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# COMMUNITIES AND WELLBEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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**Wednesday, 31st October, 2018**

- Present:** Councillor Glen Harrison (in the Chair),  
Councillors Bernadette Parkinson (Vice Chair), Loraine Cox,  
Judith Addison, June Harrison and Lisa Allen  
Co-optee Bernard Dawson
- In Attendance:** The Regional Director and Neighbourhood Manager, Onward Homes
- Beverley Wood, Hyndburn Helpers  
Lisa Hilton, Hyndburn Helpers  
Reverend Anthony Roberts, Holy Trinity Church, Oswaldtwistle
- Mark Hoyle, Head of Regeneration and Housing  
Fiona Goodfellow, Housing Strategy & Policy Manager  
Denis Aldridge-Priestly, Housing Advice & Homeless Manager

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## **195 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

There were no apologies for absence or substitutions.

## **196 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations**

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations.

## **197 Minutes of Last Meeting**

The Minutes of the Communities and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Friday 5th October 2018 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

**Resolved - That the Minutes be received and approved as a correct record.**

## **198 Appointment of Co-optees**

The Committee were requested to consider the appointment of Honorary Alderman Doug Hayes as a Co-optee to the Communities and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**Resolved - That the Honorary Alderman Doug Hayes be appointed as Co-optee to the Communities and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

## **199 Onward Homes Report on Social Housing**

Dave Mayner, Regional Director for Onward Homes and the Neighbourhood Manager gave a presentation to update Members on Onward Homes.

The Regional Director reported on the structure of the organisation and referred to the recent changes in the organisations structure. He reported that a significant proportion (54%) of their properties were located in Hyndburn. Members were informed that management services had been streamlined since April with the same service delivered throughout all areas in the North West to ensure consistency in service.

The Neighbourhood Manager provided further information on:

- the stock condition surveys that had been carried out to plan for the future
- improvements on the current allocations service
- 156 new customers signed up since April
- re-let times which were under target
- an improved overall service

The Regional Director reported that although improvements had been made in respect of income collection, the roll out of Universal Credit had had a significant impact.

The Neighbourhood Manager explained that housing maintenance issues were now dealt with by in-house repair specialists and targets for repair completion had improved in 2018 which a 80% satisfaction level. She pointed out that where there was dissatisfaction improvements were made. Further issues discussed included the impact of the right to buy scheme, the Syrian Refugee Programme, 1<sup>st</sup> Call to help and support customers and the role of the Environmental Services and the Wellbeing and Investment Teams. She informed the Committee that the organisation was centred in Accrington with all of its resources and had provided job opportunities for the local community.

Councillor Addison requested:

- the contact details of the Neighbourhood Teams for residents.
- improved communications with residents, especially, after concerns had arisen earlier in the year with regards to recycling bins.
- further information on how residents could get into arrears and what support Onward Homes offered to residents to resolve rent arrears.

She was informed that regular meetings would be held with Councillors throughout the year and information would be provided for neighbourhoods. The Committee was also informed that neighbourhood walkabouts would recommence and that they would be happy for Councillors to be involved. The Regional Director reported that there were various reasons for people getting into debt including employment, change of family circumstances and illness and that there were processes in place to deal with these issues with eviction only as a very last resort.

Councillor Cox requested further information on Onward Homes' role in rehousing the homeless. She was informed that the organisation was a member of the Homeless Forum and homelessness was included within their allocations policy to provide priority to people who needed it the most.

Councillor Glen Harrison (Chair) referred to the Right to Buy Scheme and to the need to acquire more homes to replace those sold and asked what Onward Homes' aspirations were in respect of the acquisition of properties. Councillor Bernadette Parkinson asked how many of their properties were currently empty in Hyndburn.

Members were informed that less than 1% of the stock in the Lancashire was empty which equated to around 65-75 empty properties in the Lancashire region. They were also informed that many of the properties that had required major works were now being included in repair schemes which would bring back into use many properties which had

been long term empty. The Regional Director indicated that he would let members have the figure for the number of people currently waiting for vacant properties.

**Resolved** - **That the report be noted.**

## **200 Homelessness in Hyndburn**

The Housing Strategy & Policy Manager and the Housing Advice & Homelessness Manager submitted a report to update Communities and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on current activity in relation to homelessness in Hyndburn.

The Housing Advice & Homelessness Manager explained the changes implemented by the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act which came into force in April 2018. He reported on the Council's role to prevent homelessness and their duty if this was not possible. He also pointed out that other organisations such as the Police and Social Services all had a duty to refer people faced with homelessness to the local authority. He provided figures for the number of people considered as homeless by the Council since April 2018 and those who had qualified as homeless.

