

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL**

### **HOUSING AND MAJOR PROJECTS POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL**

Tuesday, 20th January, 2015

**Present:-** Councillors Eleanor Jackson (Chair), Steve Hedges (Vice-Chair), Brian Simmons, Gerry Curran, June Player and David Veale

**Also in attendance:** Derek Quilter (Divisional Director for Project Management), Graham Sabourn (Head of Housing), Zoe Hancock (River Co-ordinator), Chris Mordaunt (Team Manager for Housing Standards & Improvements) and Michael Chedzoy (Team Manager for Housing Options and Homelessness)

Councillor Liz Hardman (Paulton)

**Cabinet Member for Homes & Planning:** Councillor Tim Ball

**Cabinet Member Sustainable Development:** Councillor Ben Stevens

#### **51 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **52 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **53 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Councillors Robin Moss, David Martin and Simon Allen had sent their apologies to the Panel. They had been invited along with other Councillors to attend as some of the reports on the agenda were linked to the remits of the Policy Development & Scrutiny Panels that they sit on.

#### **54 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Councillor Steve Hedges declared an 'other' interest to the Panel as his son works for Curo and his wife works for Mencap.

Councillor Eleanor Jackson declared an 'other' interest to the Panel as she is the secretary for the Meadow View Action Group (Radstock anti NRR campaign group).

#### **55 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN**

There was none.

**56 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE DEPUTATIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING**

Rachel Willis made a statement to the Panel on the subject of Houses of Multiple Occupation in Oldfield. A copy of the statement can be found online as an appendix to these minutes and on the Panel's Minute Book, a summary is set out below.

She said that in Bath there are two sides of the HMO coin, they obviously affect students who live in them and also the rest of the community that live around them.

She stated that she found it deeply concerning that 87% of those properties being inspected were not up to the standard required. Living in substandard property can be worrying, detrimental to health and highlight insecurities within housing. She added that we need to make sure that students have lines of communication that they can use to highlight substandard housing and they need to be able to do this without fear of having their tenancy terminated or rents increased.

She said that the current scheme is limited to houses in the three wards of Oldfield, Westmoreland and Widcombe, but as student populations in other parts of the city increase we need to make sure that similar registration schemes are put in place in other wards. She added that as student numbers increase we need to make sure that the same problems do not arise in other wards in Bath.

She commented that if the universities want to keep increasing the number of students year on year they need to build more halls on campus and house more of their students themselves rather than relying on Bath's slim brownfield availability. She added that with 5000 people on the social housing waiting list we need to make sure we are providing the space for families to live in, not just students.

Councillor June Player commented that she agreed with the comments made by Mrs Willis.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked if she had been given the exact figures in relation to the increase in student numbers by the universities.

Mrs Willis replied that she was aware of some figures through the media.

The Chair commented that an increase was expected due to the Government's decision to lift the cap on student numbers and the success of the two universities would attract higher numbers. She also highlighted the need for other wards to be prepared for the likely increase.

Councillor Gerry Curran commented that this was an issue that needed to be flagged up with the future administration and that he would advocate discussions with the universities.

The Chair asked for Mrs Willis' statement to be forwarded to officers in Housing and Planning Policy.

Councillor Tim Ball, Cabinet Member for Homes & Planning said that the Placemaking Plan would address the majority of these issues.

Councillor Dave Laming commented that he felt that warnings relating to the dangers of the river should be placed in all purpose built student accommodation.

On behalf of the Panel, the Chair thanked Mrs Willis for her statement.

## **57 MINUTES - 18TH NOVEMBER 2014**

Councillor June Player informed the Panel that in the third paragraph of Minute 46 (Saw Close Casino & Hotel) Councillor Gerry Curran is referred to simply as 'Councillor Gerry' and asked that this be amended.

The Panel agreed to the amendment and confirmed the remainder of the minutes of the previous meeting as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chair.

## **58 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE**

A WRITTEN STATEMENT HAD BEEN SUBMITTED TO COUNCILLORS IN ADVANCE.

The Head of Housing highlighted to the Panel some points from within the written document.

