

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 12 January 2023

Present: Councillor D Vernon (in the Chair)
Councillors R Bernstein, C Birchmore, N Bayley, N Boroda,
D Green, N Jones and T Pilkington

Also in attendance: Councillor C Cummins (Cabinet Member, Housing Services)
and Councillor A Quinn (Cabinet Member Environment, Climate
Change and Operations)
Phil Cole, Head of Homelessness & Housing Options
Neil Long, Assistant Director of Operations
Jacqui Dennis, Director of Law and Democratic Services
Chloe Ashworth, Senior Scrutiny Officer

Public Attendance: One member of the public was present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor A Arif and Councillor M Walsh

OSC.1 APOLOGIES

Apologies are noted above.

OSC.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

OSC.3 MINUTES

It was agreed:

1. The minutes of the meeting held on 01st November 2022 be approved.

OSC.4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

OSC.5 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Notice had been received of 1 question.

Questioner	Topic	Responding
Mr. Steven Wright	Prestwich Regeneration	Councillor Quinn

OSC.6 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no member questions.

OSC.7 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY UPDATE

Councillor Cummins provided an overview of the report. The Council has a statutory duty to support people that are homeless in the Borough and the Council must have an updated and robust Homelessness Strategy to clearly demonstrate how we will meet the required statutory duties and obligations for homelessness in the Borough. Over the past decade Bury has seen a gradual increase in homeless cases within the Borough with greater increases over the past 5 years. In 2020 a new Housing Strategy was agreed for the Borough of Bury which included a commitment to end rough sleeping by 2024.

The new Homelessness Strategy has been co-produced with the Bury Homelessness Partnership to deliver this, by applying the Borough-Wide 'Lets Do it' ethos of prevention, early intervention and the targeting of public service resources.

A member asked what efforts Bury Council has put into consulting private landlords and what plans for future consultations do they have. In response Councillor Cummins advised that initiatives to work better with private landlords will be considered and the team has recently added to the Private Sector team to develop better relationships with landlords. In addition, Phil Cole, Head of Homelessness & Housing Options advised we have over 1000 voids in the private rented sector, and we need to access these properties for the benefit of those who do not have a permanent home. Phil Cole also advised that information had today been published stating that the rental market across Bury is the most expensive in Greater Manchester which does highlight an issue around affordability.

Phil Cole, Head of Homelessness & Housing Options, referenced a recent report from Greater Manchester Combined Authority which showed the difference between Local housing allowance (LHA) rents and Market rents (PRS) for a one-bedroom flat is 46% in cost. Bury's challenge is greater than other authorities as Bury's map is smaller than many other districts.

A member questioned what Bury Council is doing to bring the 1000 empty properties in the Borough back into use. In reply, Phil Cole, Head of Homelessness & Housing Options advised we have an empty housing officer and £1million to bring those back into use and currently around 35 have been brought back into use. Phil Cole further advised that the funding is set into two parts, the deal up funding which is working with landlords and also support for landlords such as repairs service and free management service offers, both of which are being considered.

Councillor Cummins as Cabinet Member gave assurances to the committee that she is confident we can eradicate rough sleeping in the borough by 2025.

Questions took place regarding temporary accommodation. In response members were advised that we use over one hundred supported properties with wrap around support to improve lives and sustain their tenancy in the future. Part of Bury's offer is that all Greater Manchester Boroughs try to work together. We are the only Greater Manchester Authority that does not use bed and breakfast and this has helped Bury secure funding as we are seen as performing well. As of today, there are no known rough sleepers and we have met our target however, this can change quickly.

Discussions also took place regarding the impact of an increase in Asylum Seekers and providing appropriate accommodation.

In addition, targeted work is taking place on helping families to manage debt.

In conclusion Councillor Cummins advised she is confident the service will continue with their good work through communication, resolving issues promptly and having a good relationship

with the homeless partnership board and will report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in a years' time.

It was agreed:

1. An update on the progress of the Homelessness Strategy to be brought back to committee in one year's time

OSC.8 TACKLING FUEL POVERTY

Councillor Cummins provided an overview of the tackling fuel poverty report. On the 19 January 2022 a full Council meeting debated a notice of motion in relation to fuel poverty. In response to the Cost-of-Living Crisis the Council has established an Anti-Poverty Steering Group consisting of members from organisations whose remit includes activity relevant to influencing the poverty agenda. The Council is taking positive action towards targeted advice and assistance, through the installation of retrofit measures via grant funding and the Councils capital investment programme to improve energy standards, reduce energy bills and keep residents warm.

A member raised concerns regarding elderly residents slipping into fuel poverty and how to work with residents to keep them warm but not scare people. In response the Committee was advised people known to the Council who will be in fuel poverty have had offers put to them. However, support to people in the private rented sector is difficult so work is taking place with the older health team in Bury and packs have been sent out to support and reassure residents.

Discussions took place regarding the targeted approach to Chesham Fold Estate. Members were advised that 32.9% were living in fuel poverty and work started with retrofit of properties.

A Discussion took place regarding the tragic event in Rochdale with regards to a damp property, members sought assurance on what we are doing and our approach to ensure similar cases never occur in Bury. Members were advised we have conducted a deep dive into any damp or mould reports. The Council is being proactive to ensure any cases are resolved and work is being done to investigate and work with people to support a reduction in cases.

It was agreed:

1. Councillor Cummins and Phil Cole be thanked for their update and the services continual hard work on tackling fuel poverty and reducing homelessness.

OSC.9 HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE AND LGA PEER REVIEW PROGRESS UPDATE

Councillor Quinn provided an overview of the Highways Maintenance and LGA Peer Review Progress Update. Earlier this year the Council initiated a Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review of highway maintenance to understand whether the level of existing investment gave the Council value for money and at the beginning of June the LGA Peer Review took place. The scope of this review was to look at the following elements of work:

- Highways resurfacing programme.
- Highways preventative maintenance programme.
- Highways inspections.
- Highways Asset Management Policy; and
- Strategic asset management and longer-term planning.

Members asked about the effects of climate change and what the recent weather had on highway maintenance. Councillor Quinn advised that by 2050 we are expecting 59% more rainfall and the current drains will not be able to cope. We have a higher change of being flooded by rainfall than river flooding and so we need sustainable drainage and regular cleaning of the drains when rain is expected. Impacts that make it worse is drives instead of grass and artificial grass which do not support the absorption of rainfall.

Members asked questions regarding surface dressings and resurfacing. The Committee was informed that surface dressings last around 10 years, however the longer you leave it the worse it deteriorates. The decisions to surface dress or resurface are left down to the engineers to decide what is the best option as they are the experts in this. Members were informed that surface dressing is six times cheaper so early intervention is the preference.

A member asked if work can be done to help Councillors educate the community on the effects of people parking on pavements and the deterioration this causes. Councillor Quinn advised that he would be happy to sit down with members to discuss the methodology for the roads that require surface dressing or resurfacing prior to a Council meeting to help members communicate this to public enquiries.

In conclusion Councillor Quinn advised that the service does need more money to get more engineers and do more roads, however it is acknowledged this is a national problem and he has confidence in team delivering.

It was agreed:

1. That members thanked Neil Long and Councillor Quinn for their work and update and acknowledge the challenges anticipated going forward.

OSC.10 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR D VERNON
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.05 pm and ended at 9.30 pm)