

**Bristol City Council**  
**Minutes of the Communities Scrutiny Commission**  
**(previously Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission)**



**12 November 2018 at 10.00 am**

**Members Present:-**

**Councillors:** Gary Hopkins (Chair), Jo Sergeant (Vice-Chair), Carole Johnson, Jon Wellington, Afzal Shah, Jeff Lovell, Matt Melias, Martin Fodor and Charlie Bolton

**Officers in Attendance:-**

Patsy Mellor (Director: Communities), Gemma Dando, Johanna Holmes (Policy Advisor - Scrutiny), Dan Berlin (Scrutiny Advisor), Julian Higson, Penny Germon, Tom Gilchrist, Lindsay Hay, Sarah Spicer and Stuart Pattison (Crime Reduction Manager)

**1. Welcome, Introductions and Safety Information**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained relevant the safety information.

**2. Apologies for Absence**

Cllr Graham Morris

**3. Declarations of Interest**

None

**4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The draft minutes of the previous meeting (10<sup>th</sup> September 2018) were agreed as a correct record of the meeting by the Members.

**5. Communities Scrutiny Commission Action Tracker**

Members requested further information about the Waste Collection and Disposal Services in Bristol item, including where the plan to provide households with extra recycling provision originated and what was



happening now.

All other actions updated and completed.

**ACTION: Officer to provide update on the background of the plan to provide households with extra recycling provision and what is happening now.**

## 6. Chair's Business

None

## 7. Public Forum

The following Public Forum was received:

- Question 1: Agenda Item 12 : Corporate Risk Register Report - Cllr Clive Stevens

Answer to the question was provided to Cllr Stevens at Agenda item 12.

## 8. Housing Crisis - Bristol Housing Market and Trends

Sarah Spicer, Business Planning and Service Development Manager, Bristol City Council, delivered a presentation (the slides are included in the published pack).

The following are some of the key discussion points:

- Comparing house prices in Bristol to those in other Core Cities in the decade between August 2008 and August 2018 indicates that not only does Bristol have the highest average house price of all the Core Cities, it has also seen the highest percentage increase.
- In August 2018 the average house price in Bristol was £282,624, 21.4% higher than the UK average
- There is a growing disparity between housing benefit rates and actual market rents across the city.
- The increase in Part 7 housing acceptances in Bristol reflects the increase in demand for homelessness prevention services city wide over the past five year period.
- Rough sleepers and households in temporary accommodation represent an element of housing need, not taking into account hidden homelessness (sofa surfing etc) and households in appropriate accommodation.
- The City is on track to deliver 800 new affordable homes in 2020/21, in-line with the target set by the political administration.

The Chair asked about the divergence between the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and market rents. Officers' responses:



- The 4 year period of a freeze on LHA is not yet over, and there is no indication of a review at the end of the 4 year period.
- The LHA applied to Bristol includes South Gloucestershire and North Somerset. This is an issue as markets in the Authorities are different.
- Cabinet Member met with Secretary of State and raised the disparity as an issue for Bristol, and requested that Bristol is treated as one market rather than within a wider housing market area.

Discussion about homelessness and rough sleeping in Bristol. Questions raised:

- A Member requested clarification of Part 7.
- A Member asked what the main issues leading to homelessness are.
- A Member asked if there is an understanding of reasons for different levels of presenting as homelessness across different groups (highlighted care leavers having a higher rate of presenting as homeless).
- A Member requested clarification of how the rough sleeping data is collected.
- A Member asked if there is data on how many homeless people have come in to the city from other parts of the country, and if there is any analysis of reasons for this.

