

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

HEALTH & WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held at the County Borough Council Offices, The Pavilions, Cambrian Park, Clydach Vale, on Tuesday 6th of November 2018 at 5:00pm

Present:

County Borough Councillor R Yeo – in the Chair

County Borough Councillors:

A. Chapman	P. Howe	J. Davies	G. Holmes
L. De- Vet	G. Hughes	M. Tegg	
M. Forey	A. Roberts	A. Davies- Jones	

Non – Committee Members in attendance

County Borough Councillor R. Lewis – Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities, Well-being & Cultural Services
County Borough Councillor L. M. Adams – Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
County Borough Councillor S. Evans – Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny

Officers:

Mr P. Mee – Director of Public Health, Protection & Community Services
Mr A Wilkins – Head of Legal Corporate and Democratic Service
Ms C Emery - Supporting
People, Partnerships and Domestic Abuse Manager.
Ms L Davies - Head of Public Protection
Mr I Jones - Housing Operations Manager
Mr N Pilliner - Pollution and Public Health Manager

19. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from County Borough Councillor L. Jones, J. Williams, G. Stacey and K. Jones

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, there were no personal declarations of personal interests made, pertaining to the agenda.

21. AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF TRANSFERRING THE KENNELING FACILITY TO HOPE RESCUE.

Members received a verbal update from the Pollution & Public Health Manager in relation to the evaluation of the impact of transferring the Council's kennelling facility to Hope Rescue.

Members were asked to scrutinise the contents of the report.

On the 24th of November 2016, Cabinet gave approval for the transfer of the stray dog kennelling service to Hope Rescue.

Members were advised that Local Authority duties are to seize and detain stray dogs, return seized dogs to their owners, keep a register of stray dogs and retain the dogs for a period of 7 days. Following the 7-day period, the detained dog ceases to be the responsibility of the Council. Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC employs Animal Control Wardens to deal with complaints concerning stray dogs and in line with a Service Level Agreement (SLA), since June 2017, Hope Rescue have provided the kennelling facility to enable the Council to fulfil its statutory duty with regard to detaining stray dogs. Hope Rescue work with relevant stakeholders to provide a kennelling facility for RCTCBC, South Wales Police, RSPCA and other Local Authorities.

To summarise, the Pollution & Public Health Manager advised Members that during 2016, the Council explored different ways of delivering kennelling services in order to ensure they are cost effective in the future. Outsourcing the kennelling requirements to a third party organisation was decided by Cabinet to be a more sustainable option for the future given demand for kennelling overall is declining and the financial costs of operating our own kennels was unviable.

In addition, the transfer of the kennelling facility has demonstrated improvements in service delivery and has been delivered within the allocated budget, with predicted efficiencies for the coming years.

The 12-month review of the new kennelling facility operated by Hope Rescue has demonstrated successful outcomes and an improvement in service delivery for the Council, particularly in respect of the 24/7 out of hours service and increased amount of dogs being reclaimed. The evaluation demonstrates that the continued outsourcing of kennelling provision via Hope Rescue, while maintaining an Animal Warden Service, provides a cost effective solution for the future.

Members were advised that regular analysis of Animal Warden Service requests and kennelling demand will continue in the future to establish any changes in service demand going forward.

The Pollution & Public Health Manager advised Members that in respect of performance, the Animal Wardens have maintained an effective stray dog control service, which has been supplemented with the benefits of dogs being taken directly to Hope Rescue by the public through the improved out of hours service. The cover

provided by the Animal Wardens has also enabled the Council to maintain an effective pest control service and will make the service more resilient in the future.

Members were then given the opportunity to scrutinise the report in detail and to ask questions.

The Chair began by thanking the Pollution & Public Health Manager for providing the Committee with such a detailed report.

A Member, who had visited Hope Rescue earlier in the day on a site visit, stated that the facility is fantastic and praised the extra services that are provided by Hope Rescue. The Member gave praise to the staff that work there and asked if the Council could be doing more to promote the extra services that are provided by Hope Rescue such as the Christmas shoebox appeal. The Pollution & Public Health Manager advised Members that this was certainly something that they will look into.

