

PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MONDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER 2018

PRESENT - *Councillors: Surve (Chair), Gunn, Batan, Hardman, Salton, Marrow and Sidat*

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – *Councillor Brian Taylor and Firoza Hafeji*

1. Welcome and Apologies

Following introductions the Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and received apologies from Councillors Brookfield, Afzal and McGurk.

2. Minutes of meetings held on 18th June 2018

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the last meeting held on 18th June 2018 were agreed as a correct record and were duly signed by the Chair.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

4. Homelessness

The Chair provided the Committee with a verbal update on the progress of the Task Group meeting held on 16th August 2018. It was noted that the group looked at the Borough's resources to manage homelessness, the range of services and accommodation to combat homelessness. Members were informed that the task group also considered how local neighbouring authorities were dealing with the issue and how Blackburn with Darwen had been a centre of good practice and regarded as a trailblazer when dealing with homelessness.

The Chair shared 11 recommendations which were established by the task group. The recommendations were discussed by the Committee.

A discussion took place regarding topics for the Task group to look at and the suggestions highlighted were:

- Looking at other authorities that are trailblazers to compare how they were tackling homelessness.
- Looking at current volunteer figures for different areas e.g. Your call.

The Chair informed Members that the recommendations would be forwarded to the Executive Member for response and then on to the Executive Board for consideration.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted and approved the recommendations as:

1. There is a disparity when comparing Blackburn with Darwen with other neighboring authorities who either have no or minimal provisions to tackle homelessness. This results in quite significant referrals from these authorities and charities to Blackburn with Darwen. It is recommended that local connections are examined and representations be made to the Councils who have a statutory duty. Morally and ethically these local authorities should share the burden.
2. Given Shelter Lancashire are based in Blackburn they act as a magnet. Shelter Lancashire should be more accountable and ensure that they advise people in a fair and balanced way in its demands to place homeless people from neighbouring borough or prison resettlement within Blackburn with Darwen. That Shelter put pressure on neighbouring authorities to develop a program to tackle homelessness locally.
3. Universal Credit and welfare reforms are putting residents at risk of homelessness. A large number of private sector rented properties are either in poor condition or hard to access. The problem also extended to Houses in Multiple Occupation where standards of management vary. It is recommended that this Council should have more stringent vetting and regulation of the private rented sector. The Committee feels that representations need to be made to central government to review the housing program to make it better regulated, decent and cleaner housing by the end of the year.
4. We are concerned about the number of un-registered and registered charities seeking to do well. We feel this is allowing vulnerable people to find ways of not engaging with statutory services to seek help. We feel it can lead to a life of dependency and move people from town to town. A more collective approach could look into addressing the longer term needs of homeless individuals and shelter and other organisations to support with money management skills.
5. It is recommended that for the immediate future funding received into the Council from Government for Homelessness should consider ring fencing, the allocation of the Priority Need Funding of £107k should be used to supplement the current budget to help cope with the increasing demands within the homelessness department of Blackburn with Darwen Council. This would have a beneficial impact longer term in re-connecting people back to their responsible authorities.
6. It is recommended that Blackburn with Darwen Council looks into setting up a "Healthy Hostels" programme. Where it can set up an ideal standard provision. Any private providers will have to be on a par to this and this should be a condition of housing benefit.
7. Planning Policy can play a positive role in ensuring that plans and decision processes are geared towards 'wellbeing' and that we are preventing oversupply that draws demand into the borough. In particular the Council

needs to be more thorough with HMO planning approvals and have them well regulated.

8. To reduce the amounts of unfit housing within the private sector. Currently there are also 500+ HMO bedsits, significantly more than other Towns of a similar size. A high proportion was deemed poor quality.
9. An audit needs to be carried out to ensure that we are getting best value from all intervention programmes to ensure we are getting 'real' outcomes and that there is no duplication occurs, thus making our resources more efficient and effective. In particular this needs to target vulnerable single chaotic people.
10. That a piece of work be carried out to measure total costs to the public purse on homelessness within our borough. That there is a discussion with DWP at exploring using some of their funding to help address the revolving door syndrome. It would be a good investment of resources to ensure that benefits being paid for rent and accommodation are value for money, that HMOs and Landlords have an obligation towards the wellbeing of the resident in issues such as substance abuse, health, employment and training. We are concerned that HMOs are institutionalising vulnerable people and making them more dependent.
11. The Committee is concerned about the visible rise of street begging. The concerns relate to organised crime, modern day slavery and potential for related adult abuse. The Committee recognises that the council is limited in resources and powers but wants to see a multi-agency approach to prevention. Genuine homeless need to be supported. People playing the system need to be identified and prosecuted.

5. Committee's Work Programme for 2018/2019

The Committee considered the work programme for Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 2018/19.

RESOLVED - That the Committee agreed the work programme as:

- Invite Sayyed Osman, Director of Adults & Prevention to the next Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee to update the Committee on alternative provisions available for homeless people who felt threatened to return to their home town. Also to present a breakdown of the expenditure of the Priority Need Funding of £107k.
- Invite Gavin Prescott to the next Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee to present the HMO policy with its terms and conditions.
- Invite Councillor Andy Kay, Executive Member of Resources to provide the Committee with information on wraparound services available for homeless people.

6. Date of the Next Meeting

RESOLVED - It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday 10th December 2018.

Signed.....

Chair of the meeting at which the Minutes were signed

Date.....