Officers' responses:

- Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act is primary homelessness legislation, providing the statutory underpinning for action to prevent homelessness and provide assistance to people threatened with or actually homeless. In April 2018 Part 7 was amended with the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which has placed further duties on the Council to enable access to assistance to people to prevent homelessness.
- The Council has noted a lot of people have lost their rented accommodation in the private sector, with a high amount of s21 notices being served, which provides private tenants with 2 months notice (after the fixed term period which is usually 6 months). The Council is focusing on preventative work.
- People are living in their parents' homes for longer now, as a result of affordability and lack of opportunity to get on the housing ladder.
- The statistics (on Slide 5 of the presentation) show how many people the Council accepted a duty for; but, there are many more 100's of households the Council assist in preventing from getting in to the situation where they may become homeless.
- Formerly looked after children (in LA care) have a higher risk of homelessness and treated as more vulnerable if they have left care within 3 years; and there is an automatic priority for those who leave care under 21.
- There is a standard methodology for collecting rough sleeping data - the Council complies with that. Also, it depends when the count is carried out. It is a snap-shot; a point in time. The next count (2018 data) is this month, and the information will be made available afterwards.
- The Streetwise team in the Council have contact with a cohort of street homeless with drug and alcohol misuse issues, who are difficult to engage in support services. A new Street Intervention team is being set up, with a multi-agency approach, with the aim of tackling this issue.

Cabinet Member: Bristol, as regional capital, will attract people from outside the city. Bristol has wider provision than regional towns. The data does not include all homelessness, eg those in night shelters.



Street homeless is 3% of homelessness, although it has disproportionate attention. There are many other groups who are in temporary accommodation.

The Chair asked why temporary accommodation is difficult for couples to access.

Officer response:

- Pathways programme (partnership to enable homelessness prevention and recovery) is targeted at single people; and there are very few temporary accommodation options for couples

Cabinet Member: Pathways addresses whole range of needs (including health, education), so people are able to sustain tenancies.

**ACTION: Officer to confirm when the data from the November 2018 rough sleeping count will be available**

**ACTION: Officer to provide data showing the amount of single people presenting as homeless**

The Chair asked what the proportion is of Council temporary accommodation and commissioned private landlord provision.

Officer response:

- At any one time there are 250-300 households placed in emergency spot purchased accommodation. Housing benefit does not cover the full cost of these.

Cabinet Member: The aim is reduce this number by placing people in Council accommodation. The Council aims to secure more Council accommodation for this purpose, financed through housing benefit. The Council is over-dependent on one private provider at the moment. This is being tackled by entering the market to secure accommodation; and rather than sell stock at auction the Council is now utilising it for temporary accommodation. Also the Council encourages Housing Associations to make units available for temporary accommodation.

Discussion surrounding the costs and benefits of building more homes to be used as temporary accommodation, rather than spot purchasing in the private sector.

**ACTION: Officer to provide cost/benefit analysis of building more homes for temporary accommodation as opposed to spot purchasing.**

A Member asked whether reports of private landlords selling may affect the Council's ability to provide temporary accommodation

Officers' responses:

- This will put more in the housing market. This will benefit the Real Letting scheme, a social lettings agency.
- Some smaller providers are getting out of the market. Large portfolio holders are taking up the slack. So there is a growth in larger providers' portfolios.



- There is an opportunity to purchase available housing for affordable housing as they come onto the market. This may result in a number of properties being built being static or falling, although affordable housing growing.

A Member asked what the projections of new build are, and whether projections are anticipated to change due to the changes/downturn in the housing market.

Officers' responses:

- There is an upward shift on affordable housing delivery – overall figure will increase.
- There are fluctuations on quarterly returns. Reasons include Registered Providers' positions can change; and also the Council housing delivery has been reprogrammed as a result of the borrowing cap proposal – so predictions will change.
- Brexit is having and will have a big impact on the market. Bristol is flattening out. There is more uncertainty.
- 1500 out of the programmed 3500 homes are showing due to the fact some will take some years to come through.

Cabinet Member: Also working on off-site manufacture to speed up delivery at no impact to quality.

Discussion and Members questions about what the identified affordable housing need by property type/size/tenure is; and the affordable housing rent levels of new builds, including whether Affordable Rent is appropriate.

