

Minutes of the meeting of the HOUSING AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE held on TUESDAY 14 JULY 2016

Present: Councillor C Williams (Chair)
Councillors Burke, Ferrans, Ganatra, Geaney, Hosking, Jenkins, Khan, and Wallis,

Officer: E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present: Councillor Long, B Leahy (Head of Development Management) and J Nokes (Housing Options Manager) and 5 members of the public

Apologies: Councillors D McCall and Webb

Disclosure of Interests:

Councillor Ferrans declared an interest as a member of the Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP) and as a substitute member of the Development Control Committee.

Councillor Jenkins declared an interest in Item 9 as her father (Mr C Bramall) was Treasurer of the Emmaus Community at Carlton.

HAC07 MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Housing and Community Committee held on 14 July 2016 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

HAC08 ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF HOUSING

The Committee discussed a paper which gave examples of possible, cost-effective, short-term alternative forms of housing provision and noted that:

- That the schemes presented in the paper were by no means the only alternative forms of such housing and that other options, such as mobile homes or static caravans should also be explored;
- Any of the options described in the paper would require formal planning consent, although the actual detail would depend on which particular option was being developed;
- That many of the options were already being used elsewhere by other local authorities and it would be possible to discuss with these authorities how they had dealt with planning issues;
- Local Planning Regulations in Milton Keynes required new developments to conform to existing buildings (D2), but given that there were many modern buildings in Milton Keynes and due to its continual growth, it should be possible to locate any

such developments in areas where the D2 regulation would not be an issue;

- Current regulations specified that any new development should have 30% affordable housing, but this was not stipulated as a minimum amount and therefore it was difficult to have a whole development of affordable housing;
- However, it was possible for the Council to develop a strategy to enable some sites to be allocated solely for alternative housing schemes, such as the YMCA Y-cube modular developments, and if designated properly, the 30% rule would not apply, allowing the whole development to be designated as affordable housing;
- The Cabinet Member explained that personally, he was not keen on short-term temporary accommodation and that the Council's Administration was keen to see more bungalows being built as there was a shortage of suitable smaller housing options for older residents to downsize into and free up larger, under-used properties for families;
- It was possible for the Council to use its powers of acquisition to buy up existing, empty properties, but as soon as these properties were transferred to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), they would immediately be available as a Right to Buy option for any tenants housed there;
- It was therefore, necessary to use a partnership vehicle so that any properties acquired as temporary housing sat outside the HRA. Technically they were rented out as private lets but such properties would be maintained to the same standards as council properties and rented out at the same rates;
- This was a short term solution and ideally the Administration would like to be in a position to build sufficient council houses in order to provide a long term, permanent solution to local homelessness;
- The Planning Team was happy to work with developers to encourage them to provide a higher proportion of affordable housing in new developments but would need a strong mandate from the Council's Administration in order to facilitate this;
- It was up to councillors to decide the strategy on affordable housing when developing its own land and again the Planning Team was happy to facilitate this if given the right mandate. It was not possible for development sites to be all things to all people and a clear mandate from councillors on how they wanted to proceed was needed;
- Viability and deliverability were pertinent to the 30% threshold but general housing deliverability was the main objective of the Government's current housing policy;
- What people wanted was somewhere permanent where they could feel secure and call home. Many in housing need were

sceptical of the private sector as rents were too expensive for those on low incomes. One of the biggest causes of the current crisis was an unaffordable rise in private rents;

- The Administration would far rather be spending the £4.4m currently being used on temporary, room-only hotel accommodation, leasing from other landlords, housing associations etc, on building proper housing;
- The Housing Department had written to 300 residential properties which were registered as empty for Council Tax purposes about a possible lease scheme, rather than an outright purchase, but only received 12 replies from property owners;
- The new Housing and Planning Act could make it even harder for local authorities to fulfil their obligations to provide housing and alleviate homelessness.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Committee acknowledges the Cabinet's desire to provide permanent housing solutions for the homeless in Milton Keynes, but that in light of the spiralling costs of providing temporary accommodation, the Cabinet is requested to explore the short-term benefits which could be gained by the use of modular developments, converted shipping containers/portacabins/terrapins, mobile homes, log cabins, static caravans etc, which have been successfully used elsewhere, in order to move people out of temporary, room-only hotel accommodation. The Committee would expect to receive the views and findings of the Cabinet in time for its scheduled January 2017 meeting.
2. That having been made aware of the planning issues relating to the establishment of such developments, the Committee recommends that the relevant Cabinet Members for Housing and Planning and senior planning staff prepare a draft proposal to be presented to the November 2016 meeting of full Council on how these issues can be resolved and any such developments expedited, in order to provide the necessary mandate for planning officers to which to work.
3. That the Committee requests staff in the Planning Department to prepare a briefing note to be provided to the meeting scheduled for Monday 10 October 2016 on the number of new developments built in Milton Keynes, giving a breakdown of those which met the 30% affordable housing criteria, together with the total number, both as a figure and as a percentage of affordable homes completed as at June / July 2016.

HAC09

DRAFT HOMELESSNESS (STATUTORY NEED) STRATEGY

Following a referral from the Cabinet on 11 July, the Committee scrutinised the draft Homelessness (Statutory Need) Strategy and made the following observations:

- The law required Councils to prepare such a strategy and this document felt like a 'box ticking' exercise;
- It did not explain what the Council's baseline strategy for dealing with homelessness was;
- There were no SMART objectives, timescales or measures of success;
- It covered work already being done but did not provide any new targets;
- The Committee had little confidence in the draft strategy as presented and would recommend that the Cabinet withdrew it and worked on producing a more coherent approach.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Committee is disappointed at the lack of detail, timescales, SMART objectives, targets or any emphasis on positive outcomes and has little confidence in this being a workable strategy which can deliver solutions to those people in statutory need of housing.
2. That the Cabinet be requested to withdraw the draft strategy in its present form and working with housing officers, produce a coherent document which addresses the concerns of the Committee, as outlined above and which meets the needs those who are statutorily homeless in Milton Keynes as a matter of urgency.
3. That the baseline report by the Housing Quality Network (HQN) on which the strategy is based be circulated to the Committee for information

HAC10

TASK AND FINISH GROUP ACTION PLANS

Due to lack of time at the meeting, this item was not discussed but the Committee was requested to review the item in their own time and send any comments to the Committee's Planning Group which would prepare a response.

RESOLVED –

That members of the Committee review the Action Plans in their own time and then send any comments they may have to the Chair, Vice-Chairs and Overview and Scrutiny Officer by Friday 2 September 2016 in order to help the Planning Group prepare the Committee's response to the Action Plans.

HAC11

2016/17 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received the 2016/17 Work Programme, noting that two items, Landbanking by Developers and Scrutiny of the Council's Regeneration Programme were currently provisional items, pending confirmation from the Scrutiny Management Committee on how these should best be scrutinised.

Again committee members were asked to send any comments they might have on the Work Programme to the Committee's Planning Group.

RESOLVED -

That the Scrutiny Management Committee be requested to advise the Committee of how it intends to scrutinise the issue of "Landbanking" by developers and its plans for scrutiny of the Council's proposed regeneration programme so that the Housing and Community Committee's Planning Group can either change the status of these items from provisional to definite or remove them completely from the 2016/17 Work Programme.

HAC12

SITE VISIT TO EMMAUS COMMUNITY AT CARLTON, BEDS

The Committee received and noted the report on the visit to the Emmaus Community at Carlton which had taken place on 4 August. Those who had taken part in the visit had been impressed with the work being done with homeless individuals by the Emmaus Community and were interested in maintaining and progressing the relationship between the Community and the Council now that it had been established.

