

Cabinet – Tuesday 2 November 2021

Agenda Item 8 (References from Other Bodies)

Notes:

1. Only the Chair of the referring body / motion owner may speak on a referral from Council, a Committee, or Scrutiny Committee (Cabinet Procedure Rule 2.3 (d) & (e)).
2. Referrals from Council on 15 September 2021 (Tackling Violent Crime) and 20 October 2021, will be received at the meeting of Cabinet on 14 December 2021.

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(a) Community & Housing Scrutiny Committee (8 September 2021)

Temporary Accommodation Update

That the Cabinet be requested to consider lobbying the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, together with the MPs for Milton Keynes, by whatever means possible, in order to raise the Council's concerns about the lifting of the current ban on Section 21 evictions as it does not consider this the right time to lift this ban which is likely to lead to an increase in homelessness.

Response from Councillor Darlington (Cabinet Member for Adults, Housing and Healthy Communities):

As the responsible Cabinet member I will of course write to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, together with the MPs for Milton Keynes, in order to raise the Council's concerns about the lifting of the current ban on Section 21 evictions.

New Non-Regeneration Council House Building Programme – Pre-Planning Processes

- i) That the Committee endorses the recommendations set out in the officers' report and recommends to Cabinet that these be adopted as standard operating procedures:
 - a) That officers gain a more detailed understanding of the site in question by undertaking a detailed site constraints survey in order to highlight all underground utilities etc that may affect the viability of a site's development. A capacity study that reflects the Council's current planning policy should also be completed.
 - b) That following these steps, work must be completed on an early site financial viability appraisal before any engagement is undertaken. This will not only help ensure that only deliverable sites are progressed in a timely manner but will help keep stakeholders informed and to manage expectations as it is important that these are not raised to levels that are not deliverable.
 - c) That the Housing Delivery Team undertakes an outline financial appraisal of the site, making use of the Proval system. This financial appraisal will make use of recently agreed global financial parameters, which have been pre-agreed with the Finance Department.
 - d) That the Housing Delivery Team engages with internal stakeholders across the Council to gather an understanding of the requirements and restrictions that may impact on any potential new scheme.
 - e) That once the new steps above have been completed and the initial financial appraisal demonstrates that the site might support development (at an approved value for money level), officers engage with their relevant Cabinet Member, followed by local ward and town or parish councillors to discuss the principle of council housebuilding on any specific site.

- f) That development briefs for new council house sites are produced for all sites, regardless of size and potential number of houses.
- g) That the layouts proposed in development briefs be scrutinised carefully before publication for consultation to ensure that they do indeed meet planning policy in order to avoid creating unnecessary concern among residents.
- ii) That individual Cabinet Members respond effectively where clashes between portfolios are identified in relation to new proposals for housing sites.
- iii) That the Cabinet gives a commitment that these smaller development sites will be distributed across the borough and not be limited to long-standing council estates in order to promote the integration of mixed tenure communities in Milton Keynes.
- iv) That the Cabinet writes to the Government requesting that the current rules on prudential borrowing and the risk regime for council housebuilding be reviewed to provide a more favourable financial environment to enable local authorities to meet their obligations to provide sufficient social housing for those in need in their areas and writes to the Milton Keynes MPs to request their support.

Response from Councillor Darlington (Cabinet Member for Adults, Housing and Healthy Communities):

Working closely with finance colleagues the housing delivery team have put in place a range of gateways required to bring forward new non-regeneration council house building schemes. These gateways begin from the very inception of a new scheme through to its completion.

We will work with teams throughout the council to ensure we engage from a scheme's outset to ensure that new schemes are delivered with active engagement from relevant departments and with local ward, parish and town councillors helping ensure local knowledge and relevant feedback is understood.

Due to the overarching need for more council and affordable homes throughout Milton Keynes we will look to take opportunities throughout the borough as they arise.

