



Scrutiny Committee

16:30 to 18:50

19 November 2020

Present: Councillors Wright (chair), Carlo, Driver (substitute for Thomas (Vi)), Giles, McCartney-Gray, Oliver, Osborn, Sands (M) (substitute for Councillor Sands (S)), Sarmezey, Stutely (substitute for Councillor Manning) and Thomas (Vi)

Apologies: Councillors Manning, Thomas (Vi) and Sands (S)

1. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED , subject to noting that Councillor Sarmezey was present for the meeting, to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2020.

4. Opportunities to achieve zero rough sleeping post Covid-19

(The chair took this item first.)

The chair welcomed Matthew Downie from Crisis and Caroline Aliwell, a private sector housing consultant, to the meeting,

(Councillors Fulton-McAlister (M) and Oliver joined the meeting at this point).

The housing partnerships officer presented the report. He highlighted that 117 people had been helped off of the street between March and July of 2020. He said that there were existing social and economic issues and the global pandemic had worsened this.

In response to a question from the chair, Caroline Aliwell said that it was important to note that there would be a build up of eviction cases going through the courts. Some people would have short term hardship and some would be experiencing long term

debt which would need to be dealt with in different ways. Councils would need more funding for discretionary housing payments alongside a scheme of grants. Matthew Downey added that where there were pending evictions, it was important to reach out to the landlords as there were things that could be done to help. Less official evictions were being seen more and more which was a different exercise. Policies which risked removal, such as an uplift in Universal Credit, would be lost unless they were fought for.

The chair questioned whether any of the announced £15m funding to help rough sleepers would come to Norwich. The housing partnerships officer said that this funding was only for ten cities and Norwich was not one of these.

A member commented that the report highlighted the good work that was being done by the city council and said that with a figure of fifty percent of homeless people coming from outside the city council area, was this work making Norwich a magnet for homeless people. The housing partnerships officer said that services in other areas were not as well funded as those in Norwich which would make it an attractive area but with an increase in funding to other areas, this figure may change. Matthew Downie said that over the last few years, homeless services had been lost due to lack of funding. Although Norwich was one of the top five cities in the country for homelessness services, he would not describe it as a magnet. There was little evidence to show that people were 'homeless tourists'.

In response to a question from a member, the housing partnerships officer said that although details around protected characteristics were requested when data was collected, it was not provided in a lot of cases. In terms of demographics, a higher number of females were being seen which could be linked to domestic abuse. In 2021, it was hoped to carry out a needs audit of those who were homeless.

A member asked how the drug and alcohol support workers had links with the council's safer neighbourhoods initiative. The housing partnerships officer said that there was one role which worked across the greater Norwich area and one for Norwich city. The council was working on getting greater access to support services for those who were homeless and work was being progressed on a detox and dry house provision. The safer neighbourhoods roles were about engaging with those on the street with substance issues.

A member referred to the provision of 39 homes as stated on page 27 of the report and asked what kind of tenancies these provided. The housing partnerships officer said that these were lifetime tenancies, after an introductory period, and were coupled with long term support. Work was done in partnership with social services where necessary.

A member highlighted the comment in the report that on one declined the provision of accommodation during the lockdown and asked what additional support these was to get people off of sleeping on the streets. The housing partnerships officer said that persistence paid off in this area. There was a fantastic outreach service which helped people who had not been living inside for long periods of time with services such as prescribing nurses to allow access to medication and also drug and alcohol workers to provide a holistic service. Matthew Downie added that they often heard from repeat rough sleepers that the offer of accommodation was incomplete as there

was no support offer, so the answer to this was an assertive outreach programme and said that the council should be commended for the level of help on offer.

In response to a member's question, Caroline Aliwell said that there was a need to deal with the causes of rough sleeping and it was necessary for as many people as possible to lobby government to ensure that voices were heard. Many different services were needed to ensure that the needs of those who were sleeping rough were met. Matthew Downie added that with lots of different charities in existence, there were lots of bids for the same pots of funding, however, lots of charities were closing due to a drop in public donations.

The housing partnerships officer said that within Norwich, a palm map had been developed to give to rough sleepers showing different providers that they could go to, to access services. The strength of charities was in providing a specialist support service. It was a complex system but a useful one.

A member asked what the legislation and support was around those who had been declared intentionally homeless. Matthew Downie said that the Homelessness Reduction Act meant that the council should be helping those in that situation. The head of neighbourhood housing said that officers had been appointed to deal with the private rented sector, which was a new approach, as an increase in people in that situation was expected. It was equally important to engage with landlords as those with small portfolios may not be aware of their responsibilities. The council had a duty to make places and investigate and vulnerabilities in relation to a resident who was declared intentionally homeless. The strength to the work undertaken in Norwich was the amount of prevention work taking place.

A member questioned what the council could do that it was not already, particularly in relation to prison leavers. Caroline Aliwell said that there was already a protocol in place with the probation services which was showing a reduction in the number of prison leavers being on the streets. Norwich prison was a short station prison which meant that people were often released at short notice. She added that the Rough Sleeping Strategy was promising and it was encouraging to see a deposit scheme in place. The outreach model was very important in terms of reaching people before they reached crisis. She suggested that if there was any capacity to undertake additional work, it would be useful to contact those who had been in receipt of improvement notices and checking in with the affected landlords and tenants to see if there was an opportunity to stop a crisis.

A member asked whether there was enough provision in Norwich to be able to house families and how support staff could give assurances that people would feel safe in hostels. The housing partnerships officer said that the council worked closely with people. Interim accommodation had been used but it was about housing people in the right place. There were different types of accommodation so a needs assessment was carried out for each person. There was still a need to be flexible with solutions and outreach workers built up trust to help to find the best accommodation for people. He added that he would be happy to provide a short online training course to members to give advice on how best to approach people who were homeless.