### **Help for Single Homeless Fund Bid**

A partnership bid, made by Bath & North East Somerset and on behalf the three Unitary Authorities including Bristol & North Somerset, for additional funding for homelessness services was successful. The 3 authorities will now receive an additional £96,063 in 2014/15 and potentially £143,438 in 2015/16. The funding will be used to ensure the continued support for rough sleepers.

### **Gypsy and Travellers**

Full planning consent has been granted for a 13 pitch Gypsy & Traveller site on land adjacent to the Lower Bristol Road. In addition a single member decision has provided a facility to draw down the budget as required and to contract with an RP partner.

At the time of writing the scheme contractor, working on behalf of Elim Housing Association, has advised they are on schedule to complete in late February.

The allocation policy has been drafted and is currently going through the democratic process. Housing applications are now being sought from prospective tenants.

### **Empty Properties / CPO**

Housing services are taking forward the Council's policy to bring long term empty homes into use by seeking to compulsorily purchase two of the highest priority empty

homes in B&NES. Cabinet have authorised the Head of Housing to make a Compulsory Purchase Order for this purpose.

The Order was served in July 2014 and the Secretary of State has now authorised the Council to confirm the Order. The Order was confirmed on 14 October 2014 and is now subject to a further appeal period. It is anticipated that the properties will be in Council ownership by early February.

### **Affordable Housing**

The officer said, 'We are supporting 20 Registered Providers to deliver a target of 610 affordable homes by March 2015. With 154 completions to the end of q3, we continue to exceed delivery targets for both rented and shared ownership homes, and are on forecast to exceed the 2011-15 target by around 28%.'

The Chair commented that it was good to see the progress that had been made on affordable housing.

Councillor Brian Simmons asked how the empty properties were identified.

The Head of Housing replied that a strategy exists to identify properties and bring them back into use. He added that high priority sites may then be subject to further action. He said that there were around fifteen target properties and that once the latest CPO process was complete the list would be looked at afresh.

Councillor Tim Ball commented that he had discussed this matter recently with other local authorities and they all had agreed that the current CPO process takes too long. He added that he hoped that the next Government could look to shorten this process.

Councillor Gerry Curran said that he welcomed the figures in relation to affordable housing and asked what the likelihood was of those figures remaining so buoyant.

The Head of Housing replied that good policies exist to address this work area and although a degree of challenge will still remain he felt that the prospects were good given the forthcoming development of the former MoD sites. He added that our local Registered Providers are also proactive on this matter.

The Chair asked if any affordable housing schemes were coming forward within rural areas through discussions with the Parish Councils under the terms of the Localism Act.

The Head of Housing replied that Team Manager for Enabling & Development led on these matters and that he would ask her to respond directly.

Councillor Steve Hedges asked for an explanation as to why the Council feels the need to take part in the CPO process.

The Head of Housing replied that the Council takes on the CPO process to highlight that it is not appropriate to have properties vacant for 20 years or more given the numbers on our housing list.

Councillor June Player asked if the target properties could be known publicly. She also said that she had been made aware of some potential sites.

The Head of Housing replied that the list of target properties could not be published but he would welcome any possible sites.

Councillor Patrick Anketell-Jones asked if he was aware of any homes that had been 'bought to leave' locally.

The Head of Housing replied that he was not aware of any.

Councillor Dave Laming commented that he had advocated quite strongly for the term 'homes' to be used instead of 'houses' and would like to see an emphasis on that basis in future reports.

The Head of Housing replied that he agreed and would look to use the term 'homes' more in the future.

Councillor David Veale asked if the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was applicable to affordable homes and whether funds from the CIL would be allocated back to the relevant Parish Council to address needs locally.

Councillor Tim Ball replied that the CIL was not applicable on affordable homes and that 25% of the CIL would be allocated back to communities to use within specific guidelines.

Councillor Ben Stevens, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development addressed the Panel. He informed them that the Victoria Bridge had been open to public since the completion of the truss removal in December 2014 and that the official opening took place on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2015.

