

Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Title of Report:	Annual Presentation by the Cabinet Member for Housing	
Report No:	OAS/FH/18/019	
Report to and date:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	12 July 2018
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Sara Mildmay-White Lead Cabinet Member for Housing Tel: 01359 270580 Email: sara.mildmay-white@stedsbc.gov.uk	
Lead officers:	<p>Davina Howes Assistant Director (Families and Communities) Tel: 01284 757070 Email: davina.howes@westsuffolk.gov.uk</p> <p>Christine Brain Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) Tel: 01638 719729 Email: Christine.brain@westsuffolk.gov.uk</p>	
Purpose of report:	<p>As part of the "Challenge" role, Overview and Scrutiny are asked to consider the roles and responsibilities of Cabinet Members. It is part of the Scrutiny role to "challenge" in the form of questions.</p> <p>Therefore, to carry out this constitutional requirement, at every ordinary Overview and Scrutiny meeting at least one Cabinet Member shall attend to give an account of his or her portfolio and answer questions from the Committee.</p>	

Recommendation:		Members of the Committee are asked to question the Lead Cabinet Member for Housing on her portfolio responsibilities, and having considered the information, the Committee may wish to:	
		1) Make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Housing for her consideration; 2) Request further information and / or receive a future update. 3) Take any other appropriate action as necessary.	
Key Decision: <i>(Check the appropriate box and delete all those that do not apply.)</i>		<i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i> Yes, it is a Key Decision - <input type="checkbox"/> No, it is not a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Consultation:		• N/A	
Alternative option(s):		• N/A	
Implications:			
<i>Are there any financial implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any staffing implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any ICT implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any legal and/or policy implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
<i>Are there any equality implications? If yes, please give details</i>		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> •	
Risk/opportunity assessment:		<i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i>	
Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
	Low/Medium/ High*		Low/Medium/ High*
None			
Wards affected:		All	
Background papers:		None	
Documents attached:		None	

1. Key issues and reasons for recommendation

1.1 Background

1.1.1 As part of its "Challenge" role, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider the roles and responsibilities of Cabinet Members. To carry out this constitutional requirement, at every ordinary Overview and Scrutiny meeting at least one Cabinet Member shall be invited to give an account of his or her portfolio and to answer questions from the Committee.

1.1.2 Last year, on 20 July 2017, Councillor Sara Mildmay-White, Lead Cabinet Member for Housing attended this committee and presented a report which summarised the areas of responsibility covered under her portfolio.

1.2 Scrutiny Focus

1.2.1 The scope of this report differs from that of last year as the Cabinet Member has been asked to prepare a report which answers the following specific questions identified by the committee members as being relevant to the housing portfolio:

- 1) **Homelessness:** Building in Newmarket recently purchased by the Council for the homeless:
 - i) What is the cost, long term for the Council apart from the cost of the purchase price?
 - ii) How long will the people who are homeless be able to stay? Is there a time limit?
 - iii) Do they have to pay rent? If so, is this deducted from their benefits? If so, is it paid directly to the Council?
 - iv) What refurbishment, if any has to be done to the property?
- 2) **Homelessness:** What do/can we do about homeless people the council moves into accommodation, who then upset all their neighbours?
 - i) Should they have been accepted for being housed if they are anti-social people?
 - ii) Should the community give them time to settle down? And if so why, and why always the same people in the community?
 - iii) What if housing the one puts two more people on the streets from splitting them up and ruining their lives?
 - iv) Otherwise should we accept some people will live on the streets, and that is actually the best solution, and start making a plan for that?

3) **Homelessness:** From recent press releases the council has been able to obtain additional Government funding to support "homeless person" in our area:

- i) What plans are in place for these funds to be used throughout West Suffolk in order to achieve value for money going forward?
- ii) Will this involve purchasing additional properties? Or improve our existing facilities?

