
HOUSING AND HEALTH COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 7 March 2023 from 7.00 pm - 8.02 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Alastair Gould, Ann Hampshire, Angela Harrison (Vice-Chair), Carole Jackson, Ben J Martin (Chair), Richard Palmer, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting and Corrie Woodford.

PRESENT (Virtually): Councillors Ken Ingleton, Elliott Jayes and Bill Tatton.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Steph Curtis, Charlotte Hudson and Jo Millard.

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Zoe Callaway, Kellie MacKenzie and Roxanne Sheppard.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillor Steve Davey.

APOLOGY: Councillor Lee McCall.

765 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

766 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

767 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 January 2023 (Minute Nos. 580 - 584) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Part B Minutes for Information

768 **Housing Allocations Policy Review and Temporary Suspension of Housing Register**

The Head of Housing and Communities introduced the report which sought to agree that the current Housing Allocations policy remained in place, and asked Members to note the temporary suspension of the Housing Register for one month and for arrangements to be put in place for vulnerable households. She explained that when the original policy was considered by Cabinet in 2020, it was agreed that the policy be reviewed. The result of the review was that the policy was working effectively and was relieving homelessness for those most in need. The Head of Housing and Communities said the policy had not caused additional work and the report included data on this.

The Head of Housing and Communities said that as part of the review, legislation changes and case law were considered and no additional changes to the policy were necessary as a result. She advised Members that there would be a changeover of the software system that managed the Housing Register and the Housing Options service. The new system, 'Huume', which all Kent authorities were moving to, would require all data to be transferred from one system to another appropriately, resulting in the temporary suspension of the

Housing Register for one month. The Head of Housing and Communities said there would be a process in place to assist vulnerable residents and those in high need, but the suspension would not have a detrimental effect.

Members asked questions and raised points including:

- What measures were in place if the changeover took more than a month?;
- how many were on the current Housing Register waiting list?;
- had there been changes to the circumstances of those now on the Housing Register, compared to 2 to 3 years ago?; and
- the breakdown in host families assisting Ukrainian refugees had led to more families presenting as homeless across the country.

In response, the Head of Housing and Communities said the system had been planned and tested and it was only the data that was being transferred. The Housing Options Policy and Performance Officer said that the changeover was across the whole of Kent, would only take a few days and would be live from 1 July 2023. She added that there were currently 1,447 live applications.

There was a discussion on the future needs for housing and how the Council's policies assisted this. The Head of Housing and Communities said some clients presented as homeless, whilst others presented with a housing need. She said the Housing Register would pick up a wider scope of people including those in accommodation with overcrowding issues or living in inappropriate housing. The Head of Housing and Communities said that affordable, available housing was required and new housing needed to be built as those on the list who were helped would always be replaced by others with a housing need. She referred to working with Housing Associations to tackle long 'void' periods which were exacerbated by the availability of materials and tradespeople. The Chair added that it was also in the best interests of Housing Associations to reduce void periods as they received no income during that time.

The Head of Housing and Communities reminded Members that residents needed to meet eligibility to go on the Housing Register. She said the private rental sector was becoming unaffordable and more volatile, and people were looking at other options, and if they met the criteria, social housing was an attractive option.

The Chair proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison.

Resolved:

(1) That, based upon the review undertaken the current Housing Allocations Policy remained in place.

(2) That the temporary suspension of the Housing Register be suspended for one month and the arrangements put in place for vulnerable households be noted.

769 Health Systems in Kent

The Head of Housing and Communities introduced the report which gave an update on the health system in Kent following significant changes in administration. She drew Members' attention to the information contained on page 12 of the Agenda which set out the new

structure, highlighting the challenges faced now that Swale was split into two areas with Sittingbourne and Sheppey falling within the Medway and Swale Health and Care Partnership Integrated Care System (HCP) and Faversham and the rural area within East Kent. The Head of Housing and Communities said there were a number of subgroups that sat beneath the main Health and Care Partnerships (HCP) including those in the voluntary sector who Swale Borough Council (SBC) regularly engaged with.