On the matter of the Grand Parade & Undercroft he stated that the project is due to be considered by the Development Control Committee in February and that a preferred contractor had been appointed. He added the project remains on budget and that once planning consent had been granted the marketing of the units will recommence.

The Chair asked if an explanation could be given for the delay in the opening of the pavement and the new road connected to the NRR estate.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that there had been a Christmas embargo on all road works and that highway works associated with Wessex Water were now ongoing until May. He added that the majority of the reserve matters for Area 2 had been completed.

He stated that a planning application in relation to Area 3 was near to completion and that Area 1 would then follow. He added that a further 20 car park spaces were planned for the site.

The Chair commented that she would welcome a parking strategy for Radstock as parking was crucial to the prosperity of the town centre businesses.

Councillor Brian Simmons asked who was allowed to use the lower level of the car park at Keynsham Civic Centre.

The Divisional Director for Project Management replied that as severe vandalism had taken place on three occasions the Council were looking to gate off the area in the evenings, but allow it to be used at weekends during the day. He said that historically officers could use the facility between 9.00am – 5.30pm.

Councillor Gerry Curran said that through his role on the Development Control Committee he was aware of a proposal to develop half of the Pinesgate site and wondered if the Cabinet Member had heard of any future intentions regarding the other half.

Councillor Ben Stevens replied that there had been some informal discussions and that it would likely be picked up in the Enterprise Area Masterplan work.

The Chair asked if any update could be given on the supermarket development scheduled for the South Road car park in Midsomer Norton.

Councillor Ben Stevens replied that there was no current news and that not much progress was likely prior to the elections.

## **59 REGISTERED PROVIDERS PRESENTATION - GUINNESS**

Representatives from Guinness were unable to attend the meeting. It is hoped they will deliver a presentation to the Panel on their current and future development plans in March.

## **60 BOAT DWELLERS & RIVER TRAVELLERS UPDATE**

The River Co-ordinator introduced this report to the Panel. She explained that in March 2014 Bath and North East Somerset Council established a Strategic River Group. She stated that the purpose of the group is to provide strategic oversight of the River Avon from Dundas Wharf to Hanham Lock and that it contains representatives from B&NES, the Environment Agency, Canal and Rivers Trust, The River Regeneration Trust and Wessex Water.

She informed them that the Strategic River Group is in the process of defining a River Avon Corridor Strategy and Action Plan. The key themes of the Strategy will be Safe and Active Communities; Environmental River Improvements; Economy and Development; Sustainable Networks and Adaptation to Climate Change.

She said that the recommendations from the Boat Dwellers and River Travellers review were captured in the Safe and Active Communities theme. She added that at the last meeting of the Strategic River Group it was agreed to form a Task and Finish Group reporting to the SRG, to deliver the actions in the review. She stated that the group would consist of members from the Canal & Rivers Trust and B&NES Planning, Housing, Environment and Equality and Diversity teams.

The initial actions of the Task and Finish Group will be to:

- Review the current evidence base relating to Boat Dwellers and River Travellers
- If necessary improve and expand the evidence base and develop appropriate guidance for boat dwellers
- Review the current voluntary code and consider how appropriate moorings can be incorporated into the planning system via the current Placemaking Plan process
- Review existing best practice and if necessary undertake visits to those authorities highlighted

The Chair commented that she welcomed the co-ordinated approach of the Task and Finish Group. She said that as well as the collection of data she would like to make sure that the views of the people concerned are heard.

The River Co-ordinator replied that she hoped the work would provide a greater understanding and quantify why people are living on the river.

Councillor Steve Hedges wished to congratulate Councillor Dave Laming for his pursuit on this area of work. He expressed his concern that the correct type of moorings would need to be provided with amenities in the locality.

Councillor Brian Simmons commented that he felt that the Health & Wellbeing Board should be made aware of this work.

The Corporate Policy Manager for Equalities introduced to the Panel the newly appointed Engagement Officers for Gypsies & Travellers and Boat Dwellers.

Councillor Dave Laming thanked the Chair and Councillor Tim Ball for their efforts on this matter. He stated that the River Regeneration Trust was now also in existence and that sites had already been identified for development. He added that he was optimistic for the future on this matter.

