

ENVIRONMENT AND LIVING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 December 2014

PRESENT: Councillor Hunter-Watts (Chairman); Councillors Mrs Brandis, Mrs Chapple, Fealey (Vice Chairman), Foster, Mrs Russel, Stuchbury and Winn. Councillors Mrs Pearce and Rand attended also.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Sir Beville Stanier, Mrs Takodra and Vick.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2014 be approved as a correct record.

2. VALE OF AYLESBURY HOUSING TRUST (VAHT) – UPDATE REPORT

(Mr Matthew Applegate, Chief Executive of VAHT, attended for this item.)

The Committee received an overview and highlights report from the Chief Executive of the Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust (VAHT) on operations over the last 12 months. Mr Applegate had last attended the Scrutiny Committee in December 2013 to provide a similar update. The report focussed on the following themes:-

Overview (in numbers)

- VAHT was responsible for the general needs / supported housing for 7,325 properties.
- Annual turnover was £44m.
- VAHT had 235 employees, and a fleet of 46 vans to cover 350 square miles.
- Received 102,412 calls to the Customer Contact Centre.
- 420 new properties had been let, as well as 25,745 repairs made to properties.
- rent arrears was currently occurring at 1.2% of total income which was the lowest since the stock transfer.
- annual cost of repairs had increased from £343 to £384 per property.
- 99.5% of emergency repairs were completed on time, 95.6% of urgent repairs on time and 93.6% of routine repairs on time.
- the cost per property of estate services had been £128.

How VAHT was performing (overview)?

- 235 formal complaints, with 95% resolved at Stage 1.
- 84.2% of tenants were satisfied that the service provided was delivering value for money.
- 91% were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live.
- AVDC Councillors had given VAHT 7.74 out of 10 for how well they believed the Housing Trust was performing, which was the highest rating since the stock transfer.

How VAHT was performing (benchmarking)?

- STAR Survey indicated that 89% of tenants were very or fairly satisfied with the service provided.

- the Net Promoter Score (how likely tenants would be to recommend VAHT to family and friends) had increased from 33% to 35%, which compared favourably to like organisations.

Governance and Financial Viability

- had adopted the National Housing Federation code of Governance, and complied with it except for the number of Board Members.
- the Tenant Scrutiny Panel had completed 4 inquiries, with a fifth underway.
- had achieved the highest rating possible from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) for governance and viability.

Performing: homes

- work had started on-site with 143 new homes during 2013.
- the new homes programme with HCA was on track to provide 173 homes by March 2015.
- a review of wider assets had identified garage sites that could be utilised to provide homes.
- Walton Court was due to be completed on 31 March 2015.

Apprenticeships and Work Placements – VAHT had provided opportunities for 6 apprentices, as well as facilitating work experience with Blake Morgan solicitors for some resident's children.

Summer Activity Scheme – 103 children had attended a pilot that had run over 16 days in August 2014. 6 activities had been available including horse riding and pottery. This was just one example from the wide range of resident engagement activities. It was hoped to expand the scheme next year.

Quality and Standards

- external verification had been sought for work relating to complaints, customer contact centre services, services to vulnerable people, tenant empowerment and involvement, repairs, home ownership and leasehold services.
- VAHT's work had been accredited by a number of professional bodies associated with the housing and home ownership industries. It had also become the first organisation in the country to be awarded Home Ownership accreditation from the Housing Quality Network (HQN), for excellence in Home Ownership services.

Managing the Impact of Welfare Reform

- the Trust had a Working Group that had looked at how to highlight changes to affected residents and to assist people to maintain their tenancies.
- 'Managing your Money' training had been delivered to residents.
- a Welfare Awareness expo had been held at the Waterside theatre, as well as holding a number of targeted roadshows.
- undertaking extensive staff awareness and training.

Help for Vulnerable Tenants

- it was estimated that welfare advice had assisted residents in claiming over £1m in additional in benefits.
- 'Surviving Winter' campaign had provided 160 free LPG bottles to residents.
- furnished tenancies for people aged 50 or over was rising by 15 people per annum.
- 'Men in Sheds' Steering Group had been established.
- Community gardens had been established at Wantage Crescent.

- a gardening service for the elderly and disabled.
- grading and prioritising of repairs.
- operating First Contact (VAHT's Lifeline Service)
- an aids and adaptations service (£400,000 p.a.).

Assistance was also provided to the wider community through a number of avenues including training for residents (How to Chair meetings, Confidence Building and IT courses), the Environmental Improvement Fund (£100,000) which primarily assisted with creating additional parking places, Pebblebrook School – Urban Garden, Giving Something Back Scheme, together with a Tuition Scheme to assist children in preparing for the 11+ tests.

