

## **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **MINUTES OF SCRUTINY PANEL 3 - HOMELESSNESS (PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY)**

**Thursday, 21 July 2016**

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillor Terrie Eales (Deputy Chair, in the Chair); Councillors Rufia Ashraf, Mohammed Aziz, Vicky Culbard, Janice Duffy and Elizabeth Gowen

**CO-OPTED MEMBER:** Pete Smith, Head of Partnerships, Homeless Link

**OFFICERS** Phil Harris, Head of Housing and Wellbeing  
Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

#### **1. APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Zoe Smith, Chair. Councillor Terrie Eales, Deputy Chair, was in the Chair for the meeting. Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor Sally Beardsworth.

The Chair welcomed Pete Smith (Head of Partnerships at Homeless Link), in his capacity as a Co-opted member of the Scrutiny Panel, to the meeting. Pete provided the meeting with details of Homeless Link and the role it plays in tackling homelessness, supporting local authorities and service providers, and promoting good practice.

#### **2. DEPUTATIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES**

There were none.

#### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING)**

There were none.

#### **4. MINUTES**

The Chair signed the minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2016 as a true and accurate record.

#### **5. PRESENTATION TO SET THE SCENE**

Phil Harris, Head of Housing and Wellbeing, provided the Scrutiny Panel with a presentation that set the scene and included:

- Definitions – Homelessness and Rough Sleepers
- Homelessness Legislation
- Causes and effects of Homelessness, including Rough Sleeping
- Relevant Council Policies and Strategies

- Statistics: Rough Sleeper / Homelessness data

The Scrutiny Panel asked questions, heard and made comment:

- At the next meeting, members of the Scrutiny Panel will be provided with a short guide to the homelessness legislation.
- Local Housing Allowance (which is used to calculate claimants' Housing Benefit) is, on average, about £100 per month less than the market rent.
- In answer to a question about the Council's use of out-of-borough temporary accommodation, the Scrutiny Panel heard that there is a shortage of temporary accommodation in Northampton but every effort is made to ensure that anyone who is placed outside of the borough is brought back to Northampton as soon as possible.
- The Council's temporary accommodation includes self-contained council housing, self-contained privately managed housing and Bed & Breakfast.
- For households containing a dependent child or someone who is pregnant, local authorities should only use Bed & Breakfast in an emergency and, even then, for a period that does not exceed six weeks.
- If a family is deemed to be 'intentionally homeless', they will normally be provided with temporary accommodation for 28 days from the date of the Council's decision. If they are unhappy with the decision, they can request a review of the decision and, if they are still dissatisfied with the decision, they have the right to appeal to the County Court on a point of law. In all such cases, the Council notifies the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) at an early stage, in order that the MASH can work the family.
- The Scrutiny Panel discussed various examples of people who are categorised as intentionally homeless.
- The Government prescribes the way in which Rough Sleeper Counts and Estimates are carried out, and those staying in shelters, hostels and squats are not included.
- Severe Weather Projects become operational when it is forecast that the temperature will fall to below zero for at least three consecutive nights.
- Pete Smith advised the Scrutiny Panel that Homeless Link previously offered advice to DCLG when it put together its Toolkit
- Pete Smith suggested there are key themes for the work of the Panel:
  - Allocations Policy – how it can support the prevention of homelessness
  - Social Lettings Agency
  - Support for people placed in temporary accommodation outside the borough
  - Corporate Parenting (it would be useful for Children's Services to be called as a witness to answer the core questions of the Panel)
  - Homelessness Strategy

- Data and Statistics – Comparison of Northampton against towns and cities of a similar size and demographics
- Rough Sleepers - An understanding of what is available to address their needs
- The Panel could listen to the views of people who are homeless or have previously been homeless

**AGREED:** That the information provided informs the evidence base of this Scrutiny Panel.

## **6. CORE QUESTIONS**

The Scrutiny Panel agreed its list of core questions that it would put to the expert advisors; a copy is attached to the minutes.

## **7. SITE VISIT**

The Scrutiny Panel considered proposals for various site visits to inform its review. It was suggested that the Scrutiny Panel would meet with homeless people too as their views and comments would be valuable to the evidence gathering of this review. The Scrutiny Panel could meet with a sample of homeless people at Salvation Army or Emmaus. It was noted that Emmaus is included within the list of expert advisors to this Scrutiny Review

The Scrutiny Officer would undertake desktop research and report findings to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

It was **AGREED:** that:

- (1) The Scrutiny Officer would arrange for the Scrutiny Panel to visit Oasis House, meet with homeless people willing to provide information to the Scrutiny review and if possible, a sample of temporary accommodation in the Borough. Dates would be communicated to the Scrutiny Panel.
- (2) That the findings from the site visits are reported to a future meeting.
- (3) That the findings from the desktop research exercise are reported to a future meeting.

## **8. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

The Scrutiny Panel approved the Community Impact Assessment for this Review. The document would be published on the Scrutiny Webpage.

The meeting concluded at 8:00 pm