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## Housing and Health Committee

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 5 March 2024 from 7.00 pm - 9.22 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Hayden Brawn, Ann Cavanagh, Kieran Golding, Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison (Chair), Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin, Tom Nundy, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer (substitute for Councillor Elliott Jayes), Hannah Perkin and Karen Watson (Vice-Chair).

**OFFICER PRESENT:** Steph Curtis, Tina Grafton, Charlotte Hudson, Jo Millard and Sarah-Jane Radley.

**OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY):** Zoe Callaway.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY):** Councillor Carole Jackson.

**APOLOGY:** Councillor Lloyd Bowen.

### 727 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

### 728 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Ben J Martin declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was employed by a Housing Association.

During the meeting, Councillor Nundy declared an pecuniary interest in Item 8 Temporary Accommodation Update. He left the room whilst the item was discussed and did not vote.

### 729 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 September 2023 (Minute nos. 275 – 280) were taken as read, approved as signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### 730 **Health and Wellbeing Plan Closedown Report**

The Community and Partnerships Manager introduced the report explaining that the Health and Wellbeing Improvement Plan 2020 – 2023 had come to the end of its delivery period but as part of the emerging Corporate Plan, health would be holistically embedded across the work of the Council and there were a number of cross cutting key objectives which would contribute to tackling the wider determinant of health. She said that a new Community Development Strategy was proposed and the team would continue to support the community and develop relationships with key partners in the health sector.

The Chair said that Members and officers had spent considerable time highlighting health issues for Swale residents. She referred to the presentation given to the Housing and Health Committee in July 2023 by Nikki Teesdale of the Health and Care Partnership for Medway and Swale. The Chair said that health and well-being was an important part of all service committees.

Members were invited to speak and made comments including:

- Thanked and praised the team for the work carried out and support given to communities;
- were attendance figures available for the One Swale Roadshow?;
- raised concern that without a set of priorities in an accessible form, focus could be lost;
- scrutiny of declining health and life expectancy in the borough was important and without a priority and framework to work towards, this could be lost;
- considered it was important to have all the health priorities in one accessible place and expressed desire to keep the Health and Wellbeing Improvement plan;
- raised the difference in support to Sittingbourne and Sheppey residents from Medway Swale Health and Care Partnership compared to the support given by East Kent Health and Care Partnership as health authority to Faversham residents;
- cross-boundary issues were frequent;
- many residents were unaware of the services provided;
- health providers needed to work together to sort out issues;
- the health service was divided and it was often about who held the contract;
- could see the value in obesity clinics as was very difficult to undo once obese;
- there was a risk that it was nobody's business when it ought to be everybody's business and suggested getting Local Plan Policy involved;
- highlighted that in Workstream 2 – Supporting Healthy Lifestyles – family hubs should be added as many children's centres were closing; and
- needed to see the Community Plan before deciding whether to cease the Health and Wellbeing Plan.

The Community and Partnerships Manager said attendance figures were still being collated for the Roadshows, but would be circulated.

The Chair said a possible future Committee topic discussion was to invite Primary Care networks representatives to talk about other forms of direct support. She added that an invitation could be extended to Nikki Teasdale to attend again to give an update on the work being carried out with community groups and the diagnostic services available that could lead to improved health outcomes. The Chair suggested that KCC could also attend to give an update on Adult Social care. Members agreed.

The Head of Housing and Community said that the Integrated Care Strategy was nearing completion. She said that at the health and care partnership levels there were localised plans with priorities which SBC fed into and she also highlighted that the Community and Partnerships Manager represented SBC on the East Kent Health and Care Partnership. The Head of Housing and Community said that the HCP plans and the Integrated Care Strategy focused on clinical outcomes and SBC had the most influence within the Integrated Care Strategy. She referred to the cost of living work and working with the voluntary sector as the main areas that SBC could maximise their influence and said that work through the Local Plan could significantly influence the long-term health and well-being of residents.

