

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND TACKLING HOMELESSNESS

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness held on Thursday, 7 December 2023 at 9.30 am at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Darren Sanders (in the Chair)

Councillors Cal Corkery
Daniel Wemyss
Graham Heaney
Raymond Dent

24. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Amanda Buxley and Mark Broomer from the Residents Consortium.

25. Declarations of Members' Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

26. Approving Portsmouth City Council's Homelessness Strategy 2024 - 2029

Jo Bennett, Assistant Director Housing Need and Supply presented the report, the purpose of which was to present the Homelessness Strategy which detailed Portsmouth City Council's approach to understanding and responding to customers and residents who face homelessness, and to seek approval for the Strategy and the associated plan to be effective from 1 January 2024.

Deputations

A written deputation from Martin Silman, Portsmouth & District Private Landlords Association was read out by Democratic Services.

Deputations are not minuted but can be viewed here:

[Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness, 7 December 2023 on Livestream](#)

Members' Questions

In response to Members' questions, officers clarified:

- The lived experience of a person on the Partnership Board was invaluable and the plan was to replicate this with the Strategy. The new Partnership Board will have a focus placed on the experience of those living within services to co-produce and design going forward. The Partnership will be relaunched in January 2024.

- The service has one block with individual units - self-contained premises - as part of supported temporary accommodation which may suit those who have come through the housing needs front door or for those who are trying to move onto independent accommodation and are not able to live in environments such as The Registry. The Service continues to track all different cohorts and attempt to respond in a housing supply way to what is needed.
- The Strategy talks about sufficiency of accommodation but also the right type of accommodation and the right type of support to provide the facilities people need to live well but also to support them to sustain tenancy. There will be additional models of accommodation needed across the strategy period.
- People who withdraw their applications is difficult for the service. People often approach the service at crisis point and then they lose contact. Staff try to re-establish contact over a prolonged period of time. The result of the consultation had shown that there needs to be a focus on preventing homelessness and helping people sustain their tenancies and not to lose their homes in the first place rather than just a reactive service. New roles have been created such as an independent supported housing assessor.
- There is a forum to meet with/talk with colleagues and a monthly meeting with the authorities' close neighbours. There is also a comparator group of organisations that has been created to meet with people who are in a similar place in terms of population or size to learn from each other. There is a lot of cross council working.
- In terms of tracking people, the rough sleeping navigators are key to understanding where someone is. The Outreach programme have a group that meet weekly to discuss where people have gone, what has happened to them and to follow up and ensure they are safe. People are provided with funded phones so staff can make contact with them.
- The barriers to successful preventions are because people don't come to the Council until they are past the point of being able to prevent homelessness for various reasons. The Strategy aims to do more to 'shout' about prevention and focus on this part of the work. The aim and key focus is to change the point at which people access the services.
- Although PCC holds the responsibility to publish the Strategy it is really about a partnership approach. The promotion of services lies with the whole partnership and ensuring that at all points of contact, the information is in place to enable officers, members of the public, members, councillors of the city council the ability to recognise the need and signpost or refer through to appropriate services.
- The staffing levels were increased but the demand just got bigger.
- Every applicant receives a personalised plan which is discussed with them by their case officer. They also receive this in written form or any form

they need it in. Often people come to the Council just wanting to be given a home and are not interested in acting on the advice and support given or acting to solve their own problems.

- If someone is classed as intentionally homeless, they will still be in the City and need a roof over their heads. There is a non-statutory pathway which allows the Council to consider how to move forward, regardless of intentionality. Work is done with Children's social care for those who have children who might be intentionally homeless and for younger people in the same situation. The protocol allows focus on the housing solution rather than the legal decision.
- There was no way of validating the claim that PCC have reduced housing stock by removing over 1000 homes from HMOs in the City.

Member Comments

Members noted and praised the significant expansion of services and the work that had gone into the Rough Sleeping Pathway.

Members considered combining the strategies was a really good idea in terms of resource for the Council and allocating that resource in the most efficient way.

Chair's Comments

The Chair noted that giving people a place to live is one of the most important things the Council can do. He noted that Councils across the country are reporting a crisis in homelessness with the cost-of-living crisis adding to that problem.

Portsmouth is now seen as one of the best places for tackling rough sleeping in particular because of the plan to build council housing. There is a multi-agency cross party group overseeing how to deal with the homeless in the City.

The Council has brought back more than 500 new council homes and provided safe and secure accommodation for rough sleepers with navigators to help them back on their feet. Homeless people are now able to access bank accounts which is a crucial element in helping secure employment. There is still a legal distinction between rough sleepers and others who come to the Council for help with different pots of funding which is not ideal. The Chair noted that the Government has just increased the local housing allowance, but rents have gone up by more.

He noted the biggest cause of homelessness is people being kicked out by friends, family or private landlords. He referred to the written deputation and noted that dozens of landlords had joined the licensing forum regarding the additional licensing programme the Council had introduced. He also noted a steady stream of HMO applications coming to planning committee on a regular basis. The Council is keen to crack down on bad landlords and improve the quality of living standards provided in private rented accommodation.

He stressed the focus on prevention in the strategy and ensuring people are able to access safe and secure accommodation.

Decision

The Cabinet Member approved the Council's Homelessness Strategy 2024 - 2029 (Appendix 1) and associated action plan (Appendix 2) to be effective from 1 January 2024.

The meeting concluded at 10.12 am.

Councillor Darren Sanders
Chair