

MINUTES OF BROOKE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 FEBRUARY 2018

PRESENT:

Members of the Committee: Councillors Claire Edwards (Chair), Mrs A'Barrow, Mrs Bragg, Keeling and Pacey-Day

Officers: Chris Blundell (Financial Services Manager), Dave Wortley (Community Advice and Support Manager), Holly Reid (Prevention Manager) and Veronika Beckova (Democratic Services Officer)

24. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 7 December 2017 were approved and signed by the Chair.

25. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Mrs New and Srivastava.

26. FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2017/18 QUARTER 3

The committee had previously been requested to bring copies of the relevant Cabinet report from 5 February 2018 to the meeting.

The Financial Services Manager attended the meeting to answer questions. The item was briefly introduced as per the Cabinet report and key points were highlighted.

The report was discussed in detail at the meeting and the following additional points were made:

The administration process of the **Icelandic Investments** has been completed. Following the sale of assets, a small surplus was generated on the exchange rate.

The **Handyman Service** is linked to the Council's commercialisation agenda and an area that the Council is keen to expand.

It was highlighted that further training may be required for members to make the best use of the Rugby Monitoring and Performance System (RMPS). Members' Training is scheduled to be discussed in more detail as part of the agenda for the Special Joint Overview and Scrutiny Meeting on 19 March.

RESOLVED THAT – the Financial Services Manager be thanked for his attendance.

27. HOMELESSNESS – 12 MONTH UPDATE

The committee received a report (Part 1 – Agenda Item 5) concerning the 12 month update following the review of Homelessness in 2016/17.

The Community Advice and Support Manager and Prevention Manager attended the meeting to present the report and answer questions. A presentation was given at the meeting (annexed to the minutes).

The report was discussed in detail at the meeting and the following additional comments were made:

A review of Homelessness took place in 2016/17 when a sub-group was established in response to recent increases in homelessness in the borough.

The sub-group made recommendation as listed in the report.

Private Sector Leasing Scheme

Part of the sub-group's recommendation was for the Council to continue working with local landlords via the Private Sector Leasing Scheme (PSLS) to lessen the need for Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation.

From Monday 19 February, the Council's portfolio will increase from 24 to 29 units for single people. The Council's portfolio also includes six units for families with dependent children.

Within the team, one officer is responsible for acquiring additional properties and their management. The Council is responsible for all the repairs.

The scheme has been very successful in reducing the need for B&B accommodation. Towards the end of 2017, only one family stayed in B&B accommodation.

In the past couple of months, B&B accommodation was used to temporary house homeless people irrespective of their circumstances as part of the Council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). The SWEP is actioned when the temperature drops below zero degrees for three nights or more.

In 2016/17, SWEP was in place for three to four days over the winter months. In 2017/18, SWEP has been in operation longer as this year has been considerably colder. On 15 February, SWEP was in place for a week. Officers are anticipating for SWEP stay in place for another week.

Rugby has a limited number of B&B accommodation. To get people off the streets during the severe weather conditions, some were placed into B&B accommodation out of town in Coventry and Birmingham. For some people, this creates a problem, as they may be reliant on support service provided within Rugby.

Officers are addressing issues and looking at alternatives to put in place for future winters.

During the introduction of the report, the following questions were raised:

Has the situation regarding rough sleepers in the Town Centre been resolved?

The action to remove rough sleepers from the Town Centre was not initiated by the Council. During this action, officers' support was offered. A lot of supported accommodation has disappeared from Rugby and has been replaced with floating support. For people with very intensive issues, one or two hours of support a week is not sufficient. Numbers of rough sleepers have slowly started to increase.

Are the units rented from Private Sector landlords in good condition? What happens if any tenants are disrespectful?

The Council takes on properties that have met certain standards. The Council also becomes the managing agent for these properties. Landlords can opt-in into our gas safety contracts if they wish to do so or any issues can be reported directly to them.

As it is our contract with the landlord therefore we are responsible for the property. We cover any damage caused. Behavioural contracts are in place. The Accommodation Officers is on top of issues, talks to people, considers support needs and carries out weekly checks (more frequent checks if required).

We have a very intensive housing management function and good relationships with our landlords. Some are actively looking for properties for us to then rent from them. We are seen as a trusted and reliable partner.

If people do disrespect the properties or there is anti-social behaviour, they are evicted.

With our client base, we try to change behaviours, lives and outcomes.

Can you provide up update on Bell House?

Bell House is an ongoing project. There is a number of options that management is considering. We are currently modelling all the options. A report should be coming to councillors for consideration shortly.

Preventing Homelessness Improving Lives (p.h.i.l.)

