
Housing and Health Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 22 October 2024 from 7.00 pm - 9.32 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Hayden Brawn, Ann Cavanagh, Tim Gibson (Substitute for Councillor Angie Valls), Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison (Chair), Peter Macdonald, Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin, Pete Neal, Tom Nundy, Chris Palmer, Julien Speed (Substitute for Councillor Lloyd Bowen), Karen Watson (Vice-Chair) and Tony Winckless (Substitute for Councillor Kieran Golding).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Charlotte Hudson and Kellie MacKenzie.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE : Simon Mitchell (Assistant Director Adult Social Care Commissioning) and Mel Anthony (Commissioning Manager, Adult Social Care Commissioning).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Kieran Golding, Hannah Perkin and Angie Valls.

356 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

357 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 August 2024 (Minute Nos. 147 – 153) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

358 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

359 **Adult Social Care - Commissioning Update**

The Chair welcomed Simon Mitchell (Assistant Director Adult Social Care Commissioning (ASCC) and Mel Anthony (Commissioning Manager, ASCC) to the meeting.

The Assistant Director (ASCC) and Commissioning Manager (ASCC) gave a presentation based on the following themes: What did the operational Adult Social Care Housing (ASCH) team look like in Swale?; what help was there for Swale residents? – Connect to Support; what help was there for Swale residents? Commissioned Services summary; Making a Difference Every Day – our strategy for Adult Social Care in Kent; Commissioning Intentions; Accommodation Strategy; Priority threads; and Our improvement plan ambition.

The Chair invited questions from Members, and points raised included:

- Would Faversham have the same service as Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey?;
- did the Community Trust Occupational Therapists (OTs) and National Health OTs communicate with each other?;

- how would this work feed into the Local Plan process and planning applications in particular with regard to wheelchair accessibility on new developments?;
- communication links between the Council and hospitals needed to be improved in terms of ensuring adults leaving hospitals received the necessary care in their home;
- welcomed the provision of individual care packages;
- were charities able to provide assistance?;
- what communication was there with families?;
- there should be a quicker 'pathway' back home from hospitals;
- welcomed the idea of people leaving hospital and staying in their own homes if it was sensible and safe;
- supported accommodation on the Isle of Sheppey was appalling, there was no provision;
- how many beds would be available at Ocean Heights, Minster?;
- private landlords were not being able to undertake the relevant heating safety checks without the relevant engineers and social workers being present, this needed to be looked at as it was adding to delays for people being discharged from hospital;
- delays in terminating tenancies were causing backlogs to the housing register and the longer properties remained empty the quicker they fell into disrepair;
- properties could not be adapted during the warranty period which also caused delays;
- the relevant website page for completing Disabled Facilities Grant applications kept being moved. It needed to be obvious and clear where and how people could access the form;
- improved working with Housing Associations, Police etc. was needed to improve social care;
- experienced two residents who were discharged from Medway Hospital only for the Kent Enablement Team to advise they should not have been and gone back to hospitals as failed discharges;
- the waiting list for improvements to properties to allow residents back to their own homes was two years, that was not good enough;
- had witnessed big failures from the home care service who did not always visit the homes themselves to carry out assessments;
- considered that the staying-put team at Swale Borough Council (SBC) did a great job;
- important that the direct payments system had the relevant safeguarding controls in place;
- the loss of bungalows for the elderly was a big issue particularly on the Isle of Sheppey;
- there were not enough suitable available properties for the elderly;
- some residents were being discharged to properties that were not suitable and that was having a detrimental impact on their quality of life;
- Kiln Court, Faversham used to provide respite care but had been closed;
- stressed the importance of succession planning to ensure the elderly/sick were able to improve their quality of life and those around them; and
- the direct payments system needed to be simplified and highlighted to users how easy it was to use, to encourage take-up of the service.