With regard to (iv) Local authorities have flexibility to set their own reasonable prudential indicators for the HRA so a change in national requirements would not result in a more favourable financial environment. We do believe however, that given the extent of the national housing crisis, a more favourable borrowing rate specific to house building and the HRA, would enable greater investment in building new homes and the Cabinet will write to government requesting this is considered. There are many other factors driven by national policy that have a greater impact on the ability to invest in new housing, including right to buy, grant levels and process and rent setting policy, which we will continue to highlight and challenge.

(b) Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee (9 September 2021)

Covid-19 and YOS Inspection Update

That Milton Keynes Council be recommended to strengthen the support available to victims of crime by young offenders

Response from Councillor Townsend (Cabinet Member for Public Realm):

In May 2021, Milton Keynes Youth Offending Team was inspected by the HM Inspectorate of Probation. Overall, the outcome was 'Good' but an area of work that the inspection highlighted as needing to be addressed was that of the victim work in relation to Out of Court Disposals (OOCDS). The report highlighted three main areas which required some improvement, focusing on; planning to manage risk, timeliness, and increasing victim contact.

At the time of the inspection the victim service in the Youth Offending Team (YOT) contacted victims of all statutory cases, including Youth Conditional Cautions and Youth Cautions, however at that time we were not routinely contacting Community Resolutions (which is a non-statutory outcome). Following the HMIP inspection we immediately reviewed our approach and have already implemented several changes to our victim contact. This ensures that contact is made with **all** OOCDS, including Community Resolutions, where victims have consented.

An ongoing challenge across the Thames Valley Police area, including Milton Keynes, has been that only a small number of identified victims consent to contact by Youth Offending Team victim service. However, in seeking to improve victim engagement, we are approaching Victim First to discuss the current commissioning agreement in place with the Police to ensure we have a clear understanding of their pathways and to identify opportunities to add support for victims from the YOT victim service at an earlier point, or to build upon the support already in place.

Additional changes to improve the numbers of victims enabled to engage with the YOT has been implemented by our newly appointed Police Officer. As part of his role, when he delivers OOCDS, he will re-explore with victims providing a further opportunity to ensure they are fully aware of the support available that they are entitled to receive.

In summary, many steps have already been taken to rectify the identified areas within our victim service. We are aware of some of the areas in which improvement is still required, lie outside of our direct control, such as numbers of victims willing to engage and timeliness of legal outcomes, however we continue to work closely with partners to influence and address these.

(c) Regeneration & Renewal Scrutiny Committee (22 September 2021)

Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Deal

That developers, including Milton Keynes Development Partnership/Council, be encouraged to provide affordable homes in Central Bletchley in order to build up a sense of community in the area.

- i) That any new home building in Central Bletchley should be geared towards the needs of young people already living and growing up in Bletchley and trying to get on the housing ladder, re-inventing Bletchley as a place for the next generation.
- ii) That the Committee recommends the Town Deal Board model and the way it works to Cabinet for possible adoption by future projects designed to improve local areas in other parts of the borough.
- iii) That the Committee requests the Cabinet/Leader of the Council to write, in a positive and conciliatory manner, to Iain Stewart, MP for Milton Keynes South, requesting that he lobbies the Chancellor on behalf of Milton Keynes prior to the Local Government Spending Review announcement (27 October 2021) to ensure that both the Town Deal funding and funding for projects which could also have a major impact on Bletchley, such as the East-West Rail Link be maintained.

Response from Councillor Marland (Leader of the Council):

MKDP already has a made a commitment to aspire to deliver more than the affordable housing policy requires on sites that it owns at 36%, which is 5% more than the current planning policy. The Council is also committed to delivering affordable housing and will be investing £61.5m in the regeneration of the Lakes Estate, which will also be of benefit to the Town Deal area.