Another Member also began by praising the service and queried the budget for the 2018-19 Municipal year. The Member was advised that a decision was made during 2017/18 with Cabinet Member support, to allow Hope Rescue to keep the £25 statutory fee when a dog is reclaimed. This was agreed to cover unforeseen administrative costs and to enable Hope Rescue to continue to provide the following added value services to the Council and third sector:

- Free respite for dogs owned by people entering a Domestic Abuse refuge.
- Free respite for dogs of homeless people entering emergency or temporary accommodation
- Free respite for dogs of vulnerable adults under the care of Adult Services
- Subsidised respite kennelling for dogs of adults going into hospital where referrals are received via Council Social Care

The Chair commented that he was very impressed with the facility and gave praise to the help that has been provided to them by the Local Authority. The Chair stated that he would like to arrange another site visit next year.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to approve the report.

22. REVIEW OF THE PROPOSED RHONDDA CYNON TAF HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2018-2022

Members were asked to scrutinise the suitability of the proposed draft Rhondda Cynon Taf Homelessness Strategy 2018-22 and following this to make recommendations in respect of the strategy.

To begin, the Head of Public Protection asked Members to consider the Wales Audit Office National Report.

In January 2018, the Wales Audit Office issued their report “How Local Government manages demand – Homelessness”, which reported on how effectively Local Authorities across Wales had implemented the new legislation that became operational in 2015. This report made eight recommendations. The Council has produced an Action Plan in response to these recommendations

Members were asked to scrutinise the Council's action plan in relation to how the Council will address these recommendations.

The Chair began by stating that it was a very detailed report and gave his support to the action plan.

A Member asked if any data was available to compare pro-rata with Cardiff Council. The Head of Public Protection advised that RCT are doing very well with homelessness prevention, however Members were advised that it is a very complex issue.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to approve the action plan. It was agreed that the matter would be referred to Audit Committee in December.

Members were then given a presentation by the Supporting People, Partnerships and Domestic Abuse Manager in relation to the Homelessness Strategy 2018-22.

Members were advised that new Homelessness legislation in Wales became operational on the 28th April 2015 via Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. This Act placed new duties on Local Authorities to help anyone seeking housing advice and assistance, with an emphasis on prevention of homelessness via early intervention to tackle the causes of homelessness in a strategic and co-ordinated way.

The Act requires all Welsh Local Authorities to carry out a review of homelessness for its area and formulate and adopt a Homelessness Strategy by the end of 2018, with a new homelessness strategy every fourth year thereafter.

The review of current homelessness services in RCT highlights how the Council has a very well developed multi agency approach. However, although there are wide ranges of prevention services across RCT that are working well, there are areas where more work is required to address need:

- There are limited services for male victims of domestic abuse;
- A high proportion of clients who present as homeless have complex needs with substance misuse and mental health problems increasing;
- Bed and breakfast accommodation is still used to place young people and those with a mental health need;
- There is a shortage of single person accommodation across RCT;
- Access to suitable affordable housing is difficult, particularly one bed single person accommodation;
- Demand for social housing is very high;
- There is a need to make better use of the private rented sector;
- A lack of specialist accommodation with support for young people;
- There are concerns about Welfare Reform and the impact that will have on homelessness presentations and other services;

- There are difficulties for ex –offenders to access accommodation.

The Homelessness Strategy 2018-22 has three key objectives:

- Objective 1 – Preventing homelessness and repeat homelessness from occurring, wherever possible, therefore reducing homelessness;
- Objective 2 – Ensuring that appropriate support and accommodation, including temporary and emergency accommodation, is available to meet the needs of homeless and potentially homeless people;
- Objective 3 - Ensuring people with housing support needs have these fully assessed and have access to services to maintain independent living.

The Homeless review found that the existing strategic aims and prevention activity have helped deliver effective results in the face of increasing demands on services. It is anticipated there will be further increasing demands on Housing Advice, Homelessness and Supporting People services in the future.

The key objectives will allow the Council to meet its statutory obligations in accordance with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and build on the good work already in progress.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions.

The Chair began by giving his thanks for such a comprehensive report.