In response the Commissioning Manager (ASCC) confirmed that the services applied to

the Faversham area, as well as Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey. She confirmed that the community teams did have close alliances with the ASCC OTs and the hospital OTs, and the discharge pathway being developed would improve those links and connections further. The Assistant Director (ASCC) explained that with regard to hospital discharge, 'joint brokerage' referred to bringing health and social care together, so one team dealt with placements into care homes. He agreed to find out the data in respect of response times for 'Crossroads' and their crises service.

The Assistant Director explained that where appropriate they responded to planning applications in respect of wheelchair accessibility, room sizes etc., but ultimately it was down to developers as to whether their points were taken on-board. The Commissioning Manager added that development of the Accommodation Strategy for Adult Social Care, as a well-researched document, was an important tool in highlighting to developers what was required and necessary in Kent. She explained the importance of ensuring it aligned with the Kent and Medway Housing Strategy.

The Assistant Director said their Frontline Social Work Practitioners liaised with families and where support was identified were then referred to the Arranging Support Team. A review was being carried out regarding the 'pathways' out of hospital available to people, and that they had been working with health colleagues to make it 'smoother'. He spoke about a project being trialled in East Kent called the Home First model, to help people back to their own homes and ensure the relevant support was provided by the Kent Enablement at Home service. The Commissioning Manager said that the conversations the social work team had with people in terms of support, were very positive and about helping people to achieve the things they wanted to. They had Community Catalysts out in the community feeding back community representatives/organisations and were exploring how to enable people to access those services.

The Managing Director agreed to find out how the Kent teams linked in with Medway Hospital and were part of the discharge discussions. The Commissioning Manager said they would also check how well staff at Medway Hospital understood the new Kent and Medway discharge pathway. She spoke about the closure of Blackburn Lodge, Sheerness which had been considered at a meeting of the Adult Social Care Committee (KCC) in September 2024, and agreed to share the link to that meeting with Members. She also referred to the new care home in Minster, Ocean Heights, and confirmed that they had taken some bed space. She spoke about the newly formed Quality Team which would support the market to improve quality in all settings, not just care homes. In response to a question from a Member, the Commissioning Manager agreed to confirm how many Kent County Council (KCC) funded beds would be available at Ocean Heights. The Assistant Director explained that as a new home Ocean Heights was not on the KCC Contract, and they might decide to take private clients. He explained that their contract allowed them to block book beds, but most placements were individually negotiated within homes.

In response to a question from a Member, the Commissioning Manager agreed to provide a map for Members clarifying the social care areas in Swale. She confirmed that they worked closely with registered providers around development of supported housing. With regard to ending tenancies and self-referral pathways she explained they would discuss this with practitioner leads to have a better understanding about any issues. The Assistant Director understood concerns raised about poor communication between the different care teams and hoped that with the new system things would improve.

The Commissioning Manager reported that they had recruited some Engagement and Involvement Officers whose work included going out into communities and speaking to people about how they envisioned their elderly life would look like, and they were helping to develop the refresh of the strategy. She said the relevant safeguards were in place with regard to direct payments. Providers were put through an accreditation process to ensure they were a fit and proper business, and people accessing the service were also informed about the tax situation.

The Chair thanked the Commissioning Manager and Managing Director for their presentation.

360 **Temporary Accommodation - Scrutiny Report**

The Head of Housing and Communities apologised for the lateness of the report which had been tabled. She introduced the report which provided an update on the current performance in relation to Temporary Accommodation (TA), the current budget position, and current controls in place to manage the TA budget. She referred to the Statutory TA placements set out in paragraph 2.4 of the report.

The Chair invited questions from Members, and points raised included:

- Important to note and thank the Housing Team for their good work;
- why was homelessness rising?;
- encouraged by how quickly the Council acquired properties, and wondered how much money would the Council save as a result?;
- praised the outstanding work of the housing team to reduce homelessness across the borough;
- how many residents could be housed at Johnson House, Sittingbourne and Bridge House, Sheerness?;
- needed to bear in mind the impact the two-month holiday camp closures during January to February 2025 on the Isle of Sheppey would have on the homeless figures;
- Southern Housing had advised that 68 of the 78 voids in Kent were in Swale;
- certain that residents were thankful for the amazing work carried out by the Council's housing team;
- were any new housing association properties being built?; and
- stressed the importance of registered housing providers meeting with developers prior to building properties, to ensure they were built to the high standard housing associations and others expected.