The Trust was planning to run a 'Be the Difference' transformation programme during the next 12 months to assist in develop staff and which would hopefully help to improve areas such as a better working environment, enabling staff to become more efficient and to provide a better customer service.

Members raised a number of questions and were informed as follows:-

- that any tenants found to be dumping rubbish would be in breach of their tenancy agreement and enforcement action would be taken.
- that the new development of flats at Jansel Square, Bedgrove had been a successful scheme.
- that VAHT had reduced grass cutting costs through their new contract. The Trust was always willing to discuss with other organisations how they might co-ordinate grass cutting activities.
- that information on the Bucks Home Choice – Choice Based Lettings (CBL) was provided on the VAHT website for residents who were interested in finding a suitable home.
- that a new VAHT staff member had not initially been applying the CBL policy for a short period after it had been reduced, but this issue had now been rectified.
- that the Trust had invested in systems to improve the efficiency of their service, as well as the costs of providing them.
- that the increase in the average cost of repairs per property last year had been largely due to a number of fences being blown during the winter by strong winds. A shortage of fencing panels across England had then impacted on the time taken for the Trust to make urgent and routine repairs.
- that the Trust had a database with property specific information for all their properties. Items such as kitchens and boilers were not replaced unless they had been inspected first. For repairs, the average lifespan for kitchens was 15 years, 12 years for a boiler and 25 years for a roof.
- that VAHT now had an in-house development team which was looking at options for developing new housing both in the Vale and on the peripheries of the District.
- that reviews undertaken by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel had looked at:-
 - Voids turnarounds and how to improve them.
 - Repairs, including the service provided to vulnerable residents.
 - Affordable Warmth, how this could be made more efficient and sustainable.

- Complaints process, and how it might be improved.
- Garages, how they might be operated more efficiently.
- that the performance for voids turnarounds had improved from 40 days (3 years ago) to 23 days, although the Trust was looking at ways to further improve this performance.
- that the Trust had made savings by bringing back the servicing of gas appliances in-house. It was intended that, where practicable and cost-efficient, further services such as kitchen fitting would also be brought back in-house.
- that VAHT logged all phone calls and contacts with residents, which would enable Councillors to enquire about specific cases.
- that Ward walks with Councillors had been well received and would likely be held again following the May elections. The Trust also undertook walks with local residents and Members were most welcome to join them.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Chief Executive of the Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust be thanked for attending the meeting and briefing the Committee.
- (2) That VAHT be commended for their good overall performance over the last 12 months.

3. AYLESBURY VALE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE 2014

Superintendent Olly Wright (Aylesbury Area Police Commander), Thames Valley Police attended for this item).

The Committee received a report which provided Members with a summary of activity on the delivery of the Aylesbury Vale Community Safety Partnership (AVCSP) Plan so far in 2014/15 and an update on some of the recent and future changes taking place in connection with community safety.

From 1 April to 31 October 2014, there had been a 13% reduction in total recorded crime compared to the same period in 2013/14. This included:-

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| • Burglary | 166 (down 10) | 6% reduction. |
| • Theft of vehicle | 47 (down 21) | 26% reduction. |
| • Theft from vehicle | 374 (down 98) | 21% reduction. |
| • Robbery (business) | 4 (up 2) | 100% increase. |
| • Robbery (personal) | 23 (down 2) | 8% reduction. |
| • Serious Acquisitive Crime | 611 (down 132) | 18% reduction. |
| • Total crime | 4136 (down 607) | 13% reduction. |

Further analysis revealed that this was part of an overall trend that had seen levels of crime reducing year-on-year since 2009.

Examples were provided of projects that had been undertaken as part of the Community Safety Partnership Plan in 2014/15, including:-

- Spring Time Burglary Campaign – during April, this had focussed on reducing risks of thefts from sheds and outbuildings. 6 events had been held in various garden centres in Aylesbury, Buckingham and Waddesdon to give advice on security. Over 400 people had attended the event and been provide with a variety of crime prevention products.

- Don't get burnt by burglars – a campaign had been organised to raise awareness in response to summer burglary risks. Campaign literature had been distributed to GP surgeries, pharmacies, catteries, kennels and parents (via the school/parent email system), and gave advice about making your home look lived in during the holiday period.
- Operation Ranger – during September, a crime prevention initiative and awareness campaign had been held in rural areas to reduce risks such as Tac marking, Cesar (unique identification marks/tags permanently hidden within property, and Selecta DNA. These types of initiatives also reduced the opportunities to sell on stolen goods and therefore reduced their attractiveness.
- Chelsea Choice – a play about how a young girl becomes involved in child sexual exploitation (CSE) , was rolled out to 9 of the 11 local secondary schools in the Vale. The play allowed teenagers to see that this type of crime could happen to anyone and that certain risky behaviours could lead them into dangerous situations. The play was followed up with a session run by R U Safe and the drama group to give practical advice to young people who had concerns about themselves or friends.
- “R U Wise” – was an online campaign raising awareness about CSE for young people and parents/carers, launched in partnership with Barnardos to support the work of Chelsea's Choice.
- Purple Flag for Aylesbury Town Centre – a renewal application for the accreditation had been submitted, with the results expected to be publicised in January 2015.

