

Minutes of the Special Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held at the Civic Centre, Riverside, Stafford on Tuesday 16 July 2019

Chair - Councillor J Hood

Present (for all or part of the meeting):-

Councillors:

C A Baron	A D Hobbs
R J Barron	W J Kemp
A R G Brown	R M Sutherland
A G Cooper	M J Winnington
A P Edgeller	

Cabinet Member - Councillor J K Price - Environment Portfolio
Cabinet Member - Councillor J M Pert - Community and Health Portfolio
Cabinet Member - Councillor C V Trowbridge - Leisure Portfolio

Also Present:-

Councillors B M Cross, P M M Farrington, M Green, M Holmes, R A James, E G R Jones, P W Jones, R Kenney, P A Leason, A M Loughran, G P K Pardesi and A N Pearce

Officers in attendance:-

Mrs A Nevin	-	Health and Housing Manager
Mrs H Smith	-	Lead Officer Housing Options
Mr A Bailey	-	Scrutiny Officer

CWB1 Minutes

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held on 12 March 2019, having been published in Digest No 254 were submitted and signed.

CWB2 Apologies

An Apology for absence was received from Councillor L Nixon (Substitute W J Kemp).

CWB3 Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy Review

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Development (V3 8/7/19) which provided an outline for the review of the current Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, along with the current Allocation.

The Committee received a presentation from the Lead Officer Housing Options, which covered the following areas:-

- Background
- Housing decisions and footfall
- Upstream Homeless Prevention
 - Commitment
 - Our Approach and Our Actions
- Prevention and Relief Outcomes Comparison
 - Reason Relief Duty Ended
 - Reason Prevention Duty Ended
- Empowerment
 - Support Needs of Applicants
 - Commitment
 - Our Approach and Our Actions
- Rough Sleeper Pathway
 - Commitment
 - Our Approach and Our Actions
- Robust Partnerships
 - Commitment
 - Our Approach and Our Actions
- Expanding Housing Options
 - Commitment
 - Our Approach and Our Actions
- Review of the Allocation policy
- Sustainment
 - Commitment
 - Our Approach and Our Actions
- Overview of Priorities
- Consultation Questions

The Committee discussed the following aspects of the presentation and the report with the Cabinet Member (Community and Health Portfolio), the Health and Housing Manager and the Lead Officer Housing Options:-

- Commended the work of the Council's Housing Options Team
- Clarification of how much funding the service had attained
- Welcomed mental health support
- Care leavers were a priority and the need to start the bidding process before the age of 18
- Clarification of the work with the armed forces and the police
- Confirmation that all rough sleepers from Stafford had been offered accommodation. Rough sleepers from outside the Borough were offered advice and directed to their own local authority who were able to assist them
- An explanation of the verification process for rough sleeper numbers
- The work of the Tenancy Sustainment Officer
- The multi agency approach to homelessness
- An explanation of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

The Cabinet Member (Community and Health Portfolio) concluded the discussion by paying tribute to the working of the Council's Housing Team

using a multi-layered approach which had been successful in attracting external funding and had become a gold standard service.

RESOLVED:- that in exercise of the powers delegated to the Committee, the consultation on the Homeless and Rough Sleeper Strategy be noted.

CWB4 **Presentation - Proposed Merger between Stafford and Rural Homes and Housing Plus**

The Committee received a presentation from Karen Armitage, Chief Executive of Stafford and Rural Homes in relation to a Proposed Merger between Stafford and Rural Homes and Housing Plus, during which she raised the following issues:-

- An introduction to the three objectives contained within the Stafford and Rural Homes Corporate Plan 2016-2021, namely:-
 - Homes
 - Build
 - Growth
- Homes
 - Owned 6,300 properties
 - Regenerated many properties
 - The importance of supporting people with mental health problems in Stafford
 - The need to deliver a profit in order to subsidise public funding cuts
 - The need to make every contact count
- Build
 - Stafford and Rural Homes had an annual turnover of £39 million and had invested £280 million to date in the Borough
 - The company employed 200 people
 - This demonstrated that Stafford and Rural Homes was a big company, but a relatively small housing association
 - The company had won many awards including runner up in The Times Top 100 Not-For-Profit Organisations to work for in 2018
 - The company had now reached optimum performance levels and had borrowed £90m for growth and were now looking for a suitable merger partner
 - If the company did not merge soon, it could be forced to do so
 - Referred to the following successful building projects:-
 - Hesketh Village, Stafford
 - Sidney Avenue, Stafford
 - Greyfriars, Stafford
 - Priory Road, Stone
 - St Peters View, Hixon
- Growth
 - It was highly likely that the Board of Stafford and Rural Homes would approve a merger with the Housing Plus Group

- The Housing Plus Group had a care arm which would be highly beneficial for Stafford and Rural Homes
- Stafford and Rural Homes had Housing Works which would be highly beneficial for the Housing Plus Group
- A merger would therefore be mutually beneficial
- The merged company would have a stock of 18,000 houses that would make it the Midlands largest Placeshaper
- Stafford and Rural Homes was a gem of a company and this merger represented the best opportunity

The Committee discussed the following aspects of the presentation with Ms Armitage:-

- Complimented Stafford and Rural Homes on their building projects
- Clarification of how Stafford and Rural Homes worked with mental health services
- Stafford Borough Council would continue with the good relationship with Stafford and Rural Homes following a merger
- Confirmation that Stafford and Rural Homes would keep their premises at the Stafford Technology Park post merger
- Confirmation that Stafford and Rural Homes would continue to meeting the Council's Chief Executive and Portfolio Holder post merger
- Clarification of the membership of the Parent Board and the Homes Board
- An explanation of the new company's vision for commercial properties
- Confirmation that Stafford and Rural Homes Board would see all responses from customers as part of merger decision

The Cabinet Member (Community and Health Portfolio) concluded the discussion by paying tribute to the excellent work of Stafford and Rural Homes over the last 13 years, with quality and standards being at their forefront and welcomed the large investment in housing stock in the Borough. Continuing he explained how he hoped that the Council's close relationship with Stafford and Rural Homes would continue in the future and suggested that the Committee write a letter of support for the proposed merger.

The Committee subsequently agreed to send a letter a letter of support to Stafford and Rural Homes for their proposed merger plans.

RESOLVED:- that in exercise of the powers delegated to the Committee:-

- (a) the Committee send a letter a letter of support to Stafford and Rural Homes for their proposed merger plans;
- (b) Ms Armitage be thanked for her presentation.

CHAIR