

21 JANUARY 2014

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of a meeting of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Tuesday, 21 January 2014.

p Cllr Mrs P Jackman (Chairman)
p Cllr S P Davies (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

p J E Binns
p D A Britton
p Mrs P J Lovelace
p B D Lucas

Councillors:

p A D O'Sullivan
p N S Penman
p D J Russell
p M S Wade

In Attendance:

Councillors:

Mrs D M Brooks (Portfolio Holder, Health & Leisure)
Mrs J Cleary (Portfolio Holder, Housing & Communities)
C Harrison
D Harrison
Mrs M McLean

Also in Attendance:

Mr Michael Clowes – Chairman, New Forest Local Children's Partnership
Ms Candy Huxham - Manager, Handy Trust

Officers Attending:

M Devine, Mrs L Kmet, G Miles, Ms A Righton, Mrs D Stacey and Ms M Stephens, and for part of the meeting, Mrs J Bailey, D Brown, J Burton, Mrs N Luddington and G Spawton.

30. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2013 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllr M Wade in Minute No. 33.

32. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

33. CHILD POVERTY: NEW FOREST CONTEXT AND ACTIONS (REPORT A).

Cllr M Wade disclosed a non-pecuniary interest in this item as a trustee of the Handy Trust. He concluded that there were no issues under common law to prevent him from remaining in the meeting to speak and to vote.

Mr Michael Clowes, Chairman, New Forest Local Children's Partnership and Ms Candy Huxham, Manager, Handy Trust were in attendance.

The Panel considered the levels of child poverty and deprivation in the New Forest and the role of the Local Children's Partnership in addressing these issues.

Panel members were informed that the Hampshire Child Poverty Needs Assessment (2011) showed that the New Forest appeared 10 times in the top 20 of areas with high levels of child poverty in the county. Research by the Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership also showed that the average income in the New Forest was low compared with other Hampshire Districts. Housing costs in the New Forest were eleven times higher than the national average. All these factors had a detrimental impact on children growing up in poverty stricken households.

The Chairman of the New Forest Local Children's Partnership, Michael Clowes, was in attendance and addressed the Panel on the Partnership's Action Plan which sought to improve the lives of children living in poverty. The Partnership brought together social care, health, criminal justice agencies, education, local authorities, voluntary organisations and other services to ensure integrated, child-centred approaches to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The Action Plan recognised that child poverty in the New Forest could be reduced through the development of focused projects and initiatives supported by key stakeholders in the District. For example, the Partnership was developing, for District-wide distribution, a support service booklet that would contain advice and guidance on key areas of support such as health, debt management, parent support, employment and training. Along with this, the Partnership would also be running a poster competition with local schools to raise awareness of child poverty and the local support available.

The work of the Partnership was enhanced and supported by voluntary and charitable organisations across the District such as the Handy Trust, a small charity based on the Waterside, which offered a support service for 0-25 year olds. Candy Huxham, the Manager of the Trust was in attendance and briefly explained to the Panel the recent projects and work undertaken by the Trust to support children and families in financial hardship.

Members were keen to assist the New Forest Local Children's Partnership in any way they could, but as this was a complex issue, this required more detailed planning and investigation were required to do justice to its importance. The Panel felt that further consideration could be given at its work programme planning session at the March Panel meeting, where a thorough scoping exercise could be undertaken, with the advice of Michael Clowes and Candy Huxham and other organisations as appropriate.

The Chairman thanked the guests for their attendance and contributions.

Accordingly it was:

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That a scoping exercise be undertaken at the March Panel meeting to determine ways in which the Council could assist the New Forest Local Children's Partnership in supporting its Action Plan.

Action: Martine Devine

34. IMPACT OF LEISURE SERVICES ON COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELL-BEING (REPORT B).

The Panel considered the health programmes offered at the Council's Health and Leisure Centres and their contribution to community wellbeing, as well as how capacity issues were being managed at the Centres.

It was explained that the Leisure Service contributed to the wellbeing of New Forest residents by providing facilities and health programmes that encouraged people to be more active which positively contributed to their health and wellbeing.

The Panel considered the range of health programmes currently being offered as set out in Appendix 1 to the report. They were pleased to see that the programmes and outreach work benefited all sections of the community, particularly those with health conditions and in areas of deprivation. Key to the success of these targeted programmes was successful partnership work with health professionals and those responsible for public health. The Council maintained a good working relationship with health colleagues and was able to influence health provision through working with the New Forest Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Panel noted that the success of the Leisure Service in providing high quality facilities and programmes had meant that demand for the service had increased with throughput rising year on year. Whilst members had some concerns regarding capacity at the centres, they felt reassured by the way in which centres were being managed through their programming. This ensured that facilities at the centres were accessible to users and continued to encourage regular activity.

The Panel commended the good work of Leisure Services to the Portfolio Holder.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Panel endorse the health interventions being undertaken at the Health and Leisure Centres,
- (b) That that Panel endorse the Leisure Service seeking to develop the capacity of the Health & Leisure Centres through a variety of means; and
- (c) That the Panel commend the good work of Leisure Services to the Portfolio Holder.

35. PLANNING FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT (REPORT C).

The Panel received an update on the implications for the Council of the introduction of Universal Credit.

