



WATCH LIVE
on MK Council's YouTube channel
www.youtube.com/MiltonKeynesCouncil

ITEM 4a



Minutes of the meeting of the COMMUNITY AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2021

Present: Councillors Ferrans (Chair), Gowans, Khan, Marlow, Raja, Reilly, Wallis and C Wilson-Marklew

Apologies: Councillor Nazir

Officers: D Wilson (Supply and Acquisitions Service Manager), M Heath (Director Children's Services), J Harrison (Head of Housing Operations), S Rankin (Head of Older Peoples' Housing and Community Support), M Hancock (Group Head of Commissioning), V Collins (Director Adult Services), E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer), S Pitkin (Business Support and Civic Events Manager)

Also Present: S Green (Chief Executive Officer, MK YMCA) and Councillor Darlington (Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Housing)

CH21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Marlow declared an interest in Item 6 as her mother-in-law was a resident of Priory View, Dunstable.

Councillor Wallis advised that she was a tenant of Milton Keynes Council.

CH22 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee held on 10 November 2020 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

CH23 HOUSING NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Witnesses: D Wilson (Supply and Acquisitions Service Manager), M Heath (Director Children's Services), J Harrison (Head of Housing Operations), S Green (Chief Executive Officer, MK YMCA)

Young People Registered for Housing with the Council

The Council's Supply and Acquisitions Officer introduced her paper on the number of young people registered for housing and the number currently residing in temporary accommodation, explaining the relevance of the figures given in the Briefing Note.

The Committee learnt that:

- a) The main reason for young people becoming homeless was a breakdown in their relationship with their family who were no longer willing to provide the necessary accommodation;
- b) Apart from the line identifying "Single Young People" the other categories in the list included couples and were households, rather than individuals
- c) The figures quoted were slightly lower than previous years as pathways into suitable accommodation for young people were becoming more stable. The offer available from the YMCA at its new CMK campus was making a difference;
- d) The Housing Solutions Manager was anticipating a possible spike in homeless young people as Covid-19 restrictions on the reasons for private landlord evictions were lifted and she was already working with some landlords to try and mitigate this;
- e) The age range of "young people" the Council dealt with was 18-25 years of age.

Young People's Accommodation Sufficiency Tasking Project

The Committee then received a presentation from the Director Children's Services and the Housing Operations Manager, introducing this new piece of work. The Committee heard that the aim of the project was to ensure that shared priorities were clear across services, initially Housing, Adult Services and Children's services so that the Council can respond consistently to concerns regarding the accommodation sufficiency for young people who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless or which the Council has a duty to house. The presentation also set out the themes of the work and what conclusions had been reached so far.

YMCA Offer

The Committee next heard from Simon Green, Chief Executive of the MK YMCA who explained how the new campus in CMK was helping young people with their accommodation needs:

- a) The YMCA supported a wider age range of young people (18-35), based on the way housing benefit entitlements were structured as they changed significantly after the age of 35;
- b) The YMCA was the main provider of accommodation tailored to the needs of young people in Milton Keynes;
- c) Locally, housing opportunities for young people were not good – Milton Keynes has been dubbed the “capital of youth homelessness.
- d) Buying a house in Milton Keynes was virtually impossible for young people and they often did not meet the criteria for social housing provided by the Council or housing associations;
- e) Private sector provision for young people was insecure, expensive and required large deposits;
- f) The YMCA nationally had recently produced a report on housing for young people called “Impossible Homes” ([Impossible Homes](#));
- g) MK YMCA was ambitious to expand its portfolio with small, purpose-built developments for young people across Milton Keynes to enable them to stay connected to their local communities;
- h) The new campus in CMK provided 106 self contained flats at 80% of the market value for that sized property;
- i) Rent levels had been set by an independent surveyor and deposits were not required;
- j) The independent accommodation was occupied by young people in work who were not relying on benefits to fund their accommodation needs;
- k) The average length of stay was 6-9 months but moving-on options were limited so the YMCA was working to develop its own internal housing pathways.

Registered Providers / Private Sector Provision

The Supply and Acquisitions Officer then gave a short presentation on what was available to young people from other registered providers (housing associations) and the private sector.

She advised the Committee that she had held a very positive marketing and engagement meeting that day with private landlords about what the Council could do for them in the way helping residents manage tenancies and preventing problems before they

became an issue in return for them either renting direct to the Council or providing more secure, longer term accommodation.

The Supply and Acquisitions Manager added that the Council was very successful in making nominations to housing associations although for many prospective tenants finding the first month's rent in advance was a struggle, but the homelessness prevention fund had helped in supporting those who were eligible with the necessary finance.