In response to a member's question, the housing partnerships officer said that with short term prison sentencing, people would often move around within the prison service. Not all prison leavers would have a connection to Norwich. Housing benefit could be paid for up to 13 weeks to help those with a tenancy to continue with it and also, where Norwich City Council was the landlord, a tenant could appoint a caretaker to take on the tenancy while they were in prison.

A member asked about emergency housing provision within the city and how it was set up. The housing partnerships officer said that any accommodation would have to go through due planning processes. There could be evictions from emergency accommodation due to anti-social behaviour and if the behaviour was violent, there would be a cooling off period. There was enough emergency provision to meet the current needs of the service.

A member questioned whether there was provision for rough sleepers who were taking drugs or had animals. The housing partnerships officer said that there was provision for those with animals at St Martins but the council was not seeing as many rough sleepers with animals. In terms of access for those who were drug users, the council had to act within the law so there was no use of any drugs on the premises.

(At this point in the meeting, the chair thanked Matthew Downie and Caroline Aliwell for attending the meeting and they left.)

Members discussed those who had been declared intentionally homeless and the duties of the council around this. The housing partnerships officer said that the council had to advise people of the repercussions of their actions but also had to inform them of their rights. There was a requirement to work with people to provide guidance but there was no requirement to provide temporary accommodation. The cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment said that if council tenants had neighbours who made their homes unliveable, there was a need to inform people of the consequences of their actions and had to follow the law, as did all landlords. Most antisocial behaviour would be a police matter but a multi-agency approach was needed to address complex needs. A member commented that the council needed to ensure that there was no perception of threat in the council's communications around this topic.

(Councillor Mike Sands left the meeting at this point).

RESOLVED:

- 1) To ask cabinet to:
 - a) look at how the council communicates the risk of becoming intentionally homeless to tenants, to clarify that the council is giving information and to reduce the perception of threat.
 - b) provide a demographic of those who have received such communications to the scrutiny committee members
 - c) review council policies around intentional homelessness

- d) Ask the housing partnerships officer to provide online training to members on approaching people on the street and how to give advice.
 - e) Support landlords in how to deal with tenants who will have change in circumstances over the coming months
 - f) Contacting tenants who the council had previously contacted with improvement notices and also use rogue landlord databases as an exercise in early intervention
 - g) Work with county and advice agencies to map where to refer people who need early intervention services.
 - h) lobby central government for increased funding
- 2) To thank officers for their work in this area and to acknowledge the good work the council is undertaking regarding tackling homelessness.

5. New Anglia Local Enterprise partnership recommendations

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED:-**

- 1) That the Leader of the Council requests from the LEP a clear plan and commitments for how they are going to meet the minimum target of reducing emissions by 13% year on year.
- 2) To ask cabinet through the scrutiny committee or CEEEP as appropriate to consider investment opportunities within Norwich that would generate the best results in reducing emissions and providing community benefit, so that these can be fed into the new Norfolk & Suffolk Investment Plan.
- 3) The LEP written answers refer to “Developing a dedicated vehicle for generating local energy in a way which benefits communities, and consider where targeted pilots could help us explore initiatives and learn from other leading areas/schemes”. The council is due a report on solar financing from the cabinet member for safe and sustainable city environment, therefore the committee proposes that the cabinet member meets with local community energy groups and the LEP to discuss a pilot in Norwich.
- 4) Ask cabinet to promote grants from the LEP by including details in communication with businesses when sending out business rates letters.

- 5) As the LEP to provide information on the self employed grant scheme and lobby government to provide more targeted support for those who are self employed.
- 6) LEP has details of its grants programmes on the website, but it's not clear what the impact of these is. Therefore the committee asks for a report on benefits delivered: impact on social mobility and local jobs
- 7) ask the Leader of the Council to push for unions to be represented on the LEP board.
- 8) To ask the leader of the council as the council's representative on the LEP to ask that it considers:
 - a) including clean growth and protection/enhancement biodiversity as key criteria for project applications.
 - b) regularly assessing the net impact of its activities (policies/programmes/funding) on carbon emissions and extent to which the LEP is meeting legal targets.
 - c) review its strategic approach to transport planning which is currently dominated by major road building schemes and to bring its policies and funding contributions into line with net zero carbon target.
 - d) assist WildEast in helping to meet its goal of dedicating 20% of all land in East Anglia to biodiversity by 2030.
- 9) Build on the goodwill and acknowledgement of climate emergency to press for carbon accounting. Chris Starkie acknowledged that - not enough was being done to meet the Climate Change Act's requirements. Small acts of carbon reduction need to be weighed against, and scaled up to exceed actual ongoing emissions and the first step is measurement. Tyndall report gives 13% annual reduction of Norwich emissions to meet targets in Climate Change Act. This is an engine of economic renewal and offers genuine opportunities to the many in high carbon jobs who will need alternative employment. The sooner this transition is managed, the more manageable it will be.
- 10) To recommend to the LEP that they lobby government for Universal Basic Income pilot scheme in Norwich to boost local demand.
- 11) To push for meetings to be held in public in order to increase accountability, transparency, public awareness and trust.

6. Scrutiny committee work programme 2020-21

The strategy manager suggested that the item 'social inclusion following Covid-19' for the December meeting of the scrutiny meeting could encompass the equality information report alongside emerging data on the impact of the pandemic on different groups to provide discussion points on patterns of impact and mitigation.

RESOLVED to note the scrutiny committee work programme 2020-21

CHAIR