Universal Credit was the biggest change to the welfare system since it began and would replace a number of Tax Credits and benefits, including Housing Benefit. There was a need for the Council to take a pro-active approach to plan for the introduction of Universal Credit, yet ensure there was a proportionate response so that significant resources were not used to address issues that may not materialise. However the Council should be properly prepared, think through the various implications and form a view on the level of the Council's involvement where there was some discretion.

It was noted that the Government was intending to introduce the Universal Credit from 2016, but some elements could slip to 2020. For the New Forest, it was anticipated that up to 10,000 of the 80,000 households in the District might be affected.

Members expressed their concerns regarding the impact that rent payment arrears could have on the Housing Revenue Account and the Council's finances, and were reassured by the Council's planned approach to managing the changes.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

36. HOMELESSNESS NIGHT SHELTER TASK AND FINISH GROUP (REPORT D).

The Panel considered a progress report from the Homelessness Night Shelter Task & Finish Group.

The Task & Finish Group had held a number of meetings to gain a greater understanding of homelessness legislation and the nature and extent of rough sleeping in the District.

The Group found that there were problems with rough sleeping in the New Forest, but the numbers were not well understood, due to the rural nature of the District.

Whilst there was no direct provision for rough sleepers over the age of 25 in the New Forest, New Forest Night Stop provided free short term emergency accommodation for homeless young people aged 16 – 24, in the homes of trained and approved volunteers around the District.

As the numbers of adult rough sleepers were largely unknown, but the Group considered that they were unlikely to be high enough to warrant the costly provision of a direct access hostel. In examining options for provision of accommodation to over 25's in the Forest, the Group had held discussions with New Forest Night Stop regarding possibly extending their services for adult rough sleepers.

The Task & Finish Group were happy to report that Night Stop had recently been successful in obtaining funding to pilot a 'Night Stop Plus' scheme which would provide accommodation for older rough sleepers. The funding would largely be used for administration and the recruitment of host volunteers. The Task & Finish

Group would monitor the progress of the Night Stop Plus scheme in seeking to reduce the numbers of adult rough sleepers in the New Forest.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That the Task & Finish Group maintain a 'watching brief' of the progress with the Night Stop pilot and report back to the Panel at a later date.

37. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES

The Portfolio Holder for Health & Leisure reported the following: -

- Hampshire County Council would shortly be selling various travellers sites across the County including the site at Marchwood.
- The Health and Leisure Centres were ahead of their targets.
- The Lyndhurst dementia friendly High Street campaign would be launched on 20 February 2014.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Communities reported the following: -

- The Portfolio Holder praised the exemplary work of the Reactive Maintenance and Housing Helpdesk teams during the recent very challenging weather conditions. The Panel requested that their thanks and appreciation be conveyed to all those employees involved.
- The Police Crime Commissioner had invited bids for grant funding based on the key elements of his Commissioning Plan "Towards a Safer Hampshire". It had been indicated that some monies would be made available for the statutory district level Community Safety Partnerships to cover local priorities.
- The Joint Action Group (JAG) continued to work hard on behalf of New Forest residents and businesses to keep crime and anti-social behaviour low. There had been a slight rise in non-dwelling burglary recently which was of concern.
- Hampshire County Council had recently announced that it would cut the numbers of Accredited Community Safety Officers. The implications of this would be assessed by the Portfolio Holder in the coming weeks.
- The Killed and Serious Injured Working Group had met for the first time and would report back to the Panel in due course.
- The Community Safety Partnership had been approached by the Police to review a domestic homicide incident in the District. A decision on whether a full review needed to take place would be made in the next few days.
- The Community Alarms project had progressed well. The Council's control room had been operating a 24-7 service since the beginning of January 2014. The Community Alarms service was due to transfer in-house shortly.

Once these services had bedded in, the rest of the Council's out of hours calls would be transferred to the CCTV and Community Alarm control room. In addition all the CCTV from the Council's Health and Leisure Centres was being brought under the main CCTV maintenance contract for efficiency and data protection control.

- The Council now had 75 families on the local programme for Troubled Families, known in the District as "Supporting Families". The Council had been able to claim a reward grant for 19 of these families as they had returned to employment, or reduced offending.

38. WORK PROGRAMME (REPORT E).

The Panel considered their future work programme as set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the Panel's work programme set out in Appendix 1 to these minutes be agreed.

CHAIRMAN

Attachment: Minute 38 – Appendix 1

Work Programme 2014/15

ITEM	OBJECTIVE	METHOD	TIMING/UPDATE ON PROGRESS
Housing			
Changes to the benefits system/spare room subsidy and universal credit	To examine how the changes to the benefits system/spare room subsidy has impacted on low income families and housing tenants. Same for universal credit.	Possible joint meeting with the Corporate Overview Panel. Initial officer report to Panel then detailed report in 18 months examining universal credit/Task & Finish Group	January 2014 (initial investigation) September 2014 (to examine universal credit)
Empty Homes	To review the number of empty homes within the District and the progress of Housing Officers in bringing them back into use	Report to Panel	June 2014
Tenancy and Allocation Policies	Consider the impact of the policies	Report to Panel	January 2015
Crime and Disorder			
Reoffending Rates in the District	To examine strategies to reduce reoffending rates in the District	Report to Panel	March 2014
Children and Young People			
Child poverty	Determine ways in which the Council could assist the New Forest Local Children's Partnership in supporting its Action Plan.	Scoping exercise at work programme planning workshop	March 2014