The Chair commented that the waterways were a great asset for B&NES, but that concern remained over the recent deaths associated with them and called for safety to be further improved.

Councillor Dave Laming agreed that it remained such an important issue.

The Chair asked for the Panel's comments to be passed to the Strategic River Group.

## **61 PAULTON - DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Chair explained that the Group Manager for Policy & Environment was unable to attend the meeting.

Councillor Liz Hardman addressed the Panel. She stated that Paulton was a medium size village that had seen lots of housing developed recently including a large

amount on the former Polestar site. She informed them that 650 new homes have been delivered or planned for since April 2011.

She commented that she believed that Paulton and the Somer Valley had done enough for housing within the area and that further housing would put a huge stress on the highways, schools and local surgeries. She added that what the area truly required was employment opportunities.

The Chair commented that she was disappointed in the potential loss of a retirement community development for local people and the employment that that could have brought to the area.

Councillor Brian Simmons asked if she was aware that Wickes were set to take over the former Great Mills site.

Councillor Liz Hardman replied that she was and that she welcomed the jobs that this would create.

The Chair thanked the officer for their report and the Panel for their role in receiving and discussing similar reports across other areas of the Council over the past few years.

## **62 HOMELESSNESS UPDATE**

The Team Manager for Housing Options and Homelessness introduced this item to the Panel. He said that the report covered the Council's statutory duties and its approach to rough sleepers.

He explained that the Housing Options Team is the Council's frontline service for people at risk of homelessness and for those who are already homeless. He added that team provides specialist advice and assistance and has access to a number of practical options and resources to prevent homelessness.

He stated that 16 households were currently in temporary accommodation which was a very low figure when compared to other local authorities and that the Council very rarely needed to use bed and breakfast accommodation.

He said that the Council and other local partners provide services, including health, welfare, housing and employment services to help rough sleepers make a transition into safer and healthier lives.

He informed them that the number of rough sleepers in the area is estimated every autumn in accordance with best practice. In 2014 it was estimated that there were 27 people sleeping rough on a single night in Bath and North East Somerset (one in three did not have a local connection with the area). The previous year the estimate was 33 and in 2012 the estimate was 22 so the position has remained relatively similar over the last three years.

He explained that Julian House provides the direct access hostel in Bath and that it is usually fully occupied and that the move-on provision rarely has a void bed for more than one or two nights. He added that the hostel is one of only six direct



access hostels in the region; the others are located in Bristol, Yeovil, Taunton, Bournemouth and Winchester and it attracts rough sleepers from the surrounding areas.

He stated that newly-arrived rough sleepers without any local connection are reconnected to their home area when it is safe and reasonable to do so. This ensures that accommodation available in their home town is not lost and that vital support services are maintained. Rough sleepers can decline a reconnection which ends their entitlement to local services and can mean they continue to rough sleep.

He said that the Council had successfully bid for money from a Help for Single Homeless fund with North Somerset Council and Bristol City Council to provide a "rapid response and outreach" service to identify and assist rough sleepers. The funding is £239K between the three authorities and runs until April 2016.

The Chair commented that she was encouraged by the levels of success and the partnerships established with the RUH and Julian House.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked if the count was simply a record of those sleeping on the street and did not take into account those staying within Julian House.

The Team Manager for Housing Options and Homelessness replied that the count was just of those people sleeping on the street and did not take into account those within Julian House.

Councillor Steve Hedges asked if the Council could make any further provision.

Councillor Tim Ball replied that he felt that nobody should have to sleep rough in this day and age, but that he was aware that some people do not want to come into a hostel.

The Team Manager for Housing Options and Homelessness commented that there was Severe Weather Emergency Provision in place for when it is very cold.

The Chair asked if the Bedroom Tax had had an impact of the number of people seeking homelessness advice.

The Team Manager for Housing Options and Homelessness replied that he did not have any specific figures to respond to that question. He added that the Council was a leading authority in downsizing tenancies.

The Chair wished to congratulate him on his report. She added that around 5 years ago a piece of work was carried out on Youth Homelessness in the Somer Valley and she asked if an update could be given to the Panel in March.