1.3 Response to Key Questions Set out in the Scrutiny Focus

1.3.1 **Homelessness:** Building in Newmarket recently purchased by the Council for the homeless:

1.3.1.1 **What is the cost, long term for the Council apart from the cost of the purchase price?**

There will be some minimal general building maintenance costs for this property. All external maintenance for the whole building sits with the Council. Internal maintenance costs for housing element remain with the Council until an agreement is made with a registered provider. Internal maintenance will be the responsibility of the registered provider as agreed in a lease, or recovered by a service charge. The Council will receive an income from leasing the property to a housing provider which will be used to offset any maintenance costs. At present, the amount of the lease has yet to be agreed with registered providers but we will update members in due course.

1.3.1.2 **How long will the people who are homeless be able to stay? Is there a time limit?**

There is no time limit. How long those who are homeless stay in the property will depend on their needs and how quickly the Housing team can find them alternative long term accommodation.

1.3.1.3 **Do they have to pay rent? If so, is this deducted from their benefits? If so, is it paid directly to the Council?**

They will be required to pay rent to the registered provider leasing the property. The amount will be agreed by the registered provider. Those tenants who are able to access help with their rent due to low income will be able to claim Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing costs which can be paid directly to the registered provider.

1.3.1.4 **What refurbishment, if any has to be done to the property?**

At present, the only identified refurbishment will be the addition of laundry facilities. The Council has no plans to carry out other refurbishments.

1.3.2 **Homelessness:** What do/can we do about homeless people the council moves into accommodation, who then upset all their neighbours?

1.3.2.1

Should they have been accepted for being housed if they are anti-social people?

Neighbour issues can occur regardless of whether the tenant was previously homeless. The Council works with landlords (most of whom are registered providers) to resolve issues and if necessary cases are raised at the Council's multi agency anti-social behaviour meeting in order to agree actions that involve other agencies. This can include additional support or police intervention, for example.

1.3.2.2 **Should the community give them time to settle down? And if so why, and why always the same people in the community?**

We would hope that all residents are given a chance to settle into their homes. Customers come from many backgrounds and some have never had a home of their own therefore they often need to be reminded of the terms of their tenancies and to build life skills, which can take time. I would advise concerned residents to talk with the relevant landlord or the Council in order that the Housing team or other agencies can provide support and guidance.

1.3.2.3 **What if housing the one puts two more people on the streets from splitting them up and ruining their lives?**

Neighbours who have concerns about individuals should, as stated above, liaise with the relevant landlord and raise any concerns with the relevant organisation, including the council.

1.3.2.4 **Otherwise should we accept some people will live on the streets, and that is actually the best solution, and start making a plan for that?**

Some people do make a choice to live in the open, sometimes on the street, and sometimes in parks or woodland. The Council will help and support those who would like our help, at any time. The Housing team make efforts to maintain contact with those who are on the streets and make it clear that help is available, when they are ready. Many people who find themselves on the streets have complex needs and traumatic backgrounds; building trust and confidence takes time. The Housing team do not give up, they just try different tactics to build that trust.

1.3.3 **Homelessness:** From recent press releases the council has been able to obtain additional Government funding to support "homeless people" in our area:

1.3.3.1 **What plans are in place for these funds to be used throughout West Suffolk in order to achieve value for money going forward?**

The Council was awarded the funding for 2018/19 as a result of a robust application to central government. This money will be used to provide support, specifically for rough sleepers, and prevent the first night on the streets. It will also be used to help get people off of the streets as quickly as possible and into suitable accommodation. The funding will provide for five additional posts to support outreach work, including mental health and substance misuse professionals. It also secures ten ring-fenced beds. The bid was agreed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and we will continue to work with them to secure future years funding. The additional posts have been advertised and our aim is to have staff in place for September 2018. We are also developing the necessary service level agreements with the accommodation providers.

The funding was awarded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and we hope that announcements relating to the funding for 2019/20 will be made in the next few weeks.

1.3.3.2 **Will this involve purchasing additional properties? Or improve our existing facilities?**

We will not be purchasing additional properties using the funding awarded by central government. Rather, we have worked with six accommodation providers to secure ring-fenced accommodation for rough sleepers.

1.4 Proposals

1.4.1 That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee ask questions of the Cabinet Member following her update.