Upcoming projects for 2014/15 would include:-

- Operation Arctic – launched in October, this was the annual seasonal burglary reduction campaign to make residents more aware of the increased risk of burglary during the darker evenings.
- Christmas Alcohol Awareness Campaign – would be rolled out during December to raise awareness about responsible drinking.

During the next few months the new Community Safety Action Plan for the period 2015/16 would be drafted. This would be informed by the strategic assessment which, alongside feedback from public consultation, helped to set out the priorities for action. Early indications from the TVP strategic assessment highlighted that the Vale should concentrate efforts on raising awareness of new and emerging crime trends such as cyber crime, child sexual exploitation and legal high misuse. This year's consultation would therefore be used to help the AVCSP understand residents' awareness of these types of crime.

The ASB, Crime and Policing Act had gained royal assent on 13 March 2014, and was bring about the biggest change in ASB powers since their introduction in 1998. While the Act looked at some other areas of work within Crime and Policing, such as forced marriages and firearms, the report to scrutiny focussed on the ASB parts of the Act (parts 1-6 of the Act). The Act, which applied in England and Wales, introduced measures to:

- focus the response to anti-social behaviour on the needs of victims
- empower communities to get involved in tackling anti-social behaviour
- ensure professionals can protect the public quickly through faster, more effective powers and speed up the eviction of the most anti-social tenants

The Act consolidated the existing 19 ASB powers into 6 more flexible powers. Two new powers have also been introduced to help focus the response to such behaviour on the needs of victims. These were the Community Trigger and Community Remedy. Further information on the new powers were detailed at Appendix 1 to the Committee report.

In 2007, a co-located Police and council officer team, The Public Safety Team (PST), had been established and was playing the lead role in using the formal powers. Between 2009-2014 in Aylesbury Vale, 1 ASBO, 1 Drinking Ban Order and 1 Dispersal Order had been issued using the powers. No injunctions had been issued.

The PST had a high level of success in dealing with ASB issues using lower level sanctions which were agreed and enforced by partners, for example the Yellow and Red cards scheme. Yellow cards were issued as a first warning to young people who were causing ASB in the community. A Red card was issued as a second warning. If further ASB continued an acceptable behaviour contract (ABC) was formally written and a meeting involving the PST, parents and the young person took place to agree the prohibitions in the agreement. An ABC was a voluntary sanction and was not enforceable, but did demonstrate someone's willingness to address behaviour, which was used as evidence should an escalation of enforcement be needed. Over the last 6 years the number of lower level sanctions issued had included 8 Good Neighbourhood Agreements, 69 ABCs, 742 yellow cards and 68 red cards issues.

As part of the joint approach to commissioning, the Council had been working with partners across the county to review domestic violence services. Over the past 12 months a countywide service needs assessment in relation to domestic violence had been completed to help develop a countywide tender. This work was ongoing, with a view to commissioning a new service by April 2016.

Transformation of the Probation Services was well under way, with the National Probation Service splitting into two service organisations in every part of the country. In each area, the National Probation Service managed all high risk offenders while the new Thames Valley Community Rehabilitation Company managed lower risk offenders.

The Community Safety team had been restructured, resulting in the loss of a part time post, which reflected the reducing demands for crime prevention in relation to traditional crimes such as SAC, and the increased use of social media to communicate with residents. As part of the Environmental Health and Licensing restructure there was a proposal for the deletion of the Handyman post which had been receiving fewer referrals over recent years, again reflecting falling crime levels.

In 2013/14, CCTV had captured 525 incidents and supported 307 arrests. Between April to October 2014 it has captured a further 438 incidents and supported 171 arrests. While AVDC provided some funding towards the cost of operating the CCTV Control Room (operated by the Police), TVP had been consulting local authority partners on potential CCTV budget savings.

The structure and function of CCTV control rooms across the region have been reviewed to identify options to save money whilst retaining an effective monitoring service. The current preferred option was to create a single control room for Buckinghamshire, based in Milton Keynes police station. The control room in Milton Keynes had been refurbished in 2010 and was the only one in Buckinghamshire with the capacity to monitor cameras from other areas. Work was now underway on a

feasibility study to explore the costs associated with transmitting images from other areas of the county to Milton Keynes; the technical issues associated with the proposal; and the operational implications of the proposed arrangement. Once this information was available all partners would be able to determine the viability of this option, which had the potential to deliver savings of up to £75,000 per annum for AVDC.

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) had come into being in November 2012 as part of the review to make Police services more accountable. The Thames Valley PCC's first Police and Crime Plan had been published at the end of 2012, running until 2017. The PCC had recently attended the Council meeting on 3 December 2014 to speak with Members.

Along with the introduction of PCCs, Police and Crime Panels (PCPs) had been appointed consisting of one councillor from each local authority area. The Panel was independent of the office of the PCC and oversaw the work of the PCC. Its role included:-

- to review the PCC's proposals for the amount of council tax local people pay towards policing, with a power to veto these proposals if it considered the amount to be inappropriate
- to consider the PCC's Police and Crime plan and annual report
- to consider the PCC's proposals for the appointment of a new Chief Constable, with the power to veto
- to investigate complaints about the PCC.

Superintendent Wright informed Members on a number of current policing issues that were impacting on the Vale which included:-

- that while the number of 'traditional' crimes such as burglary and theft had reducing, there had been increases in other areas such as on-line crime, fraud and crime committed from across international borders. It was likely that some of these 'new' types of crimes were not being reported yet so did not show up in overall crime figures.
- that increasing police resources were being use in response to the threat posed by terrorism.
- that it was likely that more incidences of CSE would come to light over time.
- that abuse of mephadrone (MCAT/Meow Meow) was an increasing problem in Aylesbury and, to a lesser extent, in Buckingham.

Councillor Mrs Pam Pearce, AVDC's representative on the PCP attended the meeting and provided Members with an overview of the work of the PCP, and then responded to questions.

Members requested further information on community safety, policing, and on the PCP and were informed as follows:-

Policing and Community Safety

- (i) that TVP and partners were responding to the drug abuse problem to ensure that they did not escalate.

- (ii) that TVP would be very happy to work with local Members and schools in the Bedgrove Ward on issues such as car parking and speeding in close proximity to the schools.
- (iii) that a Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) had been established in Aylesbury to act as a single point of contact for the whole of Buckinghamshire and to receive all safeguarding and child protection enquiries.
- (iv) that the Police and Crime Commissioner was still putting together a list of proposed sanctions that could be used to replace court action when punishing offenders for low level crime offences and anti-social behaviour.
- (v) that the Serious Organised Crime Agency (UK equivalent of the FBI) and the South East Regional Crime Unit had both been created to provide a cohesive response to serious organised crime groups and issues such as large-scale drug distribution, gang and gun-related activity, organised serious acquisitive crime, cyber crime, and the deliberate targeting and exploitation of the vulnerable.
- (vi) that the Government's counter-terrorism strategy was based on 4 areas of work:-
 - Pursue – to stop terrorist attacks.
 - Prevent – to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.
 - Protect – to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack.
 - Prepare – to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack

The main area where Councils were able to assist the overall strategy related to the prevent agenda, which was delivered locally through the development of joint partnerships and working. TVP had a civilian Prevent Engagement Officer who had been involved in delivering a Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent (WRAP) in local secondary schools.

Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel

- (vii) that the Police and Crime Panel (PCP) was constituted of 18 Councillors (one from each of the Thames Valley local authorities,) and two independent Members.
- (viii) that the PCP had an important role to play to ensure that the PCC was carrying out his duties and discharging his powers in line with his Policing Plan and agreed budget.
- (ix) that PCP meetings were held in public, with the public most welcome to attend. PCP meetings were also webcast.

Members also commented that AVDC should be considering the adoption of an initiative introduced by Wycombe District Council and some others, which sought to work with, and discourage, off licences and shops from selling high alcohol beers and cider.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That Superintendent Wright be thanked for attending the meeting and briefing the Committee.
- (2) That the progress made against the 2014/15 Community Safety Partnership Plan be noted.

4. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their work programme for the period up until March 2015. As previously discussed by the Committee the work programme included a Recommendations Tracker, to assist the Committee in monitoring recommendations and the implementation of actions agreed at previous meetings, and to help in questioning decision makers.

Members commented that during discussion on the possibility of AVDC becoming a housing developer at the November 2014 meeting, Members had indicated that they would like to receive information to a future meeting on other Councils that were currently acting as developers, and on the feasibility and viability of AVDC acting as a property developer.

RESOLVED –

That the work programme be agreed, as discussed at the meeting.