associated with some homes in multiple occupation (HMOs); lack of dedicated student housing (especially for students at Brighton University). Cllr Randall noted that

both city universities were now fully engaged with this issue and taking more responsibility for problems associated with their students. The council was looking to use planning law to check the spread of HMOs, but needed to be circumspect to avoid legal challenge.

- Private Rented – vacancies in the sector silting up, and significant recent rent increases.
 - Housing Benefit – imminent changes to the benefit system likely to exacerbate housing problems, particularly for young people.
 - New homes – very little activity either nationally or locally. The council is looking to encourage new building on two city sites: Circus Street and Preston Barracks.
 - Empty Homes – looking at reducing the number of empty council properties (currently around 70, although part of this has been necessitated by the development of Seaside Community Homes and the requirements of its financing). Also looking at how best to deal with private sector empty properties.
 - Supporting People – recognising the importance of Supporting People grants and seeking to protect Supporting People activities as much as possible in the current financial climate.
 - Extra Care – increasing demand for a range of supported housing options for older people.
 - Tenants – greater tenant involvement in making decisions about their housing, both in terms of council tenants and people in the RSL or private sector.
- 41.3 Asked whether he would consider remaining as SHP Chair when he takes up mayoral duties in May 2012, Cllr Randall told members that he would certainly consider doing so if asked.
- 41.4 In response to a question on the sub-letting of social housing, Nick Hibberd, Head of Housing and Social Inclusion, told members that tenancy fraud was a priority for the Housing service. Housing and the council's Audit service worked together to investigate potential sub-letting, either on the basis of tip-offs from members of the public or cross-checking housing records with benefits' data. Although not a problem on the same scale as in some London boroughs, sub-letting was a significant issue and was not tolerated. The council did prosecute suspected fraudsters, although this was a tricky process as it was typically not easy to collect evidence sufficient for a conviction.
- 41.5 The Chair thanked Cllr Randall for attending and answering members' questions.

41. HOMELESSNESS: TRAINING SESSION

- 42.1 This item was presented by Narinder Sundar, Commissioning Manager, BHCC Housing Commissioning Unit; and Richard Denyer-Bewick, Quality Assurance and Risk Manager, BHCC Rough Sleepers' Team.

- 42.2 Members were told that rough sleepers present a significant local challenge. Most rough sleepers (around 65%) have no local connection, and may originate from a wide variety of places – they are not just displaced people from London. Rough sleepers typically have very complex needs, including mental health, physical health and substance misuse issues.
- 42.3 The council provides or commissions a number of services for this group of people, working with and alongside other organisations including local church groups. One such organisation currently runs St Patrick’s Night Shelter, providing 14 beds, but will shortly be closing the service. A group of city churches plan to open extra cold weather provision, which should replace some of this capacity; and the council also funds an extreme weather shelter scheme.
- 42.4 In answer to questions regarding how the number of rough sleepers was counted, the committee was told that the methodology of the official count was nationally fixed; although recognised as inaccurate, the consistency over time of this count allows the current situation to be compared with past situations. The council also undertakes its own count which is much more accurate; typically, the local count produces around double the results of the national count.
- 42.5 In response to questions regarding the trigger for opening the extreme weather shelter, members were told that the shelter is opened whenever there is a forecast for freezing weather across three consecutive days. The shelter is opened on day 1 of the forecast period, and the situation is reviewed daily thereon.
- 42.6 Members were also told that the location of the emergency shelter is not widely publicised, as the shelter is only accessible via referrals; it would be too dangerous to simply allow rough sleepers to turn up on spec. Although requiring referral might seem to risk delaying access to an emergency provision, in fact the great majority of rough sleepers are known to agencies and can be referred very quickly.
- 42.7 Members were also informed that the council had bid for funding for a project that would identify and swiftly intervene with new rough sleepers, aiming to get them off the streets with immediate effect. This scheme would be available to people with or without a local connection.
- 42.8 In response to a question about the occupancy rate at city hostels, members were told that rates were very high – in practical terms, there is a waiting list for places and the Homelessness team works hard to encourage timely ‘move-on’ to less intensively supported accommodation for hostel residents in order to free up places for the most needy.
- 42.9 The Chair thanked the officers for their contribution, praising their wide knowledge of city homelessness issues.

42. SAFEGUARDING ADULTS ANNUAL REPORT

- 43.1 This item was introduced by Denise D’Souza, Director of Adult Social Services and Lead Commissioner, People. Also present were Brian Doughty, Head of Adults Assessment, and Michelle Jenkins, Safeguarding Adults Manager

- 43.2 In response to a question asking how council staff and those of partners were alerted to safeguarding issues, members were told that a variety of means were used, including an email staff register that automatically alerted subscribers. There are still some software incompatibilities, particularly regarding the council's Care First and the NHS Care Programme databases, and non-IT solutions to these may be required.
- 43.3 In answer to a query about the high number of safeguarding alerts compared to investigations, the committee was told that safeguarding procedures had subsequently been clarified, as it was felt that partners were making alerts where there were care rather than safeguarding issues – many of the alerts were leading to care assessments rather than safeguarding investigation.
- 43.4 In response to questions regarding the relatively low alarm rates from BME and LGBT communities, members were told that there was ongoing work to raise awareness amongst BME people. Currently, data is not collated on LGBT people, as there is a sensitivity about asking for this information at a time of crisis.
- 43.5 In answer to a query about the long time taken to conduct some safeguarding investigations/staff investigations, the committee was told that the process was sometimes unavoidably lengthy as investigations into staff misconduct often had to wait until a safeguarding investigation had concluded. However, the process was now as streamlined as possible.
- 43.6 The Chair commended the council's safeguarding team for their excellent work, reflected in the annual report.
- 43.7 RESOLVED – That the annual safeguarding adults report be noted.**
- 43. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE/ STRATEGIC DIRECTOR, PEOPLE, ON ASC PERFORMANCE**
- 44.1 This item was introduced by Philip Letchfield, Head of Performance and Contracting, ASC.
- 44.2 Members were informed that the Department of Health (DH) had launched 'Local Accounts': an annual, locally produced report on ASC performance. Local accounts are currently voluntary, and there is very little guidance on them, the intention being that each area develops a report that suits its specific needs. The question for Brighton & Hove is therefore how best to take this project forward. The intention is to consult with local people and stakeholders (including BHLINK and the Older People's Council) to produce a Local Account that is of real use to local people.
- 44.3 In response to comments about the difficulty of getting members of the public to engage in a consultation on the format of the annual social care performance report, members were told that this issue was a tricky one, and that the council would have to plan carefully, considering how best to use stakeholders to encourage debate. Amongst the stakeholder groups/forms of publicity suggested as useful were: the BHLINK newsletter, The Pensioner newsletter, community newspapers, Community Development Teams and the Tenant Disability Group. It was also suggested that ASC might consider running a prize draw to encourage consultation responses.

44.4 RESOLVED – That the report be noted and officers invited to a future committee meeting to discuss a future iteration of their plans with regard to Local Accounts.

44. ITEMS TO GO FORWARD TO CABINET OR THE RELEVANT CABINET MEMBER MEETING

45.1 There were none.

45. ITEMS TO GO FORWARD TO COUNCIL

46.1 There were none.

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of