

Meeting	Housing and Community Safety Policy and Scrutiny Committee
Date	18 October 2022
Present	Councillors Fenton (Chair), Pavlovic (Vice-Chair), Vassie, Fitzpatrick and Wells
Apologies	Councillors Cuthbertson
Officers in Attendance	Neil Ferris, Corporate Director of Place Denis Southall, Head of Housing Lewis Rodgers, Resettlement Services Manager

7. Declarations of Interest (17:36)

At this point in the meeting, Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interest or other registrable interest they might have had in respect of business on this agenda, if they hadn't already done so in advance on the Register of Interests. Cllr Pavlovic declared that he was previously employed in the homeless sector and was involved with the resettlement contract pre-2016.

8. Minutes (17:38)

Resolved: That the minutes of the last meeting held on 21 September 2022 be approved and signed as an accurate record.

9. Public Participation (17:38)

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

10. Scrutiny Resettlement Services Update Including Winter Provision and Strategy Update 2022

Members discussed a report on the current homelessness situation and the winter night provision for rough sleepers and single homeless people in York.

The Committee raised concerns over the uptick in the number of rough sleepers from previous years combined with the decrease in funding

offered by the central Government and increase in anti-social behaviour. They also noted issues with the annual street count that is commencing following the start of the winter provision on 1 November 2022, where some rough sleepers may be in emergency accommodation, and were worried this would result in skewed figures and further loss of funding.

Officers stated that the number of rough sleepers has increased from the previous year and as a result, the Council had attempted to place bids to increase funding from the Government, but this was unsuccessful due to changes in policies that now favour the prevention of homelessness and rough sleeping. They also explained that the Council has regular meetings and discussions with other organisations and local authorities to monitor the number of rough sleepers so are confident that the counts conducted by Homeless Link will be accurate.

Clarification on the winter provision was sought by Members and Officers confirmed that the provision made accommodation more accessible to rough sleepers as they do not have to engage with certain Council services to be placed in the accommodation. They agreed to state that there is a winter sleeping provision in place so there may be fewer rough sleepers in their reports.

Members enquired about the current capacity in temporary accommodation for rough sleepers, how numbers will be managed if they are full prior to 1 November and what the process moving forward will be. Officers explained that they no longer have access to the 4 additional units at the Salvation Army but that they are analysing and making use of their existing assets, such as Crombie House, to accommodate people. They also plan to do more sophisticated prevention work in the future to identify reasons for rough sleeping alongside expanding their housing capacity and funding.

Members noted some issues with the current resettlement policy of needing to engage with Council services for a minimum of 6 months and how this may be a barrier if there is an increase in the number of rough sleepers due to cost-of-living crisis and rise in evictions. Officers commented that the time frame can be reviewed and that there are private sector team routes available to rehouse people quickly.

Questions surrounding the Council's staff were raised, including how they support rough sleepers who may be part of the LGBTQ+ community, and Officers confirmed training is provided and that peer support is available. Moreover, Members also noted the increase in workload for staff and asked whether they are managing this. Officers explained that the Council has employed more staff and changed how they work to improve effectiveness and efficiency but there are still ongoing issues

Covid precautions and preparations were also discussed by Members to ensure the Council is equipped to support rough sleepers. Officers explained that the Council has extensive resources and PPE stock, that they can utilise quickly if/when necessary.

Resolved:

- i. That the report on the updated Resettlement Services be noted.

Reason: To keep the Committee updated on the homelessness situation and the winter night provision for rough sleepers and single homeless people in York.

11. York Housing Allocations - Scrutiny October 2022

Members considered a report on the York Housing Allocations Policy. They asked if there have been any changes in the types of households applying for social housing due to the pandemic and cost of living crises and Officers explained there has been an increase in numbers but no large changes in patterns and that they are monitoring this.

The issue of council tax banding on newly built social housing was discussed and how it can become a barrier for, and unaffordable to, people on low incomes/benefit recipients as they may be unable to cover the high taxes and charges. Officers explained that the Council does not have control of this as the tax is calculated on the house price and type but there are benefits such as Council Tax Support and Discretionary Housing Payment available for such residents. They also suggested that it may be useful to investigate the type of housing that is built and ask for a mix of housing types from developers to mitigate these issues.

Members also raised questions about the possibility to complete retrofitting works while homes are vacant. Officers explained they are looking into this but that at present, this would take too long so the focus is on retrofitting properties that are already occupied.

Members asked for an update on the Mental Health cluster unit concept and what is being done to move the project along to completion. Officers stated that there were issues with finding a developer but they are now revisiting the model and setting up a mental health housing panel to move complex cases into the pathway. They confirmed one of the two proposed buildings was built and is currently being used to house homeless families.

Questions were raised about housing accessibility and quality for care leavers and young people, including whether they can keep their

accommodation if they move out of the city to attend university. Officers responded that they are not able to keep stock for university students but may be able to investigate this further before reassuring Members that care leavers who return permanently are given high priority for housing. They also explained that they have had some challenges with housing stock and had a backlog of repairs during the Covid period, but this is now improving, and they are having meetings with young people to develop housing.

Housing for offenders was discussed and questions surrounding how the Council supports them when they are released arose and Officers explained that there are a lot of difficulties with this due to lack of support, advice, and resources. Members highlighted the importance of the Council relinquishing tenancies at the earliest point of someone being sent into custody so that they are not acquiring rent arrears which will then become a barrier upon release. Officers suggested having a refresher of this protocol with staff and will re-engage with probation staff to make sure they are aware and mindful of this issue.

Officers provided some suggestions on things Members can do to support Housing Options staff which included providing feedback on any IT issues. They also requested that people are conscious of the reality of the housing market in York and be willing to look at other options, such as shared ownership and private sector options to help staff and their workload.

Resolved:

- i. That the report on York Allocations Policy be noted.

Reason: To keep the Committee updated on York's approach to the housing waiting list and vulnerable groups.

12. Work Plan

Resolved:

- i. That the Committee work plan be noted.

Reason: To ensure the Committee has a program of work for 2022-23.

Councillor Fenton, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.35 pm and finished at 7.40 pm].