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Meeting	Decision Session - Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods
Date	12 October 2015
Present	Councillor Carr
In Attendance	Councillors Gillies and Boyce

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## **11. Declarations of Interest**

At this point in the meeting, the Executive Member was asked to declare any personal, prejudicial or pecuniary interests in the business of the agenda. None were declared.

## **12. Minutes**

Resolved: That the minutes of the Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods Decision Session held on 25 August 2015 be approved and signed by the Executive Member as a correct record.

## **13. Public Participation**

It had been reported that they had been three registrations to speak on item 5 Petition, To remove the bench arms installed on Rougier Street, under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

Mr Bridge, the petition organiser, spoke in objection to the installation of the bench arms and raised the following issues:

- The lack of engagement on this subject politically and from the Council.
- The lack of response from the Conservative and Labour Groups
- The lack of response from the Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods.
- The lack of understanding raised in the report, as the petition did not comment on the inadequacies of the homeless services in York.

He stated that some people choose to sleep rough and highlighted the impact for those rough sleepers when putting defensive architecture into the city. He asked that the decision be deferred until engagement had taken place with the petition organisers.

Mr Beacon, a local resident, spoke on various housing issues. He felt the benches were a way to hide a growing problem regarding society becoming poorer and not being in a position to afford a house. He felt the Housing Policy was geared to keeping house prices high and that optional homes like caravans or park homes were discouraged by the planning system. He highlighted that housing people for under £20k had been reported as being successful in America but felt that certain levels of government would be more concerned that this option would depress the housing market.

Cllr Warters was in attendance to offer his support on the recommendations in the report. He felt the actions of the Council, installing arms on benches, was to be praised. The arms were a suitable aid for the elderly and a welcomed addition to bus stop furniture to reduce the attractiveness of the benches to the drunks. This problem had to be addressed in Rougier Street and near the station. Officers should be praised for this simple and effective low cost solution.

#### **14. Petition - To remove the bench arms installed on Rougier Street**

It was noted that the decision would be considered in consultation with the Executive Member for Transport and Planning.

The Executive Members considered a report that highlighted a response to the change.org e-petition which asked the Council to remove the bench arms installed on Rougier Street.

Officers gave an update and highlighted the support that the Council offered to individuals who were homeless, threatened with homelessness, rough sleeping or street drinking.

They stated that the installation of the bars was not directed at rough sleepers or anti-homelessness and that the Council made numerous interventions to ensure no one had to sleep rough.

Officers highlighted that the City of York Streetscape Strategy & Guidance, that was adopted in 2014, stated street furniture must comply with British standards and be accessible for all to use, which included the installation of arm rests on benches to assist older people.

Officers confirmed they had received numerous complaints from users feeling vulnerable at the bus shelter in Rougier Street.

The Executive Members agreed the bars were installed as a duty of care to support older people. They noted that some individuals did choose to rough

sleep or street drink and although these were known as a vulnerable group, other groups, such as the elderly, should not feel intimidated or repelled by the substances they find when using the bus shelter. They also felt that the bad condition of the shelter made it an unsuitable place to sleep and agreed that the homeless had other options available to them.

Resolved:

- (i) That the petition and the information set out within the report highlighting the reasons for installation of the bench arms be noted.
- (ii) That option 1, to retain the bench arms, as set out at paragraph 25 of the report, be agreed.

Reason: To ensure that the city continues to take a proactive approach to supporting individuals who are homeless, street drinkers or who find themselves in difficulty whilst at the same time ensuring that the benches are available for use by bus users and where possible be compliant with the guidance adopted by the council in the Streetscape Strategy & Guidance document.

## **15. Update - Homeless Strategy Action Plan 2013-18**

The Executive Member considered a report that set out any significant national and local changes since the publication of the Homelessness Strategy 2013-18 'A City Partnership to prevent homelessness'. It also addressed a number of areas for improvement which were identified during an assessment of the homeless service as part of the national 'Gold Standard' challenge.

Officers gave an update and confirmed it was a legal requirement to have a homeless strategy. The strategy would give a framework for CYC Homeless Services and partner agencies to work together to improve services and tackle homelessness in York until 2018.

Officers confirmed they were committed to retaining a quality statutory homeless service by ensuring there was a range of homeless prevention tools and a range of supported housing to help people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Executive Member thanked officers and agreed to accept the recommendations listed in the report.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report, which contains national and local changes since the publication of the Homeless Strategy in 2013 and takes account of consultation findings, be agreed and published.
- (ii) That the updated action plan which will run alongside the current Homelessness Strategy 2013-18, 'A City Partnership to prevent homelessness', be adopted and published.
- (iii) That Member commitment to the principle of preventing homelessness, tackling the causes of homelessness and ensuring that City of York provide an appropriate service to meet the statutory requirement under Housing Act 1996 and Homelessness Act 2002 be confirmed.

Reason: The Homelessness Strategy is a legal requirement. The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide advice, and information services to anyone who is homeless or at risk of homelessness. The local Authority has a duty to provide temporary accommodation to homeless households (criteria apply under Housing Act 1996). A review is necessary to incorporate current trends, legal changes, financial constraints and service requirements.

Cllr Carr, Chair

[The meeting started at 11.30 am and finished at 11.55 am].