In response to the Chair's comments that there had previously been a health and wellbeing input in Planning and Planning policy, a Member said that he hoped the intention was to bring those policies back in.

The Chair supported the offer by the Community and Partnerships Manager to hold a workshop with Members to discuss what health priorities should be included in the Community Development Plan and stressed the importance of Members having sufficient information.

The Chair referred to a yearly health publication by the Public Health Observatory with useful information that used to be circulated. The Community Services Manager agreed to circulate.

The Chair proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Chris Palmer.

**Resolved:**

***(1) That the proposed next steps to support Health and Wellbeing as set out in the proposals be agreed.***

**731 Safeguarding Policy Review**

The Safeguarding and Anti-Social Behaviour Team Leader introduced the report advising that the Safeguarding Policy was renewed annually. She outlined the changes from the previous policy, some of which were as a result of the recent Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board audit that had been carried out.

Members made comments including:

- Welcomed the updates, particularly the inclusion of trauma informed care;
- thanked and praised officers for their work;
- why were elected Members not required to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check?;
- confirmed there would be additional staff training on trauma informed practice;
- suggested adding coercive control and stalking at 5.1.2 of the policy;
- praised the guidance on who to contact for support in the policy;
- queried whether, in the increase of residents with mental health issues using fatalistic language, all incidents should be reported;
- suggested including unaccompanied refugees as a specific vulnerable group in the policy;
- praised the excellent document and said the previous policy had been referenced by academics studying housing qualifications in local housing associations; and
- suggested the sharing of or threat of sharing of intimate photographs be added to the policy.

The Head of Housing and Community advised that the issue of Members having a DBS check had been considered previously but legal advice was that this could not be enforced. She said that new requirements had been considered that required Members that sat on social care and education committees at County level to be DBS checked. The Head of Housing and Community reminded Members that they could not stand in an election with certain criminal convictions. In the debate that followed Members spoke of the complexity and different levels of checking and the legal requirements needed to carry out a check. The Head of Housing and Community agreed to look into this again.

The Safeguarding and Anti-social behaviour Team Leader reminded Members of the Adult Safeguarding training that would be taking place the following week which would cover suicide ideation and she advised Members how to report quickly and effectively to the safeguarding team. Referring to unaccompanied refugees, she said this group would still sit within the vulnerable children's group but further thoughts on including them in a separate group could be considered if it did not add complications.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Ben J Martin and seconded by Councillor Hayden Brawn.

**Resolved:**

***(1) That the refreshed Safeguarding Policy for 2024 be agreed.***

**732 Government Consultation on changes to Allocation of Social Housing**

The Chair advised that the discussion on this item would form the response to the Government's consultation.

The Head of Housing and Communities advised that a consultation of 40 questions was launched on the 30 January 2024 to consider amendments to the national criteria on housing allocations for social housing. She reminded Members that there were already national criteria, and the Housing and Health Committee could add local criteria and this formed the Council's housing allocation policy. The Head of Housing and Communities drew attention to the new proposals as set out in the report on pages 53 to 55. She advised that since drafting the report, further work had been carried out by Housing Options Policy and Performance Officer on the impact of the proposed changes and she highlighted that one of the biggest proposed changes was around the local connection test which currently was a two year residency criteria for the applicant but under the proposed changes this would apply to family members and could increase the housing register by 30%

The Head of Housing and Communities drew attention to the tables at pages 54 to 55 that set out the criteria within the policy that was currently covered. She said the antisocial behaviour test and the terrorism test were not currently linked to the Council's policy, but the receiving Housing Association might have their own policies in place to manage their stock appropriately.

The Head of Housing and Communication said that the main concern was that the current proposals did not align with homelessness legislation. A number of people currently on the register might be excluded because they did not meet the proposed criteria and she stressed importance of having an exit route for people from temporary accommodation. She said there was no clear guidance around some elements of the proposed changes and some aspects were better managed more effectively using other legislation.