There is a policy in Plan:MK related to the Central Bletchley Prospectus Area (Policy SD16), which provides guidance for new development proposals in this area. A Central Bletchley Prospectus was approved by the Council on 16th December 2019 and included an aspiration to diversify uses and increase housing choice. These have formed a basis for taking forward the Central Bletchley Urban Design Framework SPD which will help deliver transformational and high quality developments across Central Bletchley. Whilst Plan:MK does not provide guidance about the mix or tenure of housing within the Central Bletchley area, it does identify it could support higher density housing development. This is likely to result in developments with a greater proportion of smaller one and two-bed properties, which would help to meet the housing needs of young people. In addition, development proposals would be guided by our affordable housing policy in Plan:MK (Policy HN2) which requires 31% of new dwellings to be delivered as affordable housing.

It is pleasing to hear the positive feedback about the work of the Towns Deal Board and the work that the Council is contributing to support this initiative. The Towns Deal Board has been established to support the delivery of the Town Investment Plan and is supported with additional capacity funding from Government to enable this approach to be put in to effect. While this level of investment and support may not be possible on other local investment projects across the Borough, the principles of local engagement and ongoing communication with key stakeholders is something that the Cabinet are committed to.

The Leader wrote to the local MP for Milton Keynes South on 19 October asking him to lobby the Chancellor to support the Towns Deal allocation in full and investment in East West Rail.

Agora Centre, Wolverton

- i) That the Committee notes the sustainable way of living promoted by the project team, eg incentives to get electric vehicles, energy efficiency housing and the energy micro-grid, and if successful, recommends that these expectations should form part of future design guides as to what is expected from developers of other projects when they work within the borough.
- ii) That the Committee considers the communications strategy for this project so far to have been very good and recommends that it should be seen as a “how to” exemplar for other such projects.

Response from Councillor Middleton (Cabinet Member for Resources):

I welcome the recognition of the value of the Council investing in and championing pioneering sustainable design, at both a technical and placemaking level. Putting innovation into practical action through real projects, and in doing so developing the knowledge and capability to roll the lessons out to future development across Milton Keynes, will be vital to achieving our aim of becoming the greenest city in the world and carbon neutral by 2030. And I’m delighted that we’ll be doing this while also delivering the long-awaited regeneration of the Wolverton Agora site.

I agree that the learning from this project could be valuable both within and beyond Milton Keynes, and I’ve asked officers to work with the external development team to make sure this is recorded and documented as the project moves through detailed design and into construction phases and feeds into future communications, both locally and more widely.

We are directly delivering this development due to market failures and it is already living up to its exemplary credentials by being identified as a Good Homes Alliance case study of sustainable placemaking and recently shortlisted for a National Urban Design Award.

(d) Budget & Resources Scrutiny Committee (30 September 2021)

Update on 2021/22 Budget Items

- i) That when considering the future of the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) booking system, the Cabinet be requested to consider the total effects of the system, including the dynamics of the use of the HWRCs, any impact on kerbside collections, the effect of Covid-19 on residents' waste disposal habits and whether these have changed significantly, the possibility of a knock-on increase in fly-tipping and the budgetary implications of the various scenarios.
- ii) That as part of this review, the Cabinet also considers whether the decrease in the number of health and safety incidents at the HWRCs to zero has produced a resource saving for the sites' operators, H W Martin, and whether all or part of this saving should be refunded to the Council.

Response from Councillor Townsend (Cabinet Member for Public Realm):

The financial analysis continues to demonstrate that a reduction in cost has been verified. This is due to reduced tonnages as a result of less importing of waste from neighbouring authorities (many of whom have introduced charging at their HWRCs for items such as construction waste) and the increase in income as a result of commercial waste businesses using the Newport Pagnell commercial waste weighbridge. The holistic total waste tonnage scenario has been rendered through costs and outputs of the recovery park and while the proportion of residual waste presented at HWRCs has increased the overall total tonnage has reduced. A more detailed version of the paper presented will be circulated that shows the holistic data with trend analysis that will consider and evidence the referral.

No financial incentive or price can be placed on H&S and the fact that the booking system has evidenced the safest possible working environments for our team and our residents is one that should be recognised as a service achievement and celebrated not one where price reduction which could further compromise future safety of residents.
