

Minutes of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
of the **Test Valley Borough Council**
held in Main Hall, Crosfield Hall, Broadwater Road, Romsey, Hampshire, SO51 8GL
on Wednesday 14 July 2021 at 5.30 pm

Attendance:

Councillor N Lodge (Chairman)

Councillor N Matthews (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor G Bailey
Councillor D Baverstock
Councillor C Borg-Neal
Councillor Z Brooks
Councillor T Burley
Councillor C Dowden

Councillor K Hamilton
Councillor J Neal
Councillor J Parker
Councillor T Swain
Councillor A Ward
Councillor A Warnes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor N Gwynne, V Harber and M Hatley

110 **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

111 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

112 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

113 **Minutes**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2021 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

114 **Call in Items**

There were no call in items.

115 **Urgent decisions taken since last meeting**

There were no urgent decisions.

116 **Scrutiny of the Housing and Environmental Health Portfolio**

Councillor Bundy, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Health gave a presentation on key areas of activity during the pandemic and looking ahead to the future. The ending of national pandemic measures may also relate to future housing pressures. Councillor Bundy also reflected on the role of the Environmental Health Service to ensure that the Committee had an understanding of the role they have played in recent months supporting our communities.

It has been an unbelievably busy year for the housing and environmental health teams who have been at the sharp end of some of the work to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the past 15 months being very much *not* business as usual, the teams have been able to continue delivering high quality services and service improvements during this time. The presentation focused on some specific areas which explained the pre-existing strategies and plans, and put these in context of pressures arising now and in the future as a result of the pandemic.

The Head of Housing and Environmental Health explained that the Council's investment in front line service delivery and commitment to making offers of emergency accommodation to people regardless of priority need put us in a good place to begin to address the emerging demand from single people during the pandemic. He further suggested that the existing strategies and plans, alongside the additional funding recently achieved from government, mean the service is in as good a place as we might have hoped to move forward and respond proactively to any subsequent impacts.

The presentation covered;

- Housing Strategy 2020-2025
- Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Progress towards strategy aims
- External (MHCLG) Grant Funding achieved
- Pandemic Impacts
- Where we are now
- What will the end of the moratorium on evictions mean
- Landlord possession activity 2003-2021
- How are Housing Associations responding
- Current and future plans
- Environmental Health

During subsequent questioning, members explored the following;

- Preventing evictions by working with other agencies and having a package of support in place to support sustainable tenancies.
- Some good ways of working have come out of the pandemic including accelerated partnership working. There is a countywide group which includes public health, NHS, mental health, southern health, Districts and HCC.
- Looking at ways in which the Council process people through the homelessness legislation. May want to use the legislation differently to move people through temporary accommodation quicker. The Council has also invested in a resettlement service to work with people in temporary accommodation to help them move on and Test Valley Lettings which offers support to private landlords and their tenants, in order to support people with more complex issues to access tenancies in the private rented sector. Following a successful funding bid to MHCLG, the Council will be recruiting a complex needs support worker, and are currently exploring the potential to second in clinical mental health support using Public Health funding.
- Working with local businesses to assist them with safe working practices which they share with other national branches of that business.
- Environmental Health is nearly fully staffed. Engaging a contractor to patch up some of the work which has built up during the pandemic.
- Energy efficiency grants.
- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 which is a huge piece of legislation – HCC are under a duty to complete a needs assessment to inform future commissioning decisions by August. The district council's homelessness duties are extended by the Act to ensure that anyone who is homeless as a result of fleeing domestic abuse is treated as a priority by virtue of the domestic abuse they have suffered – this means no change for TVBC as we have always operated in that way in these instances. Cuts to HCC Services proposed in the Balancing the Budget Consultation will have an impact on vulnerable people in Test Valley which could contribute to homelessness.
- Suggestion to use the Former Magistrates Court in Andover for rehousing people experiencing homelessness.
- Aster Void Disposal – it was noted that Aster are identifying properties across their operating area that are highly energy inefficiency and would cost vast sums to bring up to standard and these are considered for open market sale. There have been a number of these disposals in Test Valley. Aster's position is that they use the proceed to fund the new provision of 2 new affordable units for every one that they sell within a 4.5 mile radius. The committee were advised that recently 3 new units of affordable housing were being developed by Aster on an old garage site in Kings Somborne.

Councillor Lodge thanked the Portfolio Holder and his team for the informative presentation and answering the questions.

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Communications Panel Scoping Document

Councillor Brooks presented a scoping document for a Communications panel. The review of the panel would be to explore how the Council communicated information to residents before the pandemic and how effective this was and what opportunities are there to develop/strengthen in the future. The panel would also look at communications with staff whilst working from home.

The Head of Strategy and Innovation advised the Committee that there is a Communications Strategy and this will be made available to the panel.

Resolved:

That the scope be finalised and considered by the Committee on 25 August 2021.

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Initial outcomes following the Away Day

The Chairman reviewed the Away Day held on 10 July 2021. He explained that the purpose of the day was for members to re-connect and come together following the last 16 months of the pandemic, to reflect on the ongoing development of Overview and Scrutiny and take part in a session led by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. Members were also invited to discuss first thoughts on the strategic issues and topics that the Committee could consider for inclusion in their work programme in 2021/22.

Following the Away Day the Head of Innovation and Strategy has produced a list of issues/topics identified by members which will be prioritised at a virtual round table discussion on 27 July. The Chairman together with the Head of Innovation and Strategy will discuss how the round table might work and think about a process for prioritising the issues/topics.

The work programme will then be updated and a review of the four year work programme undertaken. The Committee will continue to refine and develop the portfolio co-ordinator programme.

The Chairman also advised that if anyone has any other suggestions/ideas then these can still be added to the list.

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Updates on Panels

Budget Panel – Councillor Matthews reported that at the last meeting on 28 June the panel considered the Outturn Report and discussed the revenue position for 2020/21 including the impacts faced by the Council as a result of the pandemic. The next meeting will be held on 4 October 2021.

Audit Panel – Councillor Borg Neal reported that the next meeting of the Audit Panel will be held on 26 July 2021.

Review of Outside Bodies – Councillor C Dowden that there was nothing to report until the Member and Community Group has reported back.

Climate Emergency Action Plan – In Councillor Gwynne’s absence the Chairman reported that there had been two meetings of the panel. The panel is going well and the next meeting is on 22 July 2021.

Process for the selection of Chairman – Councillor C Dowden will come back to inform the Committee whether the process agreed will be the process that will go forward once she has received comments back.

Enforcement Panel – Councillor Burley reported that he had met with the Head of Innovation and Strategy and the Head of Planning and Building to discuss how to take the review forward with the resources available. He anticipates having a first meeting with the panel in July to consider how to undertake the review within the provisions of the scope with the review starting formally in September. Members currently are Councillors Brooks, C Dowden, Parker and Warnes. If anyone else would like to join the panel then to let him know.

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Work Programme

The Chairman took the committee through the work programme. He explained that the Equality and Inclusion Annual Report has been scheduled for August. Councillor Hamilton requested having sight of the report as member champion for equality and diversity.

The Committee agreed to review its planned 4 year programme to decide which work items should be prioritised and which might be omitted.

The Head of Innovation and Strategy reported on his action to provide data on the impact of the pandemic on community organisations and how many volunteer organisations that have had to close. He reported that the Community Manager is putting information together and a briefing note will be circulated by the end of July.

Resolved:

That the future work programme, as amended, be approved.

(The meeting terminated at 7.45 pm)