A second visit, on 10 September, was being organised by Councillor Jenkins and anyone interested in attending should let her know.

The Committee's Planning Group, together with Councillor Long, hoped to meet with Colin Bramall, Treasurer of the Emmaus Community, to discuss the possibility of establishing a satellite operation, most likely a retail outlet, in Milton Keynes as the first stage of developing a permanent Emmaus presence in Milton Keynes.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Scrutiny Officers be thanked for their notes on the visit to the Emmaus Community on 4 August 2016.
2. That a second visit be arranged for 10 September 2016 and that attendance be confirmed with Cllr Jenkins so that the necessary arrangements can be put in place.
3. That the Chair, Vice-Chairs, Cllr Long and Mr Bramall (Treasurer, Emmaus Carlton) meet to discuss how plans for a possible Emmaus presence in Milton Keynes can be taken forward.

HAC13

MEETING THE NEEDS OF NON-STATUTORY HOMELESS PEOPLE

Following a request from Cabinet, the Chair agreed that a report on Meeting the Needs of Non-Statutory Homeless should be considered by the Committee as an urgent item in accordance with Section 100B 4(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, in order to advise Cabinet of the Committee's comments at its meeting on 6 September 2016.

The Committee welcomed the report as a very positive step forward by the Council in tackling the issue of non-statutory homeless people,

who were generally rough sleepers or sofa-surfers and who were sometimes more visible to the public at large rather than those who were statutorily homeless, who tended to be families with children. It was the first time any Cabinet had produced such a forceful paper about how it proposed to deal with the non-statutory homeless.

The Committee discussed the report, with contributions from members of the public who had attended the meeting, noting that:

- The current estimate of genuine rough sleepers in Milton Keynes was about 25;
- There were a number of professional beggars operating in Milton Keynes and causing a public nuisance. It was thought that only 20% of these beggars were actually rough sleepers or even truly homeless;
- Some of these beggars were particularly aggressive and the public found them intimidating. Public Space Protection Orders were working in other local authority areas to minimise such nuisances and the possibility of using these in the centre of Milton Keynes was suggested. Clear signage about not giving money to beggars was also suggested as a possible option;
- Representatives of the Milton Keynes YMCA, the City Centre Management team and a former rough sleeper who were present at the meeting, all welcomed the report as a positive step forward;
- The SaferMK Partnership has been working with local homeless persons for a number of years through its Rough Sleepers Task Group which regularly meets with rough sleepers to monitor numbers, assess their needs and help them access the right services;
- The purpose of the report was to get a Homelessness Partnership between the Council and the voluntary sector up and running and working effectively as soon as possible;
- The issue of re-establishing an emergency night shelter should be looked at as a matter of urgency and certainly in time for winter 2016;
- There were public health issues associated with rough sleepers such as used needles, general rubbish and the lack of sanitary facilities which had to be cleared up regularly. Permanently reducing the number of rough sleepers by providing proper facilities would reduce the need to carry out this type of clearance work.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Committee welcomed the report, which was the first time a Cabinet had produced a positive strategy for dealing with the issues of non-statutory homeless people in Milton Keynes and accepted the principles and purposes set out in the report.

2. That, despite references to the Council Plan, the Committee was disappointed to note that there was no firm commitment in the report to adhere to the timescales set out in the Council Plan and requests that the Cabinet includes a timescale for implementation in the final version of the strategy.
3. That the Committee is concerned about the current lack of an emergency night shelter (formerly provided by the YMCA) and requests that the Cabinet seeks ways of funding the reinstatement of this facility as soon as possible and certainly by no later than the onset of winter 2016, rather than winter 2017 as suggested in the report.
4. That once agreed, the Cabinet be asked to expedite the proposals in the report as soon as possible in order to improve the public's perception of the Council's willingness to assist the homeless when in need and to minimise any public health issues caused by not providing sufficient assistance to the homeless.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 9.40 PM