In response, the Head of Housing and Communities considered that homelessness was increasing partly due to difficulties accessing the private rented sector and also the current cost-of-living crisis. She said it did not help that many residents requiring band A and B properties had severe medical needs to consider, which reduced their housing options. The Head of Housing and Communities hoped that details of the savings made by the Council from acquiring their own properties would be provided in a future update report. She reported that the final agreements for Johnson House and Bridge House were due to be signed and she would update Members on the number of residents they could take.

With regard to the holiday camp closures, the Head of Housing and Communities advised that the housing team were working with those that would be affected early to reduce the impact on the service. She said that she was aware that Housing Associations were investing in their existing housing stock rather than new developments due to viability and capacity challenges within the construction industry.

In concluding, the Head of Housing and Communities apologised that the baseline figures were not available for this meeting. She referred to the Risks and Issues in paragraph 2.8 of the report and explained that it was important to be aware that 1% of people in the South-East of England were at least two payments behind with their mortgages and officers were monitoring the situation. She also raised concern about the impact the potential loss of the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding would have on The Quays, Sittingbourne and said officers were working closely with the operators of that site.

Councillor Tom Nundy moved the following motion: That the Housing Team be thanked for their hard work in reducing homelessness across Swale. This was seconded by Councillor Ben J Martin. On being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Performance report and controls in place to manage the TA budget be noted.**
- (2) That the Housing Team be thanked for their hard work in reducing homelessness across Swale.**

361 **Temporary Accommodation Policy**

The Head of Housing and Communities introduced the report as set out in the agenda papers, which provided an update on the review of the TA Policy and set out recommendations for a revised Policy, as set out at Appendix I of the report.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions, and points raised included:

- Should victims of Domestic Abuse be included under the 'Placements and Prioritising Households' list on page nine of the report?;
- aware of two residents both with serious medical conditions and the relevant health specialists said that their accommodation was not suitable, but they were refused assistance as they did not meet the two-year priority limit for living in the borough. It was important to look at the 'bigger picture' in those situations; and
- would it be worth adding the weekly TA charges for the area where Swale bordered Maidstone to the document in case the Council obtained properties in that area?

In response, the Head of Housing and Communities advised that victims of domestic abuse might not be included as they were subject to separate protocols and safety planning. She agreed to take this away as an action to ensure it was referenced appropriately. The Head of Housing and Communities explained that the two-year residency criteria of the Housing Allocations Policy was best practice. With regard to the TA charges for Maidstone she said it could be included, but the criteria given for the TA purchase programme had been in the main town centres with good transport links, so it was unlikely that the Council would buy any properties in that area.

Resolved:

(1) That the revised Temporary Accommodation Policy be adopted.

362 Affordable Housing Emergency - Consideration of interventions

The Head of Housing and Communities introduced the report which provided an update on the Affordable Housing Emergency that was declared by Full Council on 3 April 2024. She referred to paragraph 2.3 of the report which provided updates on the actions agreed by Members.

The Chair invited questions from Members.

In response to questions from a Member, the Head of Housing and Communities said that she had spoken to planning colleagues regarding discounts on planning fees for registered providers, and they had advised that the larger scale developments applied for by registered providers often had low fees and the Council needed to consider whether introduction of any discount would act as an incentive which it most likely would not. She said officers would look into the rural designation Right to Buy to ensure as much as possible was retained on the Isle of Sheppey.

Resolved:

(1) That the Affordable Housing Emergency update be noted.

363 Forward Decisions Plan

The Chair asked that the Adult Social Care representatives be invited to a future meeting of the Housing and Health Committee to provide a further commissioning update.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

364 Adjournment of Meeting

The meeting was adjourned from 8.23 pm until 8.35 pm.

Chair

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