

**MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 23 DECEMBER 2019 FROM 7.00 PM TO 7.30 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: John Kaiser, Parry Bath, UllaKarin Clark, Charlotte Haitham Taylor, Pauline Jorgensen, Charles Margetts, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray and Wayne Smith

Other Councillors Present

Lindsay Ferris
Malcolm Richards
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey
Alison Swaddle
Rachel Bishop-Firth
Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

59. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

60. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

61. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions received.

62. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited Members to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

62.1 Malcolm Richards asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

I am pleased to see that the Council treats homelessness and rough sleeping seriously, and as a priority, even though it remains at a low level in the Borough. Can you please confirm what action is being taken to manage this issue going forward?

Answer

Thank you for your question.

As you can see tonight in the agenda, I am bringing forward the Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy which forms part of the overall Housing Strategy. It is probably one of the most important papers that I will bring to the Council.

I can confirm that the Council does treat homelessness and rough sleeping very seriously and, although the numbers involved are relatively low, as you have said, the Council recognises the devastating impact it can have on individuals and families. Those impacts can be wide ranging and long term affecting their health, education and employment among things in other areas of their lives.

The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy that is being recommended for approval by Executive at this meeting sets out the strategic approach to prevention,

management and support for those threatened with homelessness or who are unfortunate enough to be already homeless or sleeping rough. It contains 4 strategic priorities:

1. Early intervention and prevention
2. Working towards ending rough sleeping and tackling hidden homeless
3. Building more affordable homes each year
4. Supporting our vulnerable residents

Within that fourth strategic priority the strategy highlights current actions and proposals for a number of key groups including care leavers and young people, those who have experienced domestic abuse, people with mental health problems, those with learning disabilities, ex-offenders and military veterans.

The Strategy includes an Action Plan that will be monitored, reviewed and updated annually. That action plan highlights the key outcomes we are aiming to achieve under each strategic priority.

In line with the Homelessness Reduction Act, the main focus for the Council and our partners is to prevent homelessness through early intervention and support. The Council has strong partnerships with agencies, charities and organisations across the Borough and there are a number of active and effective forums and working groups both across Directorates within the Council and more widely.

Through those partnerships, we aim to identify at an early stage those who may be at risk of becoming homeless and provide early support and advice. We also continue to work together to set up clear and accessible housing pathways for all identified key groups.

Supplementary Question:

When did the Council last carry out a survey of rough sleepers across the Borough and what were the results?

Supplementary Answer:

We carry out a survey of rough sleepers across the Borough on an annual basis, and the last one we carried out was in the middle of November. Through the information we collated through our partners, with charities and other organisations, we identified that we have 10 sleeping rough in the Borough. This figure compares to 7 in 2018, which although small numbers is a significant increase.

For information, this compares with Reading, they obviously have some different problems, but they actually have 25 rough sleepers, at this moment in time.

62.2 Imogen Shepherd-DuBey asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

Within the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, I can see that some people have been moved into temporary accommodation. Is there any data on how long people stay in temporary accommodation, before being moved to permanent accommodation?

Answer

Thank you for your question and I can confirm that the Council monitors and reviews the use of temporary accommodation and works closely with the individuals and families involved to help them find a secure and permanent address to live in.

The Council uses its own stock (for instance we are currently using between 30 and 40 properties within the proposed Gorse Ride regeneration area) or specialist accommodation to provide temporary accommodation but also occasionally, and we do not like doing this, we need to use bed & breakfast, but that tends to be on an emergency basis. We are committed to reducing the use of bed and breakfasts and in particular for families with children, as it does not really fit what they need.

Between April and November 2019, we have placed 89 households (mainly single people) in bed and breakfasts with the average stay per household being 25 days. All these households are owed a 'Relief Duty' as introduced under the Homelessness Reduction Act which came into force in April 2018. That placed a new duty on local authorities to relieve homelessness for up to 56 days for all eligible homeless applicants, regardless of priority need.

All households housed in emergency bed and breakfast (and in all temporary accommodation) have a personalised housing plan (PHP) to help support them to find sustainable permanent accommodation. Each case is then reviewed and discussed at a weekly review meeting.

Supplementary Question:

What would be the longest time that people would be staying in temporary accommodation?

Supplementary Answer:

The average, as I have said here, is 25 days.

The issue around the accommodation is very much around finding suitable accommodation because if you have got a family for instance that have got 3 or 4 children, and they are of an age that cannot really share rooms if they are different sexes, it is a lot more difficult with the larger families because we do not have a great number of 4 or 5 bedroom homes.

Normally I would be very surprised if the majority of the people that we have got in temporary accommodation are there for more than 2 and a half weeks.

62.3 Alison Swaddle asked the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure the following question:

Cantley Park enhancement. I understand that some part of the project funding will come from S106 allocation. Can you please advise from which development this portion of S106 will come from?

Answer

I have been asked that question many times and some people are confusing it with some other developments like Arborfield and Spencers Wood etc. The actual money is coming from the North Wokingham SDL, the land at Kentwood Farm House Road, but it is closely related to Matthewsgreen as well, and that is probably what has happened. More specifically, it is the Kentwood Farm House Road development.

Supplementary Question

Can you assure us that the funding that will come from the Football Foundation is well in hand?

Supplementary Answer

Yes, I can. There has been several meetings between the officers and the Football Foundation people. Our track record is very good, excellent in fact, in securing funding from them in the past and based on that I am very, very confident that we will secure that funding from the Foundation.

62.4 Lindsay Ferris asked the Executive Member for Finance and Housing the following question:

What is the estimated capacity of WBC to house homeless single people and homeless families this financial year?

Answer

I will reiterate some of the stuff I said earlier on. This document that I will be presenting later on tonight is actually part of our Housing Strategy and it is probably one of the most important documents that I will present to this Council while I am in this role.

As you know, the Council does treat homelessness and rough sleeping very seriously and recognises the devastating impact it can have on individuals and families. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and Action Plan being considered by Executive tonight sets out our strategic and practical approach to preventing, managing and support those people who are threatened with homelessness or who have unfortunately become homeless.

The key focus of the Council and our partner agencies and organisations remain on early intervention and prevention – providing advice and support to help individuals and families to remain in their current home or, if that is not possible or appropriate, to find secure, permanent and appropriate alternative accommodation.

We will only use temporary accommodation where we have exhausted those other alternatives and we will continue to work with those individuals or families, using their agreed Personal Housing Plans (PHPs), to find them a permanent solution.

The Council uses a range of temporary accommodation – from specialist accommodation to some of our own general needs housing stock. In addition, there may be occasions when we will use private rented properties or in real emergencies, bed and breakfast accommodation, but we do not like using that because it is not always possible to do it within the Borough.

The Council owns a number of properties specifically identified for temporary accommodation:

- On the Oxford Road we have very nice 9 self-contained units (including one disabled adapted flat)
- Foxwood – we have 5 contained units (including one disabled adapted flat)
- Grovelands – we have 12 mobile home units which have been renovated, including skirting round them underneath so they do not just look like mobile homes.
- Broadway – we have 10 units.

However, we have been a bit more inventive as you probably know. With Gorse Ride, we are beginning to move people out because what we want to do is refresh the stock there. We have got at the moment between 30 and 40 families actually living in Gorse Ride in temporary accommodation, in the regeneration area.

The combined budget for supporting homeless families and Housing Needs for 2019/20 was £366,000 and it is important to note that these budgets are subject to grant funding and are reviewed regularly.

Where we can we build our own accommodation, or buy our own accommodation, or convert our own accommodation, for the needs of homelessness rather than put them in bed and breakfast.

Supplementary Question

What additional facilities would the Council need to meet forecast homelessness in the Borough over the next 18 months?