The Housing Strategy & Policy Manager reported on other work taking place to prevent homelessness and youth homelessness and referred to the many organisations from the voluntary and charity sectors with which she regularly worked with. She referred to the growing problem of rough sleepers and reported that the actual number for Hyndburn in 2018 would be recorded during a count carried out in November 2018. Recent Government policy aimed to end rough sleeping by 2027 but she advised that the process of applying for Universal Credit was problematic for many people and this was adding to the problem of homelessness. She informed the Committee that the Council's Homelessness Strategy would be reviewed in 2019 and consultations would begin soon. She explained that there was a multi-agency response to homelessness in the borough and that these agencies met regularly. She referred to Maundy Relief's role in supporting provision for the homeless and advised that a number of agencies were involved to provide the additional support necessary for some people.

Members referred to the following matters:

- Landlords would be more inclined to provide housing to a homeless person/family if the rent was paid directly to the landlords.
- If the process of accessing Universal Credit would make it worse for families in this position.
- How could rough sleepers claim Universal Credit.
- What percentage of Hyndburn people could not afford affordable housing?
- The new Local Plan did not provide for half way housing.
- Other barriers to access housing other than IT?

The Head of Regeneration and Housing informed the Committee that the Council had a duty to maintain a housing register and monitor numbers. He reported that changes in the welfare system over recent years had contributed to the increase in rough sleeping and impacted upon vulnerable people in the community. In respect of adding to the Housing Association's stock he advised that it would not be financially viable for an Association to purchase and improve empty properties and that new social housing had to be met through private sector development with a 20% affordable housing provision. He pointed out that the Government had recently made a number of announcements which meant that Housing Associations could access funding for social and affordable housing.

The Housing Advice and Homelessness Manager explained that there had been an increase in the number of people presenting from the private sector. He reported that it would be difficult for rough sleepers to claim Universal Credit as it was an online system only and there was a requirement for ID. He advised that tenancy history and rent arrears were the other main barriers in seeking accommodation after being made homeless.

The Housing Strategy & Policy Manager informed the Committee that more and more people had complex needs and that before accommodation could be provided, support would have to be sought to prevent future homelessness.

Councillor Addison commented on the need to be realistic and for housing to be provided for the people who already live in the area.

The Head of Regeneration and Housing reported that it was highly unlikely for specialised housing to be built in the area because of the viability of developments. He pointed out that the Planning Department had become tougher on this issue with developers and that the housing market had started to show signs of improvement.

Beverley Wood, Lisa Hilton and Reverend Anthony Roberts – Hyndburn Helpers addressed the Committee in respect of their role with Hyndburn Helpers.

Beverley Wood informed the Committee that the systems and procedures currently in place to deal with homeless people was not robust enough to resolve the issues of those who required it due to many have complex needs. She gave examples of the experiences of a number of homeless people and referred to the difficulties of some people in gaining access to the services they required. She also requested faster responses to support services for the homeless who required it and pointed out that the current system in place was not working and that it should be less intransigent.

Lisa Hilton – Hyndburn Helpers circulated a number of photographs showing picture of properties some homeless had been rehoused in. She reported that an elderly couple had been rehoused in a property not fit for purpose and asked why the Council and Maundy Relief were using landlords that were not adequately vetted but were still being used. She pointed out that estate agents were willing to accept homeless families as long as rent was paid directly to the landlord. She also complained about the attitude of some members of staff to those presenting themselves as homeless and asked for respect to be shown to those in need.

Reverend Roberts addressed the Committee and referred to the indignity of many homeless people having to complete forms before being allowed to access basic hygiene facilities. He proposed that more training was given to the agencies dealing with people in vulnerable situations. He referred to the amount of effort that had been given to ensuring that a number of Syrian families were rehomed in the Hyndburn area and requested that this same effort was given to other homeless people. He asked what the Christmas plan was for people living on the streets and what would be done with the information ascertained from the November count. He suggested that empty shops in Accrington were used as temporary accommodation for the homeless and informed the Committee that if nothing was done then he would house the homeless in his Church and invoice the Council.

The Chair explained that any complaints about staff attitude were submitted to the Council for investigation.

Lucy Harvecom, Manager of Maundy Relief addressed the Committee and referred to the problems of sharing some information in public. She pointed out that some of the information presented to the Committee had been incorrect. She informed Members that

she considered that the key scheme was working well and explained that homeless people were offered supported through to tenancy. She indicated that homeless people with a history of substance abuse and who had criminal records were hard to rehouse. She agreed that they rehoused a lot of people in the selective licensing area but in properties that had been inspected.

The Head of Regeneration and Housing acknowledged the work done by Hyndburn Helpers and extended an invite to them to join the Homeless in Hyndburn Forum

Reverend Roberts agreed that all agencies should work together and co-operate to provide a co-ordinated response to homelessness. Lisa Hilton indicated that she had a lot of proposals to improve the Key Scheme and Beverley Wood proposed that homeless registration was opened up for the homeless at regular times each week.

The Chair expressed gratitude to all who had attended the meeting and hoped that all could work together in the future for the good of those who found themselves homeless.

**Resolved - That the report be noted.**

Signed:.....

Date: .....

Chair of the meeting  
At which the minutes were confirmed