Members asked questions and made points including:

- Was there much input from the HCP in relation to health infrastructure for new developments?
- raised concern that residents in Teynham and Lynsted were still without a GP surgery;
- referred to the recent issues at the Oasis Academy on the Isle of Sheppey and hoped the education and health situation would be rectified so that young people on the Isle of Sheppey were not disadvantaged;
- preventative health initiatives in the Borough had been cut;
- the system was disjointed and more GP's were needed;
- long term Government action was necessary;
- raised issues within planning applications in relation to the number of properties that were built before contributions were triggered;
- the HCP were spending time getting structures in place, but there was still work to be done;
- there were a lot of walking aids in the community that should be allowed to be returned to hospitals;
- performance indicators of health care providers should be transparent;
- referred to the investment in the new medical school in Canterbury with a long term aim that if students were trained locally, they would work locally;
- the viability of providing GP surgeries under a Section 106 Agreement needed more careful consideration and it was important that the HCP were consulted and challenged developers on what was required to run a GP surgery; and
- small branch surgeries were not the answer for new communities.

In response, the Head of Housing and Communities said there were regular meetings with Lead Officers on Section 106 Agreements for new developments and officers were working to improve projections including the Planning Policy team carrying out more detailed mapping. She said that premises and funding for a surgery in Teynham were being actively pursued and Kent County Council Education were working with the Department for Education on the Oasis Academy.

The Head of Housing and Community said the new health and social care structure was more integrated and SBC would have more interaction at different levels with different groups than it did under the Clinical Commissioning Group. She said that the HCP shared the frustration of the viability of providing GP surgeries, when developers had not carried out the proper research, and projected plans needed more careful consideration.

The Chair proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison.

Resolved:

(1) That the update provided on the new structure for health systems in Kent be noted.

770 Temporary Accommodation Policy

The Head of Housing and Communities introduced the report which sought to agree the adoption of the Temporary Accommodation Policy. She said SBC had high numbers in temporary accommodation and it was difficult to find suitable temporary accommodation within the borough, particularly in an emergency. The Head of Housing and Communities said that placements were frequently made outside of the borough. She said the policy sought to make information more transparent so that it was clear how accommodation was allocated, together with the rights and responsibilities of clients and the priorities that were considered in order to place. The Chair added that all the information was already out there, the policy just brought it all together in one place.

A Member commented that it would be useful for all Councillors, particularly any new Councillors elected in May 2023, to be directed to the document.

In response to a Member's query, the Head of Housing and Communities explained the principle behind section 7 on page 23 was about access to services and those in temporary accommodation with additional needs and prioritising. She said it was a judgement call for officers to make, all cases were different and had different levels of need. The Chair added that the general Housing Allocations Policy had an assessment period and time to consider information, whereas the Temporary Housing Policy often involved decisions being made instantaneously. The Housing Options Manager added that it was complex, with lots of different households and different needs and information gathering, which was often sought out of hours, was limited.

The Chair proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison.

Resolved:

(1) That the adoption of the Temporary Accommodation Policy be agreed.

771 Safeguarding Policy Refresh

The Community Safety Manager introduced the report which summarised the amendments to be made to the Safeguarding Policy and sought the Housing and Health's Committee approval. She said the policy was reviewed annually and considered any legislation changes. The Community Safety Manager referred to the separate Domestic Abuse Policy, which was currently being put together, in line with the national accreditation that SBC were applying for, and she added that additional training needs in domestic abuse had been highlighted for staff.

A Member said it would be useful for all Councillors, particularly newly-elected Councillors, to be directed to the document post May 2023. She stressed how important it was that Members could identify safeguarding issues and know where to signpost them to.

The Chair proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Alastair Gould.

Resolved:

(1) That the Safeguarding Policy for 2023 be approved.

772 **Forward Plan**

The Head of Housing and Communities introduced the report which set out future items for discussion. She drew attention that the Nightly Let Procurement Award was a joint procurement between Maidstone Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and SBC that needed to go through all Councils, and she hoped the report would be considered at the first Housing and Health Committee meeting of the new civic year.

A Member suggested an annual or bi-annual report on the Integrated Care System. The Head of Housing and Communities agreed to look into this.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

Chair

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All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel