



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE
HELD AT 7.00 PM ON WEDNESDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2017

Present: Councillors C Williams (Chair), Coventry, Ferrans, Ganatra, Geaney, Hosking, D McCall, Petchey (substituting for Councillor Burke), and Wallis

Officers: E Nickless (Interim Head of Homelessness Prevention and Housing Access), C Wilderspin (Head of Community Safety), E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present: P Williams (Chair, The BusShelter MK Project), T Davis (Vice-Chair, The BusShelter MK Project), D Gleeson (Managing Director, YourMK) and 2 members of local Residents' Associations (J Orr and B Wilde)

Apologies: Councillors Burke, P Geary, and Khan

Disclosures: None

HAC18

MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2017 be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record subject to the inclusion of the invitation by the Service Director (Housing and Regeneration) to councillors to become involved in the development of the Council's housing strategy.

HAC19

UPDATE ON THE BUSSHILTER MK PROJECT (TBSMK)

Witnesses: P Williams (Chair, The BusShelter MK Project), T Davis (Vice-Chair, The BusShelter MK Project)

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the BusShelterMK Project (TBSMK) gave a short presentation, updating the Committee on the progress of the project, including what had been achieved so far, and what issues still needed to be addressed in order to get the facility ready to open. The original aim had been to be open in time for Christmas 2017, but that was not now possible. As soon as the facilities and staff were available, hopefully in early January, a "soft launch" was planned. This would involve three or four homeless people initially to ensure that processes and facilities were fit for purpose. Then, as appropriate, there would be a gradual increase in the number of residents on the bus (maximum 16).

TBSMK had raised sufficient funds to create the facilities required to open the shelter and cover the costs of its initial operations. The Chair and Vice-Chair of TBSMK thanked the residents of Milton Keynes and local businesses for their support which had been excellent, particularly

the Intu shopping centre, which had made the project their charity of the year. TBSMK had also been made a charity partner of TSB as well as receiving very generous donations from other sources.

The Bus, which had previously been a tour bus for music bands, had had a considerable amount of structural work completed but still required some minor internal improvements. TBSMK had also obtained a steel, vandal-proof building-site toilet block, which had reached the end of its viable life for hiring out, to use as bathroom facilities. It was in the process of being refurbished to provide two showers, three toilets, a laundry facility and a kitchenette.

A suitable location in the Campbell Park area had been identified, which the Council would lease from the Milton Keynes Development Partnership and license to TBSMK for 18 months, although precise details of the lease were not yet known. There were also outstanding issues in relation to the connectivity to electricity, mains and foul water. Planning permission to locate the Bus on the site had been applied for in October and a decision was awaited.

The Chair explained that, unlike the Isle of Wight model, the Bus would not travel around every night picking up rough sleepers and dropping them off in the morning. It would stay on the one site most, if not all, of the time. Once accepted onto the Bus, it was expected that residents would stay an average of three months whilst the staff and volunteers worked with them to address their needs and supported them in finding work and more permanent accommodation. Recruitment of a Shelter Manager was currently under way; this was a full-time post requiring someone with suitable experience and skills. A programme of formal interviewing and training for volunteers was also being put together and the level of service TBSMK would be able to offer might depend on the volunteering hours it could attract.

The Committee had particularly asked to be updated on the Project's Health and Safety and Safeguarding policies. The Chair confirmed that the safeguarding policies had been submitted to the Charity Commission and TBSMK was approved as a suitable charity to work with vulnerable adults. These would be verified and revisited as part of the soft launch process.

Residents applying to join TBSMK programme would be thoroughly assessed, using established criteria already used by organisations working with rough sleepers. This would include a risk assessment, taking into account the safety of the resident, other residents, staff and volunteers. Following this assessment, all recommendations would be verified and approved by a separate panel. All staff and volunteers working directly with residents would require a DBS check, would be interviewed prior to acceptance and then be appropriately trained.

The Committee was further advised that the TBSMK Trustees took their responsibilities with regard to safety of all kinds very seriously. Although the Bus did not legally require a fire certificate, the Board had engaged a qualified and experienced fire assessor to advise it. He would be conducting a final inspection once the Bus was ready to become operational and would also provide ongoing training to residents, staff and volunteers. As a result of his advice, fire retardant mattresses, bedding and curtains had been purchased and other surfaces would be

treated with a fire retardant spray to reduce the risk of a fire starting on board the Bus. The Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service had also offered to undertake fire awareness training with residents.

TBSMK was also working with medical professionals who had experience of working with homeless people, in the preparation of relevant policies and procedures so that staff and volunteers knew what steps to take both as part of the “boarding” process and in dealing with medical related situations with existing residents.

During the discussion, the Committee also noted that:

- a) Although 30% of rough sleepers were now women, the Bus did not have suitable facilities to accommodate both men and women;
- b) Residents would not be allowed drink or drugs on the Bus, but the use of these substances elsewhere would not necessarily preclude someone being allowed on the Bus as each case would be dealt with on its individual merits. However, someone who was seriously drunk or under the influence of drugs would not be allowed back onto the Bus at that time in order to minimise the disruption to other residents; TBSMK were therefore looking at what emergency measures could be put in place to ensure that anyone in that condition had a safe place to sleep;
- c) The Interim Head of Homelessness Prevention and Housing Access agreed to look into the issue of connections to services and utilities on behalf of the TBSMK;
- d) The operational costs would be between £150-160k pa, which included setting aside some money for renewal and replacement of items;
- e) Some residents would be entitled to claim benefits which would help to cover day to day running costs;
- f) There were various referral mechanisms in place from other support agencies, as well as a self-referral process;
- g) TBSMK hoped to be able to utilise supermarket food waste to feed residents. They would be encouraged to learn how to cook for themselves, help with chores on the Bus and develop the self-sufficiency necessary to sustain a more stable life-style;
- h) Owning a pet would not be a limitation to acceptance onto the Bus as there would be a small number of kennels on the site and arrangements were being made to provide veterinary care when necessary.

RESOLVED -

1. That the Chair and Vice-Chair of the BusShelter MK Project be thanked for their attendance at the meeting and for updating the Committee on the progress of the Project.
2. That the Committee commends the progress made by the Project Team in making the BusShelter MK a reality and wholeheartedly supports the Project as one step on the way to the elimination of the need of the homeless to sleep rough in Milton Keynes.

3. That the BusShelter Project Team advises the Overview and Scrutiny Officer of any areas of the project where further support from the Committee would be of assistance in enabling it to achieve its objectives.

HAC20

MODULAR TRANSITIONAL HOUSING IN MILTON KEYNES

Witness: D Gleeson (Managing Director, YourMK)

Mr Gleeson advised the Committee that a range of options had been looked at in order to provide suitable transitional housing in Milton Keynes. Several MKDP sites had been considered and proposals developed. A site at Fishermead had been chosen which had the capacity to locate 70 x 2 bedroom, self-contained housing units using modular construction techniques. The development would be 3 storeys high, with an on-site laundry, site manager's office, cycle store and parking. Planning permission for the site had been granted.

The type of units being used had a 60 year life expectancy, although the lease on the Fishermead site was for 15 years. Once this term was up, the units could be easily dismantled and moved to another location. The units were factory constructed and would be put on pile foundations, which meant a short, on-site construction time.

The assembly of the units on site meant that residents could be moved in in phases; there was no need to wait for completion of the whole site before the first families could move in, hopefully during April 2018.

A Delegated Decision to approve proceeding with the development was scheduled to take place on 21 November 2017. Once this was confirmed, YourMK would place the order with the manufacturer.

The units used in the development would be owned by Tando Property Services, a registered provider, for the period of the 15 year lease on the plot at Fishermead, managing the tenancies and providing cleaning services. A detailed asset management plan would be drawn up following the Delegated Decision on 21 November, giving the Council nomination rights to the scheme. Tenancies would be assured short-hold tenancies

YourMK was discussing with the Housing Service how many more transitional units would be needed before submitting the next application. Across the 5 sites identified as possible locations for this type of development there was a potential for up to 300 units, although it was thought that this many might not be required.

The units provided single level accommodation and each nomination would be assessed to make sure residents were housed in the most suitable accommodation available. As the development was only 3 storeys high, there was no requirement to provide a lift, although there would be the facility to store pushchairs in the cycle store.

The units were very flexible and could be adapted for single people, but the initial brief had been to provide family accommodation in order to get families properly housed and out of unsatisfactory, temporary accommodation, often outside Milton Keynes.

The aim of the scheme was to reduce the cost of temporary accommodation whilst permanent solutions were found. This was not a

quick fix and it was important that a supply of permanent housing was acquired / developed into which people could be moved long-term in order to minimise the length of time those in housing need stayed in transitional accommodation.

RESOLVED

1. That D Gleeson, Managing Director of YourMK, be thanked for his very comprehensive report on the planned installation of Modular Transitional Housing in Milton Keynes.
2. That the Committee welcomes the progress being made to provide suitable transitional housing for those in need of temporary accommodation in a flexible and cost effective manner.
3. That the Overview and Scrutiny Officer be provided with the link to the plans for the Fishermead development for circulation to the Committee.
4. That arrangements be made for the Committee to visit the Modular Transitional Housing Development at Fishermead before the first tenants take up residence in April 2018.
5. That further scrutiny of the development and use of transitional housing to for those in need of temporary accommodation in Milton Keynes be added to the Committee's future Work Programme.