YMCA Presentation

The Committee then received a second presentation from the YMCA which set out the challenges for young people seeking independent accommodation, how their new campus was structured and the additional facilities it provided and the organisation's strategic plan for the future. During the ensuing discussion, the Committee noted that:

- a) The new campus also included a number of income-generating initiatives, such as a nursery, coffee shop, conference facilities and retail units, some of which were already providing employment for some residents;
- b) YMCA had teamed up with Thames Valley Police and the hospital to work with young people involved in knife crime to improve their life chances;
- c) "Affordable" housing should be based on what people could afford to pay, not the cost of bricks and mortar;
- d) YMCA hoped, in future, to be able to reduce the rent still further on its flats and rooms. It would like to receive the same subsidies from government as local authorities and housing associations;
- e) The focus was getting young people into employment with wages higher than the benefit level they would be entitled to. YMCA would not support people into zero-hour contracts or insecure employment;
- f) As a provider of supported housing, YMCA residents, if they were out of work, would be entitled to receive a higher rate of housing benefit. Some supported housing providers therefore charged rent up to the maximum benefit level, but MK YMCA had decided to charge the lowest affordable rents it could manage. The YMCA housing pathway provided bigger, better and cheaper accommodation the more young people earned in order to encourage aspiration and progress.

The Committee then heard from Councillor Darlington, the Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Housing Services. She thanked the Committee for its invitation and thought that it was getting to the crux of the housing problem in Milton Keynes ie local supply was not meeting and a way of bridging the gap needed to be found. She was looking forward to hearing any ideas the Committee brought forward as no local authority had yet found a solution. It would not be solved in the next year, but she hoped to be able to work with the Committee to find the answers.

During a general discussion by the Committee on the principle of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) the following points were raised:

- a) There was no number for HMO provision in the local plan but young people were only entitled to housing benefit based on the rate of a room in an HMO;
- b) Council tenancies for shared households were available and could be support with help from the Neighbourhood Team, including wrap-round support from colleagues in other departments;
- c) Council owned or managed HMOs could be a way forward in providing accommodation for young people and could raise the profile of HMOs as a viable form of accommodation;
- d) The location of HMOs was important; there should not be too many in one area as other residents and local parish councils often objected when planning applications for HMOs came forward;
- e) Inadequate parking was always an issue with applications for HMOs and innovative ways of solving this needed to be found;
- f) Although it would not necessarily solve the issue of supply, the Council should consider purchasing HMOs when they became available on the open market;
- g) The provision of custom-designed, purpose-built HMOs was one of the ambitions of the YMCA to help improve supply.

The Committee then received and noted the information papers on current rent levels for the different rental types of property and sie in Milton Keynes, the Briefing Note on the types of housing planned for in Strategic Housing Market Analysis and the update on the Council's build and Acquisition Programmes.

RESOLVED –

1. That all the presenters be thanked for their contributions to the meeting and the ensuing discussions with the Committee.
2. That officer-colleagues who provided background information documents also be thanked for their contributions.
3. That as part of its acquisition programme, the Council considers buying existing Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) when they come on the market. Although this would not necessarily increase the overall number of properties available for young people, properties which were well managed and maintained by the Council would enhance the reputation of this type of property as a solution to the current housing crisis for young people.
4. That the Council considers building its own HMOs or shared households based on the model currently being developed by the YMCA.
5. That if the Council does develop its own HMOs or buys existing ones, a positive engagement programme with the local parish council and existing residents is required.
6. That if the Council does develop such properties, thought is given to providing innovative parking solutions, such as building at first floor level with parking underneath at ground floor level.
7. That when the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) is revised, a requirement to report on the need for well managed and well-maintained HMOs or purpose-built shared properties as part of the solution to the local housing crisis be included.
8. That consideration be given to encouraging householders with suitable, spare accommodation to consider taking on young people in need of accommodation as lodgers.
9. That the expectation of the Committee is that over the next year there will be significant improvement in the provision of housing for young people and the necessary support to help them maintain their tenancies.
10. That consideration be given to the provision of courses/workshops on “living as an adult family” to help families navigate re-setting boundaries and reducing the stress of continuing to live together as their children become adults.
11. That once Covid-19 restrictions allow, a site visit by the Committee to the new YMCA facilities be organised.

CH24

HOUSING NEEDS OF OLDER PEOPLE

Witnesses: D Wilson (Supply and Acquisitions Service Manager), S Rankin (Head of Older Peoples' Housing and Community Support), M Hancock (Group Head of Commissioning)

The Supply and Acquisitions Manager explained the data in her Briefing Note on the Housing Needs of Older People to the Committee. The number of people aged 60+ registered for housing with the Council was quite small and their requirements were assessed under a number of categories ranging from 'critical or emergency' to 'no significant needs'. Often older people needed help with re-housing following discharge from hospital or similar emergency and their current housing is no longer suitable.

The Council was very successful in supporting older people into accommodation that suited their needs and move-on arrangements could be completed quickly, with most people recognising the benefits. The Council's own downsizing scheme for its tenants was also proving very successful, with 107 moves, freeing up larger, family properties, completed since 2019.