- p.h.i.l. was a result of a successful homelessness prevention trailblazer fund bid from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- The bid was county wide and based on the following top three reasons for homelessness in Warwickshire: loss of private rented accommodation, parental eviction and domestic abuse.
- p.h.i.l. is the initial point of contact for all cases of early homelessness prevention.
- The aim is to prevent homelessness 2/3 months before crisis point through many mechanisms but mainly through enhanced partnership working including Lighting Referrals.
- The project has been in place for a year and the following outcomes have been achieved to date:

- Appointment of Prevention Coordinators (two full time posts and one part time post) and a Housing Apprentice supporting the project
- 2 support workers are attached to the project: P3 for people over 25 years of age and St Basils for people under 25 years of age
- Enhanced partnership working with partnership agencies referring to the project
- Implementation Group – to shape the project/made up of representatives from Warwickshire’s five districts and boroughs, Public Health, Warwickshire Priority Families Programme and Warwickshire CAVA
- Housing Options Wizard – self-help tool for individuals use to look up potential solutions based on their housing issues
- Facebook account – used to reach to people and promote services available
- Housing and Wellbeing Plan – full assessment of people’s circumstances (usually carried out through the phone but if necessary, through a home visit) which covers:
 - Holistic and tailored approach
 - Income maximisation/Training and employment
 - Mediation/Tenancy and family support
 - Behavioural contract (between landlords and tenants or between parents/carers and young people)
 - Realistic advice
 - Referrals to appropriate agencies
 - Private rented advice (including Section 21 eviction notice)
 - Wellbeing information/referrals/signposting
- To date, the team has received 92 referrals Warwickshire wide, 32 of which fell within the categories that p.h.i.l. is concentrating on and eight cases resulted in homelessness being prevented. A breakdown of cases was circulated at the meeting and a copy is annexed to the minutes.

Breakdown of cases by local authority

Name of Local Authority	p.h.i.l. referral	p.h.i.l. referral	Advice and Assistance	Advice and Assistance	Grand Total
	<i>number of cases</i>	<i>percentage</i>	<i>number of cases</i>	<i>percentage</i>	<i>number of cases</i>
North Warwickshire	4	9%	6	12%	10
Nuneaton and Bedworth	8	17%	8	16%	16
Rugby	17	37%	25	51%	42
Strafford upon Avon	6	13%	2	4%	8
Warwick	11	24%	8	16%	19
Grand Total	46	100%	49	100%	95

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

- Takes effect on 3 April 2018
- Brings every eligible homeless person into provision
- Three stage of the new process:
 - Prevention duty for up to 56 days – take reasonable steps to help the applicant from losing accommodation

- Relief duty for up to 56 days – take reasonable steps to help the applicant find somewhere else to live
- Main duty – priority need/not intentionally homeless (homelessness provision as known)
- The new way of working presents a number of challenges for officers including dealing with clients' expectations and significant increase in caseload.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 – Rugby Borough Council's Response

- Ensuring managers understand the new legislation
- Providing training for officers
- Work to establish appropriate provision
- Broaden and deepen partnership working
- Introduce some early initiatives e.g. work with rough sleepers
- Strategic targeting of funding
- Configuration of the service

Configuration of the service

- A review of the Housing Service took place in 2017.
- A decision was made to merge Housing Options and Benefits teams into a new team: Community Advice and Support Team (CAST). The two roles within the new team are:
 - CAST Officers – responsibilities include housing benefit calculations, council tax reduction, prevention activity and relief activity.
 - CAST Lead Officers – responsibilities include dealing with more complicated cases, discretionary financial support, outreach work and full duty.
- The aim is for all officers to be generic and able to offer advice and support across areas of activity. Expertise and knowledge within the two teams will be brought together to help residents.

During the presentation, the following questions were raised:

What is the definition of an 'eligible person'?

The person has a right to be in the UK.

People with complex needs see a financial benefit in being on the street. What can be done to educate them and change their lifestyle?

Rough sleepers were offered accommodation because of the severe weather and some have chosen not to accept the offer because financially they were much better off on the street.

Through the Homelessness Forum, we are working with other organisations on how to improve services already available.

We can also learn from support organisations such as P3 who already work with people in the streets. We need to identify what their complex needs are and work

with them on those issues so that when they come off the streets, they receive all of the support when they need it.

Nationally, the implementation of Universal Credit (UC) has been an issue. With the new changes that are coming in, will it get better? Also moving forward, will officers provide a more hands on service?

UC is becoming more imbedded. The types of issues that officers are coming across have changed.

As an authority, we have been charged by DWP to provide customers with support to access universal credit (help with online claim, obtaining IT skills to be able to manage their account, etc). Benn Partnership Centre was awarded a contract to provide IT support to clients. The contract has been extended for another year. Many people were helped with their initial claim but very few have asked for any ongoing help. A study will be undertaken to find out what has happened to these people.

Another part of the support provided is through the Citizen Advice Bureau who are contracted to provide budgetary advice specifically around migration from weekly/fortnightly payments to budgeting on a monthly basis. Unfortunately, it has been very difficult to engage clients.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) the Community Advice and Support Manager and Prevention Manager be thanked for their attendance and update; and
- (2) a progress report be presented to overview and scrutiny in February 2019.

28. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The committee received a report (Part 1 – Agenda Item 6) concerning the progress of task group reviews within its remit and the forward work programme.

RESOLVED THAT – the forward work programme be noted.

CHAIR

- Homeless Prevention Trailblazers Fund - MHCLG
- Warwickshire Countywide Bid – RBC lead
- Based on the top 3 reasons for homelessness in Warwickshire
- Successful - £865,000 - ends 31st December 2019
- **p.h.i.l. is the initial point of contact for all cases of early homelessness prevention**
- Aim –
 - to prevent homelessness 2/3 month prior to crisis
- Through -
 - Enhanced partnership working including Lightning Referrals
 - E.g. Job Centre plus / Children Centres / CAB



North Warwickshire
Borough Council



Outcomes

- Prevention Coordinators
- Enhanced partnership working
- Housing Options Wizard
- Facebook
- Housing and Wellbeing plan which includes:
 - Holistic & tailored approach
 - Income maximisation / Training and employment
 - Mediation / Tenancy and family support
 - Behavioural contract
 - Realistic advice
 - Referrals to appropriate agencies
 - Private rented advice
 - Wellbeing information/referrals/signposting
- 80 referrals / 32 appropriate referrals / 8 preventions



North Warwickshire
Borough Council



Referral Process

- Identify if the customer should be referred to p.h.i.l.
- Verbal permission from customer
- Phone p.h.i.l. on 01788 533644/643
- Or
- Elected Member phone p.h.i.l. to discuss case
- Or self-referral through:
- [fb.me/preventinghomelessness](https://www.facebook.com/preventinghomelessness)



North Warwickshire
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P.h.i.I Case Studies

Case	Summary of issues presented	Action taken
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship breakdown Landlord not responding to issues regarding maintenance of the property In debt Children with additional needs Tenancy not sustainable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental Health asked to intervene Benefits review Budgeting help (eg £80 per month mobile phone bill) and clear rent arrears Assisted with CV and into part-time employment Considered other properties <p>Tenancy now sustainable</p>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently living in parental home with mother (1 bed flat). Would like to move to Northamptonshire. Wants independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mediation with mother Assisted with creating a work search plan Referred to MIND for Assertiveness Program <p>Improved relationship with mother Improved self-esteem and mental health</p>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lost job Facing eviction due to rent arrears and was threatened with section 21 notice Car repairs required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assisted to apply for a discretionary housing award Investigated availability of grants to help with car repairs Found employment <p>The threat of a Sect 21 Notice was withdrawn as she was able to fulfil her rent commitments with her new salary and her rent arrears were paid by DHP award.</p>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mental Health issues resulted in being signed off work Rent arrears resulted in Section 21 notice being issued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referred for help to tackle alcohol issue – resulted in the person stopping drinking Referred to MIND <p>Rehomed in supported accommodation</p>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rent arrears of £1,470 Section 21 notice was threatened if did not pay off arrears 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaised with letting agent to agree a repayment plan with behaviour contract Assisted with move into full time employment <p>Threat of section 21 was withdrawn</p>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lone parent with post-natal depression Customer's mother struggling with working and supporting daughter and grand daughter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family mediation Housing options advice Counselling support <p>More stable home life</p>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Property condition Section 21 notice issued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement notice served by Environmental Health This then stopped a section 21 notice being enforceable for 6 months Supporting with financial support to find alternative accommodation <p>Currently in stable accommodation with to leave when financially ready</p>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UC and fighting Cancer Rent arrears Threat of section 21 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DHP Accessed food and utilities assistance Behavioural contract to pay off arrears <p>Threat of section 21 was withdrawn</p>

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017

- ▶ Most significant changes to homeless legislation since 1977
- ▶ Takes effect on 3 April 2018
- ▶ Cross party support in parliament
- ▶ Brings every eligible homeless person into provision
- ▶ Three stage process
 1. Prevention Duty for up to 56 days
 2. Relief Duty for up to 56 days
 3. Main Duty (which is homelessness provision as we know it now)
- ▶ Challenges

HRA 2017 RBC's Response

- ▶ Ensuring managers understand the new legislation
- ▶ Providing training for officers
- ▶ Work to establish appropriate provision
- ▶ Broaden and deepen partnership working
- ▶ Introduce some early initiatives e.g. work with rough sleepers
- ▶ Strategic targeting of funding
- ▶ Configuration of the service

Community Advice and Support Team

- Merging Housing Options and Benefits Team into a new team
- Bringing together experience and knowledge to help residents
- Officers will become generic and able to offer advice and support across areas of activity
- Steep learning curve
- Cabinet Report on 5th March 2018
- Implementation commences 1st April 2018
- Test and Learn

CAST Roles

- **CAST Officers**
 - Housing Benefit calculations
 - Council Tax Reduction
 - Prevention activity
 - Relief activity

- **CAST Lead Officers**
 - More complicated cases
 - Full Duty
 - Discretionary financial support
 - Outreach work