HAC21

DRAFT ROUGH SLEEPING REDUCTION STRATEGY 2017-2020

Witnesses: E Nickless (Interim Head of Homelessness Prevention and Housing Access), and C Wilderspin (Head of Community Safety)

The Committee received a short presentation on the Draft Strategy, which was out for public consultation until 24 December 2017, from the Interim Head of Homelessness Prevention and Housing Access and the Head of Community Safety noting that:

- a) There were five strategic aims in the Strategy to reduce rough sleeping;
- b) Rough sleeping was much wider than just a housing issue and the authors had tried to capture this in the Strategy;
- c) They had also tried to keep it simple and at a strategic level at this stage;
- d) The authors would welcome feedback and input from the Committee so that the Strategy was realistic and workable;
- e) An action plan to implement the Strategy would be developed with buy-in from both partner agencies dedicated to the reduction of rough sleeping and rough sleepers themselves, rather than just the Council telling people what to do;
- f) The authors did not think anything was missing, although things had moved on since the Strategy had been initially drafted;
- g) The suggested measures in the Strategy had not yet been costed. It was not expected that the Council would have to deliver on all aspects of the strategy; it was hoped that some of the work would be delivered by partner organisations;

- h) The Housing Service had worked with other Council Departments, such as Adult Social Care, as well as external partners and agencies, to develop the strategy;
- i) Housing was also working to engage with rough sleepers as part of the consultation process. They were encouraging partners such as the YMCA and British Red Cross to discuss the strategy with rough sleepers and encourage them to engage with the Council;
- j) Housing would be working closely with the Milton Keynes Homelessness Partnership about further engagement with rough sleepers;
- k) Most rough sleepers were non-statutory homeless and not entitled to council housing, therefore other options to resolve their homelessness needed to be looked at.

The Committee then discussed the draft Strategy in detail, making the following observations:

- a) The Committee welcomed the Council's efforts to try and deal with housing provision for those who were non-statutorily homeless ie rough sleepers;
- b) The tone of the whole strategy needed to be improved. It implied that rough sleepers were a "bit of a problem" cluttering up the town centre, rather than victims who needed help.
- c) It did not really address the causes of homelessness, such as:
 - Rogue landlords illegally withholding deposits;
 - Failure of the benefits system to support those caught in the trap of low / variable incomes but paying high rents, such as those on zero-hours contracts;
 - The Council being unable to build sufficient council housing to meet demand due to Government's cap on borrowing for this purpose.
- d) On page 7 of the Strategy the categories of homelessness listed did not include ordinary people who had fallen on hard times.
- e) It needed to be more than just a housing strategy; only providing housing was not always the whole answer as some people also needed support with other aspects of their lives in order to get going again.
- f) There did not appear to be any mechanism built in to deal with a possible increase in numbers. According to a recent report published by Shelter, Milton Keynes had the second highest rate of homelessness in the South East. Shelter estimated that there could be as many as 2,400 people in Milton Keynes who would be homeless or at risk of homelessness next year.
- g) People were not "incidents"; there needed to be a clearer distinction between those who were genuinely sleeping rough and in need of assistance and "professional beggars" and how these were dealt with.
- h) The Resettlement Pathways schematic seemed overly complicated.

- i) Some estimates of costs / staffing requirements, however provisional, would have been helpful.

With reference to the Shelter Report, the Head of Community Safety commented that he thought Milton Keynes Council was probably much more honest than other local authorities about the numbers of rough sleepers / homeless persons when it completed the annual Department for Communities and Local Government return on rough sleepers. He also added that although the aim of the Strategy was to eventually help all rough sleepers off the streets, if people were having to sleep rough, then the Council had an obligation to make sure they were as safe as possible.

RESOLVED

1. That the Council's Interim Head of Homelessness Prevention and Housing Access and the Head of Community Safety be thanked for their contribution to the Committee's scrutiny of the Draft Rough Sleeper Reduction Strategy 2017-2020 and for clarification of the Committee's queries in relation to the Strategy.
2. That the Overview and Scrutiny Officer prepares a list of the Committee's comments on the Draft Rough Sleeper Reduction Strategy and circulates to the Committee for comment.
3. That once agreed, the list of comments be used as the basis of the Committee's response to the current public consultation on the Draft Rough Sleeper Reduction Strategy 2017-2020.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 09.10 PM