Officers' responses:

- When seeking appropriate proportion of affordable housing on developments we look for a range of sizes. There is a shift to smaller accommodation as a result of welfare reform, which could lead to an imbalance. The Council works with Registered Providers to help improve the supply of 3 and 4 bed properties which helps create churn. i.e a 4 bed property can create 6 moves. Investigating opportunities to build more family housing so as to create churn.

Cabinet Member: Affordable Rent has to be at or below the LHA – BCC does have a strict definition of Affordable Housing – also accepted by surrounding Authorities. Latest Homes England funding has an element of social rent in it. West of England funding will include social rent.

**ACTION: Officer to map new development programme by ward**

**ACTION: Officer to confirm amount of shared ownership delivered**

A Member raised issue of empty basement flats within properties in the Ashley ward.

Officers' responses:



- This was looked at when drawing up St Paul's Housing Plan. The properties are mostly owned by Registered Providers. The identified problem was poor living conditions in the basements, which means large expenditure to make them habitable.
- Approximately 300 empty properties brought back into use this year – target of 400 (city wide). The Council as a Compulsory purchase programme in place. In the last month the Council were successful in enabling a voluntary purchase of a property, which is now used for temporary accommodation.

Cabinet Member: There is a programme within Council housing stock looking at whether commercial and community spaces can be brought into use as housing, although this is not intended to reduce any community amenities, and so this begins with consultation.

## 9. Private Rented Sector - Update

Tom Gilchrist, Private Housing and Accessible Homes Manager, delivered a presentation (the slides are included in the published pack).

The following are some of the key discussion points:

- Selective and Additional licensing schemes in Bristol
- Stapleton Road scheme covered 1,226 properties (1,023 Selective licensed and 203 Additional licensed).
  - It ran for five years and was completed in April 2018.
  - 845 (70%) of properties required improvements to meet licensing conditions
  - 517 formal and informal notices were served requiring improvement
- Eastville and St George scheme covers approximately 2,800 properties.
  - It came into force on 1 July 2016 and will run until 30 June 2021.
  - 2,454 licenses have been issued so far (selective 2,284 and Additional 170)
  - So far 1496 properties have been inspected and 646 (43%) have required improvements to meet licensing conditions

Discussion about property licensing schemes. Key points made by Officers:

- In light of High Court case the license fee must be split into a processing fee and enforcement fee. The Council is about to begin a 6 week consultation on how to split the existing fee
- The Council can only use income of property licensing fees for property licensing related issues.
- The level of fee will go up as it will be administratively more burdensome.
- Fee is 1 off payment for 5 year term. Stapleton road scheme ran small deficit (loss of £90K over 5 years; turnover of £1.2M.
- The Council will be commissioning another report to identify areas with serious hazards and poor property management. This evidence triggers consultation in the areas.



- By taking a small area the Council can commit to inspecting every property in the areas over 5 years
- Majority of L/lords wanted us to deal with problem properties bringing areas down. Combination of large and small landlords involved
- Government view is that after the 5 year period an Authority will not need to re-designate the same area. Plan is to come back to cabinet with proposals for future licencing schemes.

A Member was concerned that that not continuing running the scheme in an area after 5 years may lead to standards slipping.

Cabinet Member: The Council is only allowed to cover 20% of the City at one time for licencing schemes, and so it makes sense to move on after bringing an area up to a standard. The licensing schemes cannot cover the whole city without Secretary of State approval, which has not been provided nationally since 2013. There is a need to justify the set-up of schemes based on evidence, including demonstrating significant risks and management in the areas. After the 5 year period, this evidence would need to be produce to carry on in the same area. Other Local Authorities have been challenged using this approach.

A Member observed that local people were concerned why Easton was originally chosen for the licence scheme; although there is a general acceptance that it has been a positive in the area. Consultation is very important; it led to the scheme being successful.