The Chair directed Members to answer the question “Does the Committee agree with the strategic objectives and the actions proposed”.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee voiced his concerns regarding the accommodation available for young people. He explained that this was not surprising given the large increase in fostering in the County Borough. He queried how we could link this with education. He also questioned what we could do to help veterans who are suffering with PTSD and he questioned what could be done for residents who live in a caravan for 10 months of the year and are then classed as homeless. The Supporting People, Partnerships and Domestic Abuse Manager advised Members that in relation to homelessness and young people, this is something that they are aware of and they are working with children services to resolve this issue. In relation to War Veterans, Members were advised that the homelessness policy prioritises veterans even before they become homeless. Concerning residents who live in caravans, Members were told that each case is assessed individually and looked at on a case-by-case basis.

A Member commented on the difference in housing benefit allowance rates between different geographical areas. The Member pointed out that in certain areas the local housing allowance can be less and is not enough to cover the increasing rent areas. Members were advised that this issue is something that they are aware of and that they have requested that the Welsh Government look at it in more detail.

Discussions ensued and a Member queried if officers have looked at the impact of on the wider community of using temporary accommodation for homeless people, for

example bed and breakfast hotels. The Committee was advised that temporary accommodation can be challenging given the complex needs of many clients placed in them however however they are looking at more sustainable accommodation options to deal with this issue. Their key objective is for people to be placed in appropriate emergency accommodation and decisions on what accommodation to use do take account of the community in which that accommodation is located.

A Member commented that the strategy seems very positive. The Member stated that the difficulty is helping residents to sustain a tenancy once it has been secured. The Member stated that many of these tenants will have issues surrounding substance misuse or are ex-offenders. This can lead to anti-social behaviour in the community. It was agreed that it is a complex issue and that the needs of tenants are becoming more apparent. The Member felt that there are problems with the way Housing Associations serve the community. These issues need addressing. Members were advised that this is a very complex issue and that they are working to support residents with their rehabilitation and to help them maintain a tenancy agreement.

A Member queried if the age group of people wanting accommodation has changed over the years. The Member was advised that they do keep a close track on changing demographics and that, in particular, there has been an increase in applications for accommodation from older residents and single households. In some areas, there is a significant under supply of single people accommodation. Members were told that the changing demographics are regularly monitored and taken into account as part of the housing needs assessment. A key priority is to look at the private rented sector, which can be more flexible in terms of meeting the needs of the individual. There is also a need to look at shared accommodation. Members were given an example of a hostel in Pontypridd where there are specific support workers on site and the homeless get access to a meal. When the temperatures drop, everyone who attends is provided with accommodation.

Members were advised that they are looking at reviewing the community safety arrangement and, in particular, how they respond to anti social behaviour. Members were told that the Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee (Crime and Disorder) will be looking at this issue in February. Members were told that there is a need to find a balance between anti-social behaviour and providing the appropriate support to residents. The Chair commented that this issue has been covered in a working group and he agreed that it is a very complex issue.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that social landlords need to do more to better serve the community. He referenced Trivallis and the fact that they have a large number of void properties. They have the facilities there to accommodate single people but they do not bring the facilities up to a satisfactory standard. They do not manage the facilities appropriately and this has created a shortage in the County Borough. The Chair confirmed that the Chief Executive from Trivallis did attend a Committee last year. The Director of Public Health, Protection & Community Services advised Members that the Council is working closely with Trivallis to address Member's concerns. Members were advised that the problems associated with housing management are exacerbated by how they communicate with tenants and elected members. The Director agreed that there are challenges in

some areas and void properties that could be let out to tenants should be re-let to address demand.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee maintained that there is a need for single people accommodation in the area and that housing providers are not maintaining the available facilities. The Chair suggested that it might be possible to invite social landlords onto the work programme.

A number of Members agreed that social landlords are an important issue and that there are challenges around anti-social behaviour and the way they communicate with tenants. A Member pointed out that staff who work at housing associations are also frustrated and that we have to be mindful of classing all housing managers as the same. A Member also commented that there are a number of health and safety issues surrounding the lack of maintenance in housing associations.

The Chair agreed to ask the chief executive at Trivallis to come in for a discussion with Members of the committee. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee felt that it should be an all Member meeting.

The Chair agreed that there is an urgent need for investment in social housing across the County Borough and that this is a long-term issue that needs addressing.

Following discussion, Members **RESOLVED** to agree with the strategic objectives and the actions proposed in the strategy.

Chair Cllr R. Yeo

The meeting closed at 6.15 pm.