Where applications for housing adaptations were made to the Council, an assessment was carried out and if the Council thinks the property to be adapted was under-occupied, it would try to assist the tenant to move to a more suitable property, rather than adapt a family home.

The Committee then received a presentation from the Head of Older Peoples' Housing and Community Support, which covered the Council's standard sheltered housing provision and sheltered housing with care scheme provision. The Council was able to help everyone who approached them aged 60+, regardless of their current tenures. Availability was regular and people can generally be accommodated fairly quickly. The 60+ demographic in Milton Keynes was fairly small at the moment but this would get larger as Milton Keynes matures and those who came here in the 70s and 80s for work start to reach retirement age.

The Council's Group Head of Commissioning then presented the data on the housing needs of older people identified in the draft Supported Housing Strategy. Adult Services had started work to develop the strategy last year and work has continued, despite the pandemic. Once the development work was complete, the Committee would be part of the wider consultation process. The strategy provided a comprehensive approach to understanding the housing needs of older people. The supply of specialist housing will need to increase as the 60+ demographic in Milton Keynes increases.

The Committee welcomed the development of the strategy as important and timely, noting that:

- a) Milton Keynes was behind its target for the provision of care home beds as it was difficult to get plans through the Development Control Committee
- b) Over the next 10 years there would be an increase in the numbers with dementia and higher levels of dependency as people lived longer;
- c) The care home market had taken a big hit during the pandemic as people who needed care were reluctant to move into the sector as they were afraid it would shorten their lives rather provide the support to prolong it;
- d) There was a need to attract more providers to Milton Keynes at all levels; the Council could not be the only source of accommodation for older people.

Finally the Committee viewed a short video produced by officer colleagues in Central Bedfordshire Council on the specialist, older person's accommodation it provided at Priory View in Dunstable and noted the link provided in the agenda to the ExtraCare Village brochure.

RESOLVED –

1. That all the presenters be thanked for their contributions to the meeting and the ensuing discussions with the Committee.
2. That in reference to the category *Housing for older people for social rent / affordable rent* as listed in the Briefing Note on the housing needs of older people identified in the draft Supported Housing Strategy, more work is done to analyse the data to assess whether the projected numbers are people already in social housing or who anticipate needing social housing as they get older.
3. That the Committee would also like to see work carried out to investigate why some older people do not see a move to facilities like the ExtraCare villages in Milton Keynes or the Council's own sheltered accommodation schemes, as a life-enhancing opportunity.
4. That once Covid-19 restrictions allow, at least a site visit by the Committee to the ExtraCare Village at Shenley Wood, with the possibility of a follow-up visit to the Willen site, be organised.

5. That officer colleagues be congratulated on the successful work they are doing to provide for the current accommodation needs of older people, but it is clear that in future years, demand will outstrip supply if this is not planned for properly.

CH25

2021/22 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and discussed the suggested Work Programme for 2021/22.

RESOLVED –

1. That the following items from the list of possible subjects for scrutiny during 2021/22 be considered as priority items:
 - New Council House Build Programme – what is being delivered across all size of property and tenures and when;
 - Milton Keynes Local Housing Company once it is operational and processes had bedded in;
 - MKC Housing Maintenance Programme – how well is the service responding to requests and are improved working processes being maintained;
 - Continued work to reduce rough sleeping and all forms of homelessness in Milton Keynes – what happens when the current governmental special funding ceases?
2. That the following items be added to the list of possible subjects for scrutiny during 2021/22:
 - Sharp practice by private landlords and what the Council can do to prevent this;
 - Update on the Young People’s Accommodation Sufficiency Tasking Project in the form of an officer Briefing Note due to time constraints within the Work Programme;
 - How well is the Temporary Accommodation Strategy working?
3. That as there is no meeting of the Committee that fits into the timescale for the establishment of the Milton Keynes Local Housing Company, an all-councillor officer Briefing Meeting be arranged at an appropriate time.

CH26

NEW MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE FOR HOUSING SERVICES

The Committee received and noted the new management structure and officer reporting lines for Housing Services.

RESOLVED –

1. That the new management structure and officer reporting lines for Housing Services, as set out in Item 8 be noted.
2. That during 2021/222 the Committee receives an officer Briefing Note on how well the new structure is working and whether anticipated service improvements are being achieved.
3. That all officers who have worked with the Committee during 2020/21 be thanked for their input into the meetings, contributions to the various discussions and their co-operation in taking on board the Committee's recommendations, reducing the need to make referrals to Cabinet.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 10:08 PM

All the presentations referred to in this document can be found on the Council's Committee Management Information System (CMIS) at: [CMIS: Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee - 23 February 2021](#)

The recording of this meeting is available to view on the Council's YouTube Channel at: [Milton Keynes Council YouTube Channel: Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee - 23 February 2021](#)