## 10. Vehicle Dwellers Encampment Policy Consultation

Penny Germon, Neighbourhoods & Communities Service Manager, delivered a presentation (the slides are included in the published pack).

The following are some of the key discussion points:

- Selective and Additional licencing schemes in Bristol
- Numbers of vehicle dwellers have increased significantly.
- There is a need for a policy for managing vehicle encampments on the highway.
- The consultation outcomes shows a similar number agreeing and disagreeing with the proposed approach; and a clear majority support 9 out of the 10 criteria to assess impact:
  - The nature, suitability or obtrusiveness of the encampment
  - The level of any nuisance including noise
  - The number, validity and seriousness of any complaints
  - The level of damage caused by the occupiers
  - Proximity to residential properties
  - Proximity to schools, children's play and public amenities



- The size and concentration of the encampment
- Human and domestic waste management
- General crime and public order offences.

- There is a need for a policy for managing vehicle encampments on the highway.

The Chair asked about the cost of providing sites, whether they would be self-financing or Council funded. Officer response:

- Sites would need to be self-sufficient.

A Member raised the point that geographical locations of the sites are important, and that we need to know where people will tolerate sites across the City.

Officers' responses:

- There was not a reference to alternative sites in the consultation.
- A number of van dwellers from Greenbank went to Avonmouth site.

Discussion about definition of Vehicle Dweller encampments and how they are distinct from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller encampments. Officers' key points:

- The Vehicle Dwelling Encampment Policy covers all vehicles, whether or not they can be moved, including caravans.
- Where people living in vehicles do not self-describe as Gypsies Roma's and Travellers, local authorities have no specific duties towards them such as the provision of a designated transit site. The Council has a separate protocol with the police for managing unauthorised Gypsy, Roma and Traveller encampments
- Vehicle dwellers tend to remain (live and work) within a locality; whereas Gypsy Roma and Travellers are generally more transient (although it is recognised that this does not exclude those who are living in houses as being Gypsy Roma and Traveller, as the person's ethnic identity is not lost when members of the communities settle). It is the case that a Gypsy and Traveller site does not have permanent residents, as the maximum stay is for 13 weeks.
- Most vehicle dwellers live and work in Bristol.

Cabinet Member: most vehicle dwellers want to live in central Bristol, although this is difficult with parking restrictions.

A Member asked if the Avonmouth site is cost neutral. Officer response:

- It is cost neutral. The Vehicle Dwellers on site pay for facilities. The Council owns the land. Going to market for lease. The Council has a possession order and the Vehicle Dwellers will leave when there is an occupant.

A Member asked how the new policy is a change. Officer response:

- Main change is the level of monitoring. As soon as vehicle dwellers encampment is identified the Council will engage with the occupants using a process for consistency, including arranging welfare



assessments, assessing impact on the community, arranging outreach, and taking enforcement action if required.

A Member asked about enforcement. Officer response:

- In Greenbank, Removal Orders were used, as well as Injunctions
- The impact of someone in a car is a concern but not as high impact as the larger vehicles.

## 11. Safer Bristol - Statistics

Members noted the report and slides (included in the published public pack).

There were no questions

## 12. Risk Register

Response to the Public Forum question was provided to Cllr Stevens.

Officer response:

- Narrative of The Risk Register doesn't look at benefits of trees, but risks of management of trees.

Cllr Stevens was offered opportunity for Gemma Dando's team to provide further details about the tree service out of the meeting.

## 13. Scrutiny Work Programme

The Chair confirmed that in the context of the Directorate restructure, the Communities Commission will keep to its work programme.

The Chair asked Members to make submissions of any further queries and points for all the agenda items, and the Communities Commission can feed up to OSMB.

**ACTION: Members to send any further points / queries about the topics discussed on this agenda to Dan Berlin, Scrutiny Advisor, at [Scrutiny@bristol.gov.uk](mailto:Scrutiny@bristol.gov.uk)**

Meeting ended at 1.00 pm

**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

