

ENVIRONMENT AND LIVING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 SEPTEMBER 2019

PRESENT: Councillor S Jenkins (Chairman); Councillors B Everitt (Vice-Chairman), M Bateman, S Chapple, A Cole and R King.

APOLOGIES: Councillors S Cole, P Cooper, B Foster, T Hunter-Watts and S Jarvis and M Winn.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June, 2019, be approved as a correct record.

2. UPDATE ON HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2019-2022

The Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2019-2022 had been produced following a review of the housing and homelessness needs of residents within the Vale and been approved by full Council on 12 December 2018. The Strategy outlined the Council's plan on addressing these needs over the next 3 years. The accompanying Action Plan was detailed at Appendix 1 to the Committee report.

The report included information on the Housing Team that was part of the county-wide housing work stream that was currently working to map all contracts and processes to ensure that relationships were maintained post Vesting Day. Transition provisions allowed up to 24 months for a new County-wide Strategy to be produced.

As AVDC's Strategy was valid until 2022, the immediate focus was on maintaining business as usual for all clients. Beyond this, the new Strategy would start to be developed that would continue to uphold the positive contribution that AVDC and the other Districts had made to homelessness in the Vale.

The Committee was informed on the 4 strategic aims of the Strategy and notable achievements during the period January – June 2019 were highlighted, as follows:

1. Strategic Aim No. 1 – The Prevention of Rough Sleeping.

In February 2019, the number of rough sleepers had fallen below 10. However, the most recent count in May 2019 had identified 17 rough sleepers. Information was provided to Members on rough sleeping initiatives that were being undertaken to support those at risk from homelessness, which included carrying out bi-monthly counts. A lack of high needs supported accommodation within the county remained a significant challenge.

Implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act continued to place demands on the Housing Team as more complex data recording was required. The partnership with Riverside Housing for Winter Emergency Provision and temporary accommodation at Bearbrook during the coldest periods had proved to be successful. In February 2019, the first properties had been supplied and released by VAHT as part of a housing first type model for medium risk clients.

Following on from lessons learnt from the Building Resilience Pilot, the Districts had funded a county-wide short-term Prison/Probation and Housing Liaison Officer contract

provided by Connection Support, to ensure prisons met their statutory duty to refer which came into effect in October 2019.

The Tenancy Sustainment Contract managed by the County Council had been extended to include support for new tenants.

2. Strategic Aim No. 2 – To Facilitate and maximise the supply of affordable housing.

The number of new affordable homes for January-June 2019 was 155. While there were no statutory obligations to provide a certain number of new affordable homes, Aylesbury consistently achieved more than the other Bucks districts.

Shared equity loans were being explored in Haddenham, as were plans to bring forward a number of social rented houses. The current figure was 34, subject to changes in the exact number of completions. A proportion of the New Homes Bonus had also been ring-fenced for the delivery of new affordable housing.

Members were informed that Bucks Home Choice, the social housing allocation policy for Bucks, had been reviewed and the new policy would go live on 1 October, 2019.

Information was also provided on the Accommodation Officer post, on the Environmental Health team successfully prosecuting landlords in breach of HMO Licensing rules, and that the draft masterplan for Aylesbury Garden Town was currently being developed.

3. Strategic Aim No. 3 – Responding to the ongoing challenges of welfare reform.

The Revenues and Benefits team continued to support Universal Credit (UC) claimants and worked closely with the housing team to help mitigate and prevent homelessness. Information was also provided on the Housing Debt Advice team and the Citizens Advice service “Help to Claim” for customers who required extra support when making a new UC claim or moving onto UC.

4. Strategic Aim No. 4 – Contribute to the improvement of health and well-being services for people at risk of homelessness.

The Mental Health Nurse post within the Housing team was working well to identify homeless people who had mental health needs so that appropriate interventions and referrals could be made.

The Housing Team had met with the Clinical Commissioning Group, who did not have a Duty to Refer, to explain the need for GPs to notify the Housing team on patients at risk of homelessness at the earliest opportunity.

Members were also informed on the following pieces of legislation introduced this year:-

- The Homes Act (Fitness for Habitation) – 20/3/2019 – which gave additional rights to tenants who lived in social or privately rented houses and flats.
- Draft Domestic Abuse Bill – 21/1/2019 – together with a consultation document.

The Housing Team had also responded to a number of Government consultations regarding tackling homelessness, the Mental Capacity Act Code, an MHCLG Allocations Evidence Collection Exercise and on improving access to social housing for members of the Armed Forces, Veterans and their families.