The Team Manager for Housing Options and Homelessness replied that an action plan update would be available for the Panel to discuss in March.

## **63 ADDITIONAL HMO LICENSING UPDATE**

The Team Manager for Housing Standards & Improvements introduced this item to the Panel. He explained that on the 12 June 2013 the Cabinet resolved to designate an area, based around the wards of Oldfield, Westmoreland and part of Widcombe, as an Additional HMO Licensing area from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 to the 31st December 2018.

He said that the scheme had already achieved a number of successful outcomes in terms of improving housing conditions, awareness of safety requirements and knowledge on the location and ownership of HMOs in the designated area.

He stated that all of the HMOs identified have been inspected and all of the improvement measures required have been communicated to the 888 applicants for licences. This has resulted in additional protection for approximately 4000 B&NES tenants.

Councillor June Player asked why landlords are allowed to still charge full rent when their properties have not complied with the appropriate conditions.

The Team Manager for Housing Standards & Improvements replied that the Council's role is to make the properties better and is not allowed to intervene in rent charges.

Councillor Gerry Curran asked if the Council still had an accreditation scheme for shared housing.

The Team Manager for Housing Standards & Improvements replied that it does not.

Councillor Tim Ball commented that he felt that the scheme was working well and that landlords in the main value the work that we have done. He acknowledged that other wards were now feeling a similar pressure on this matter and that it would need to be addressed after the elections. He wished to commend the officers for their work.

The Chair asked if the public's awareness of the standards they should expect could be improved.

The Head of Housing replied that the matter of HMOs is not simply a student issue although the team does provide literature and a presence at events such as Fresher's Week. He said that he could contact the Council's Communications & Marketing team to assess whether the matter should be more broadly publicised. He added that the possibility of extending the scheme to other wards would be raised after the elections.

## **64 DECENT HOMES POLICY UPDATE**

The Chair said on behalf of the Panel how impressed they had been with the work that had been undertaken.

The Panel noted the report.

**65 PANEL WORKPLAN**

The Chair introduced this item to the Panel. She suggested that any information relating to the development of Manvers Street be reported in the relevant Cabinet Member Update in March.

She asked for a further invitation to be sent to Aster Homes to ask them to give a presentation to the Panel on their work in the area. She also suggested that the Panel receive a report on the loss of employment sites to housing and an update on the Somerdale site.

The Panel agreed with all of those proposals.

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**

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Hi, thanks for having me here today to talk about HMOs in Oldfield.

So in Bath there are two sides of the HMO coin, they obviously affect students who live in them and also the rest of the community that live around them.

First of all I would like to say I find it deeply concerning that 87% of those properties being inspected were not up to the standard required. Living in substandard property can be worrying, detrimental to health and highlight insecurities within housing. We need to make sure that students have lines of communication that they can use to highlight substandard housing and they need to be able to do this without fear of having their tenancy terminated or rents increased. The council need to work with the University to make this happen. I would also argue that this raises concerns for the HMOs which are not currently covered by these inspections, we don't just want problem landlords do not move elsewhere in the city.

This brings me onto my second point. This scheme is limited to houses in the three wards of Oldfield, Westmoreland and Widcombe, but as student populations in other parts of the city increase we need to make sure that similar registration schemes are put in place. Often Oldfield residents will bring up student housing and if you ask them about article 4 they will say it was too late. There was plenty of warning that student housing was getting out of hand and yet this was only implemented when some streets were already full of as many students as they can hold. As student numbers increase we need to make sure that the same thing doesn't happen in other wards in Bath.

And that isn't to vilify students they bring new vibrancy to our city, trade to our shops and new visitors to the city in the form of their parents. But, if the university want to keep increasing the number of students year on year they need to build more halls on campus and house more of their students themselves rather than relying on Bath's slim brownfield availability. Surrounded by green belt Bath is a finite size. With 5000 people on the social housing waiting list we need to make sure we are providing the space for families to live in, not just students. And this will also ensure that those students who want to stay past the end of their studies also have space to live.

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