Finally, the Head of Housing and Communities said that a response had been drafted based upon the analysis of the register and she welcomed the views of the Committee so that their views were appropriately reflected in the consultation.

Members were invited to make comments which included:

- Figures and costs quoted should include the rates of inflation;
- referred to the anti-social behaviour element of the proposed policy and asked if this applied to the household or just the tenant?;
- referred to the proposal to demonstrate a connection to UK for ten years, pointing out that this was excessive as the test to benefit from Universal Credit was only three months;
- in response to any exemptions to a ten year connection suggested that those who had served in the UK armed forces, such as Gurkhas should be exempt;
- supported the two year family connection proposal as residents might move to areas of their support networks;
- referred to the current six month rule in key worker employment roles and said a two year employment criteria might make it difficult to recruit if the ability to apply to join the register was removed;
- a national policy that included an income check would push workers out of the southeast and lead to skills shortages so did not support;
- income data should be assessed on the whole household as a benefits assessment was;
- the household income assessment should be in line with the number of bedrooms and not a blanket level;
- households with Universal Credit could be exempt as higher amounts of Universal Credit were awarded to those with more care needs and therefore the cap reached more quickly;
- care leavers under the age of 25 could be exempt as they might still require additional support offered by tenancies in social housing;
- housing providers already managed tenants with anti-social behaviour records unofficially by not renting to them in the future;
- tenants were responsible for the behaviour of all household members and visitors;
- suggested victims of cuckooing in exclusions in other extenuating circumstances;
- in respect of excluding those convicted under the Terrorism Act 2000 and 2006 Category C, highlighted that an academic could fall in this category by having research information and the Council did not have the expertise to judge whether an individual was a risk;
- said the policy on anti-social behaviour needed to be consistent across all areas and Registered Providers should have the ability to use their discretion;
- there should not be a minimum income level to qualify for social housing;
- the criteria should be decided locally; and
- questioned whether the consultation had been circulated quickly before a General Election and could then lead to poor decisions being made.

The Head of Housing and Communities said that as well as responding to the questions, separate comments and responses could be sent and suggested comments around supporting local criteria to reflect the community's need could come from the Chair of the Housing and Health Committee.

The Head of Housing and Communities agreed that the consultation around responsibility of individuals or a household was not clear and this comment could be included as part of the response. She said that anti-social behaviour legislation already existed that could deal with those issues more effectively.

In response to a question from a Member around whether information from the housing

provider on anti-social behaviour was shared with the Housing Options team so that a future housing provider was aware of the history, the Housing Options Policy and Performance Officer said that registered landlords did referencing checks and rent or anti-social issues would be disclosed.

A Member sought clarification on the process of setting eligibility criteria and the Head of Housing and Communities advised that national criteria were set first, followed by local policy.

Several Members raised issues around reference to prioritising 'acceptable refugees' and were critical of the use of the language used in the Government document.

The Head of Housing and Communities advised that the consultation was a quick launch and there was limited information. She said the consultation was focused around social housing being valuable for local people

The recommendation was proposed by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Karen Watson and on being put to the vote agreed by Members.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the comments made by the Housing and Health Committee be fed into the Council's response to Government's consultation on Reforms to Social Housing Allocations.***

733 **Temporary Accommodation Update**

The Head of Housing and Communities introduced the report which gave an update on the Temporary Accommodation budget situation in Swale, following on from the last update in September 2023. She said an overspend of approximately £160k was expected and recent weeks had been exceptionally busy so that figure could rise.

The Head of Housing and Communities said work that had been carried out over the previous six months, around processing clients and helping them to move on as well as being firm around eligibility of criteria had stabilised the spend. She highlighted some key pieces of work that had progressed significantly over the past six months including subsidy lobbying. The Head of Housing and Community said the Leader and other members had lobbied Government to increase the temporary accommodation funding currently still linked to 2011 LHA rates of which Council's could only claim 90%, so far without success.