Members sought additional information and were informed:-

- (i) that there were 4,900 people on the Bucks Home Choice waiting list, which included 1,700 applications for over 55s. However, many of these were not necessarily people with a housing need but people who had a house but wanted to move. The biggest pressure and shortage for BHC was for one bedroom single person accommodation.
- (ii) that the targets in the VALP in relation to providing affordable housing as part of new developments was completely separate to the Housing and Homelessness Strategy. However, the Council was always proactive to negotiate as much affordable housing as possible and 700 lets had been delivered last year.
- (iii) that Aylesbury Vale was fortunate to have 100 units at Griffin Place for temporary accommodation. Wherever possible the Council tried not to use B&B accommodation for temporary accommodation although a few had been used that were located in the High Wycombe area. Wycombe had inspected these B&Bs to ensure they complied with safeguarding requirements although there were also plans for Officers from AVDC to check relevant premises.
- (iv) that while the Council Housing teams already had good work relationships, Officers were working to ensure that a seamless service would continue to be provided from 1 April 2020.
- (v) on the process for children who came out of care and had a housing need.
- (vi) that the AVDC Housing service was proudest of how quickly it responded to housing, and especially homelessness, issues. While homelessness legislation provided Councils with wide discretion on how they responded to homelessness issues, AVDC accepted 80% of homelessness applications compared to a national average of 55%.
- (vii) that the Housing team had worked with the Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group (who were based at the Gateway offices) in relation to homelessness / rough sleeping issues that GPs might encounter and had rolled out information so that GPs knew how to refer people who were homeless or had no fixed address.
- (viii) on the partnership working done with organisations specialising in primary care, substance dependency, mental health, employment and health.

Members noted the amendments to the strategy document and commented that they were happy for the Action Plan updates to be published on the Council's website, and –

RESOLVED –

That the progress and achievements up to the end of June 2019 against the Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2019-22 Action Plan be noted.

3. FOOD SERVICE PLAN 2019-20

Under European food law the Food Standards Agency (FSA) was deemed to be the competent authority. To ensure these powers were exercised consistently across the country by local authorities, the FSA had developed a framework agreement, part of which included the production by each local authority of a food service plan.

Service plans were seen as an important part of the process to ensure that national priorities and standards were addressed and delivered locally. The details to be

contained in the plan were specified by the FSA. Plans had to contain the following information:-

- Service Aims and Objectives.
- Background.
- Service Delivery.
- Resources.
- Quality Assessment.
- Review.

The Committee received a report which contained the Food Service Plan for 2019/20. Key features of the plan included:-

- There were 1,690 registered food businesses in Aylesbury Vale (this was 108 fewer premises than 2018/19, partially due to the work undertaken in checking and removing businesses that had closed).
- Premises were given a risk rating from A to E. Resources were targeted to ensure higher risk premises (A, B, Non-compliant C and Unrated) were inspected in accordance with the FSA Code of Practice.
- The number of premises that were deemed to be 'broadly compliant' with the law was 97.81%.
- In 2018/19 AVDC achieved 92.9% of programmed interventions with 100% of premises inspections rated A- non compliant C were completed.
- The backlog of unrated inspections from the previous year had been reduced and was 37.

The report also highlighted areas of improvement or exploration to improve efficiency and to ensure AVDC was offering the best service to customers. The Cabinet Member was in attendance and endorsed the work carried out to formulate the plan.

Following the report's introduction, Members had further questions and were informed:-

- (i) that there was not a direct correlation between the risk ratings (A-E) given to premises to ensure higher risk premises were inspected in accordance with the FSA Code of Practice, and the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme that gave each business a rating of 0-5 based on how well it met the requirements of food hygiene following an inspection by a food safety officer.
- (ii) with an explanation of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme and some of the factors that were considered during inspection visits. If there were particular issues then an officer might re-visit a business to ensure that improvements had been made although the FHRS rating would not be updated until after the next inspection visit, unless specifically requested by the premises.
- (iii) with an update on the Council's Food Business Advice Service.
- (iv) that businesses didn't have to display their FHRS rating on site, although they were published on a national website.
- (v) on the planning that the team had done in preparation for Brexit, including with some local businesses that would be most impacted. Health certificates were not currently required for moving animal products within Europe although it was possible that new requirements would need to be complied with post-Brexit.

- (vi) that it was unfortunate that the Bucks Herald had recently published an article commenting on the Council's Food Service team's capacity and resilience that had been incorrect and inaccurate.

RESOLVED –

That the contents of the 2019-20 Food Service Plan be noted and comments passed to the Cabinet Member.

4. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their future work programme for the meetings on 3 December 2019 and 10 February 2020, and expressed an interest in the following coming to the Committee:-

- Aylesbury Garden Town Update.
- Update on HS2 Infrastructure Work (to invite HS2 to attend the meeting)
- Update on outcome of changes to the County Council's Household Waste Recycling Centres.
- Aylesbury Town Centre / Town Centre Partnership – covering issues such as pedestrianisation of the Town Centre, uneven surfaces/cobbles, taxis in Market Square, and traffic flow in the Town Centre, car parking charges impact on footfall (statistics)
- Business Rates – on what was being done to assist current businesses and attract new businesses to the Town Centre (However, this issue is within the remit of the Finance and Services Scrutiny Committee).

RESOLVED –

That the Work Programme be updated, as agreed at the meeting.