Supplementary Answer

The Action Plan attached to the Strategy sets out our proposed approach to tackling Homelessness and Rough Sleeping. However, this Plan is not a plan that we draw up and put on a shelf. It is constantly monitored and reviewed – for example in Adult Social Care we have recently identified a specific need around providing move-on accommodation for adults with mental health problems coming out of hospital and potentially being at risk of becoming homeless.

However, it is not proposed to build any additional facilities for general needs temporary accommodation provision. As highlighted in the Strategy our main focus will be to actually find homes for people that are permanent homes.

In 2018/19 248 households presented as homeless to the Council. 91 of them were accepted as homeless, but in the first 6 months of 2019/20 42 households were accepted as homeless. Those households accepted as homeless are placed in Band 1, which means they are ready for immediate allocation, which ensures they receive top priority for any appropriate affordable accommodation that becomes available. I am happy to report that in the first 6 months of this year, bearing in mind that we actually accepted 42 households that were homeless in the first 6 months of this year, 212 affordable homes actually came up for allocation. We expect that number to be about the same for the last 6 months, so as you can see we are gaining on it.

It does depend on the type of home they need. If they need 4 or 5 bedroom accommodation that is more complicated for us to find, but I can tell you that those 42 had actually been placed, but at this point, 6 months, I would expect them only to be in temporary accommodation for around about 2 and a half weeks. I said the average time for someone being in temporary accommodation is 25 days.

63. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY

The Executive considered a report setting out the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for 2020-2024.

The Executive Member for Finance and Housing introduced the report.

Councillor Haitham Taylor expressed concern that referrals to Berkshire Women's Aid in Q1 2019/20, had increased, and questioned whether the Strategy would also refer to those fleeing coercive domestic abuse and also male victims of domestic abuse. Councillor Kaiser commented that domestic abuse victims were a top priority.

In response to a query from Councillor Jorgensen regarding those who became homeless as a result of substance abuse, Councillor Kaiser commented that the Council would work with the Police and other relevant agencies.

RESOLVED: That Wokingham Borough Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2024 be recommended to Council for approval.

64. CANTLEY PARK ENHANCEMENT

The Executive considered a report setting out proposals to enhance the current facilities at Cantley Park. These proposals included: a new 3G pitch; upgraded sports pavilion and changing rooms; new café and social space; additional car parking spaces, new artificial cricket wicket, upgraded grass football pitches and a destination play area.

Councillor Murray stated that he was pleased with the investment into Cantley Park and asked that consideration also be given to other sports users such as cricket.

Councillor Bath emphasised that Phase 1 work would commence in Summer 2020 and that Phase 2 would commence in Spring 2021.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) a consultation be undertaken and subject to the consultation outcomes the upgrade of the facilities be agreed;
- 2) in principle the upgrade of the pavilion, additional parking and an additional café be agreed;
- 3) the enhancing of football pitches and building the new 3G pitch, café and social space, upgrading the sports pavilion, artificial cricket wicket, additional 40 car parking spaces be agreed (subject to funding from the Football Foundation and planning permission), commencing summer 2020;
- 4) subject to funding from the Football Foundation the release of S106 monies to the value of £528k be agreed. This will need to be released at the start of the project.

65. APPROVAL OF WOKINGHAM'S STRATEGY FOR RESIDENTS WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY

The Executive considered a report setting out the Council's strategy for Wokingham residents with a learning disability and the families, partners and carers who support them.

The Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services advised the meeting that whilst nationally 68% of adult social care departments would be overspent this was not the case in Wokingham Borough. He thanked officers for their hard work. The Executive Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Services went on to advise Members that the Council spent £19.8m a year on learning disability support for 520 residents which was 42% of the adult social care budget.

Councillor Haitham Taylor commented that she was pleased that service users had been involved in designing the Strategy and asked whether feedback would be sought from them at a later stage. Councillor Margetts indicated that it would and that the document needed to be responsive.

In response to a question from Councillor Kaiser, Councillor Margetts stated that the Council would work with charities regarding what services and support they could offer and would not simply offer a block grant.

RESOLVED: That Wokingham Borough Council's Strategy for People with a Learning Disability, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.