Drawing attention to paragraph 2.9 in the report which set out the gap in the costs of temporary accommodation and the subsidy received, the Head of Housing and Communities highlighted the significant increase in costs since 2018. She referred to the data collection exercise carried out by the District Councils Network which included information that SBC temporary accommodation costs were one of the highest in the South east. She said many Councils, including SBC, had been trying to raise the profile of temporary accommodation and there had been recent media enquiries

Referring to the Accommodation Strategy, the Head of Housing and Communities explained that currently much of the accommodation was provided through nightly let arrangements and purchase arrangements which were costly. She said the programme

to purchase accommodation had so far resulted in the completion of two properties which were now occupied, with another 25 properties under offer. The Head of Housing and Communities explained there were sometimes issues with one or two bedroom properties as they were often leasehold flats and the management companies sometimes did not allow their use as temporary accommodation. She said decommissioned supported arrangement properties were currently being considered.

The Head of Housing and Communities said there had been improvements to their phone lines and a self-serve option on the website was being introduced. She added that three additional staff had also been employed.

Finally, the Head of Housing and Communities said there were currently 311 families in temporary accommodation, down from the peak of 420.

The Chair praised staff for their excellent work and said it was a good report.

Members were invited to make comments, which included:

- Funding cuts to Porchlight would have an impact;
- suggested looking at properties in Leysdown for a quick and economic purchase;
- highlighted the closure of Bridge House, Sheerness and Johnson House, Sittingbourne;
- work carried out so far has been good, but SBC did not have the resource to achieve what was necessary;
- made suggestions on how SBC encouraged Housing Associations to spend money in Swale;
- could SBC purchase empty Housing Association properties and bring them up to date?;
- praised the hard work of the team in achieving lower costs than expected;
- the situation was bleak, the system did not work and had not for a long time;
- suggested writing to MP's setting out how unsustainable the situation was;
- lack of national investment would push Local Authorities to bankruptcy; and
- should not wait until disaster hit before acting;

In response the Head of Housing and Communities said Porchlight only had funding until March 2025. She said all properties could be considered but Leysdown had poor transport links. Referring to the purchase of Housing Association properties, she said that SBC were notified when properties were being disposed of, but they often needed substantial work and it was not always cost effective and took time.

The Head of Housing and Communities said more effective ways of lobbying Government were being looked at and some other authorities were looking at calling for a Housing Emergency. She suggested lobbying locally with MP's and seeking the support of wider stakeholders as the focus up to now had been on what could be controlled internally.

A Councillor pointed out the income Government would receive from income tax from workers and construction, and savings to the NHS and from homelessness by investing in social housing.

Councillor Hannah Perkin proposed that the Committee recommends that the Council declares a social housing emergency in Swale. This was seconded by Councillor Tom Nundy and on being put to the vote the Committee agreed.

***Resolved***

***(1) That the current controls in place to manage the Temporary Accommodation budget be noted.***

***(2) That the Council declares a social housing Emergency in Swale.***

734 **Forward Decision Plan**

The Chair went through the Forward Decisions Plan.

The Head of Housing and Communities suggested the Staying Put Task and Finish Working group could be set up once the outcome of the audit on the disabled facilities grant was known so that it could feed into the review.

There was a discussion around future topic areas, issues experienced and which external representations to invite to a future Housing and Health Committee. The Chair suggested that Nikki Teesdale from Medway and Swale Health Care Partnership and a representative from Adult Social Care could attend a future meeting, and there should be a briefing on the Primary Care Network. A Member suggested a briefing on how family hubs worked and on Special Educational Needs and Disability provision. The Head of Housing and Communities clarified which particular areas of service Committee Members had concerns in order that the relevant representative attended.

***Resolved***

***(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.***

Chair

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All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel