

COMMUNITIES & HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting: 3 December 2018

At: 6.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Christine Corris (Chair) in the chair; Councillor Julian Lewis-Booth (Vice-Chair); Councillors Angie Clark, Dickie Davies, Helen Foster-Grime, Paul Hadfield, Adrian Nottingham and Andy Sorton.

1. MINUTES

The Minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 29 October 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and Officer were invited to declare any interests which they may have had in any of the agenda items for the meeting.

No declarations of interest were made.

3. CALL-IN

There were no call-in items to consider.

4. HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

The Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) provide updates in respect of recent policy and funding announcements by the Government affecting housing; progress made against the planned installations of sprinklers to council owned high-rise housing blocks; the current nature and extent of homelessness in the Borough, and key areas of work to address the issue; and progress in delivering the Viaduct Housing Partnership development Programme.

The Cabinet Member for Communities & Housing (Councillor Sheila Bailey) also attended the meeting to respond to councillors' questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- A discussion took place in relation the circumstances surrounding the disestablishment of the Stockport Housing Commission. It was stated that the Commission considered this matter at its last meeting where it was agreed to rationalise the number of member-bodies that considered related matters. At that point it was proposed that those reports that would have been referred to the Commission would be considered by the Scrutiny Committee, and that this position would be reassessed at the end of the municipal year.
- It was confirmed that capacity had been increased with regard to homelessness provision over the winter period.

- It was noted that the potential costs associated with the installation of sprinkler systems in the Council's high rise housing had risen to £10m, and it was queried as to the level of confidence the Council had in this assessment. In response, it was stated that the Council had undertaken consultant surveys to provide an estimate of the likely costs and that at this stage in advance of a tendering process, the Council was as confident as it could be about the robustness of these estimates.
- The inequitable distribution of Housing Programme Funds across the country was highlighted. It was stated that conversation continued to take place between Greater Manchester and Homes England to establish if a greater proportion of funding could be allocated to the region.
- Concern was expressed in relation to the potential for the roll-out of Universal Credit in Stockport to exacerbate existing issues whereby people are made homeless within the private rented sector and the capacity of the Council to deal with the consequences of that.
- It was stated that while the size of the private rented sector continued to increase in Stockport, there was a risk that the rollout of Universal Credit may arrest this growth as landlords decide to withdraw from the sector and dispose of their properties.
- The Council had two officers that dealt with those cases where landlords had served 21 day notices on tenants to ensure that they challenged landlords to consider the full range of options available to them.
- Additional resources were available for those who were rough sleeping and every effort was made to provide them with accommodation regardless of whether they met the strict homelessness criteria.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

5. MTFP CABINET RESPONSE: OUR BUDGET CHOICES FOR 2019/20

The Cabinet Member for Communities & Housing submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) outlining the Cabinet approach to developing its medium term strategy, which frames the choices the Council will make about its budget both next year and in future years and providing updated information on specific proposals that fell within the remit of the Scrutiny Committee.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Concern was expressed that the proposal to increase the fees charged for taxi licences would exacerbate the existing problem of drivers obtaining licences from other authorities where the cost and rigour of the licensing process was more relaxed.
- It was stated that in many circumstances fees and charges were being increased to a level where the Council was able to cover the cost of providing the service, and that to continue to run these services at a loss was no longer sustainable.
- Benchmarking exercises had been undertaken to ensure that the proposed charges were not disproportionately out of alignment with those levied by other comparator local authorities.
- It was confirmed that it was not intended to charge community groups for the use of local parks and greenspaces.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. TOWN CENTRE WEST MAYORAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION PROPOSAL

The Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) updating the Scrutiny Committee on the proposed response to the opportunities and challenges through the creation of a Mayoral Development Corporation, or other suitable entity, as the delivery vehicle and recommending that the Council formally agrees to the principles on which any MDC, or equivalent, would be created.

The Cabinet Member for Communities & Housing (Councillor Sheila Bailey) also attended the meeting to respond to councillors' questions.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Clarification was requested in relation to the overall cost to the Council that would be incurred in setting up the Mayoral Development Corporation and the ongoing costs that the Council would be required to contribute.
- It was highlighted that Stockport would continue to retain control over planning powers for the MDC area.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

7. AGENDA PLANNING

A representative of the Democratic Services Manager submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) setting out planned agenda items for the Scrutiny Committee's next meeting and any relevant Forward Plan items.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.28 pm