

COUNCIL MEETING – 15 APRIL 2014

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

17 March 2014

Present: Councillor Morrall (Chairman), Councillor Carr (Vice Chairman), Councillors Emerson, Harrington, Higgins, B Patel, M Patel, Raymond, Simmons, V Waters and Watts.

Also present: Miss J Thomas (Interim Head of Planning and Local Development), Mrs V Jessop (Principal Housing Manager), Mrs A Wilcox, (Principal Health Protection Manager), Mr J Casserly (Managing Director, Wellingborough Norse), Miss N Holden (General Manager, Wellingborough Norse) and Mrs P Whitworth (Democratic Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED to note that there were no apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note there were no declarations of interest.

3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2014 be confirmed and signed.

4. HOUSING SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT

The annexed circulated report of the Interim Head of Planning and Local Development was received to provide members with an analysis of performance progress for the housing service from April 2013 to January 2014. An outturn figure for April 2012 to March 2013 was also included in the report for comparison purposes.

The report discussed and gave figures for the following areas of the housing service: choice-based lettings ('Keyways') housing register; housing options (provision of assistance and advice to people in housing need); private rented homeless initiative grant scheme; activities to improve the condition of the borough's private sector housing stock; housing development and the provision of new affordable homes; Code for Sustainable Homes assessments; energy performance certificate (EPC) assessments; and level of external and internal telephone calls to the service.

The Principal Housing Manager presented the report, and also gave additional details to members about the housing allocation policy and the availability of affordable rural homes. It was explained that band E was for applicants with a local connection with no housing need, and that there was a need to encourage people in, or connected to, rural settlements to apply for affordable housing through Keyways.

Members congratulated the Principal Housing Manager and her team for a very positive and effective service.

Members then asked for clarification about the definition of homelessness, and whether or not that referred to rough sleepers. The Principal Housing Manager explained that a members' briefing note would soon be issued discussing rough sleepers, and the annual count for the borough suggested there were seven. She clarified that the majority of people presenting as homeless to the service were families or single vulnerable people.

Members also asked if there was a reason that paper applications to the Keyways system had almost doubled in the past year and online applications had decreased. The Principal Housing Manager replied that it was often quicker to send a form out rather than taking an applicant through the process on the phone, and reduced team capacity and the introduction of a new computer system had meant it had been a necessity at times over the past year.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

5. FOOD SAFETY AND HEALTH AND SAFETY ENFORCEMENT SERVICE PLANS

The annexed circulated report of the Interim Head of Planning and Local Development was received to seek council approval for the food safety enforcement service plan, and the health and safety enforcement service plan, both of which identified key service delivery issues and set out objectives for the health protection service for the period 2014-15. The food safety enforcement service plan and the health and safety enforcement plan were both appended to the report.

The Principal Health Protection Manager presented the report and explained that the service plans were a requirement of mandatory guidance issued to local authorities by the Food Standards Agency and the Health and Safety Executive.

Members congratulated the Principal Health Protection Manager and her team for a very positive and effective service.

Members then asked about the reasons for the number of written warnings issued on food safety contraventions having doubled in the last year. The Principal Health Protection Manager said that anecdotal evidence pointed to a decrease in standards in some premises due to the economic downturn. She explained it was possible that some premises would spend money on the front of house aspects of their business but could be more reluctant to commit additional funds to more hidden aspects. She also said that the health protection team was having to start from scratch working with new owners, as there was more turnover in different businesses occupying premises.

R1 RECOMMENDED that the food safety enforcement service plan 2014-15 be adopted.

RESOLVED that the health and safety enforcement service plan 2014-15 be adopted.

6. UPDATE ON PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS: WELLINGBOROUGH NORSE

The annexed circulated report of the Managing Director of Wellingborough Norse was received to provide members with a quarterly update on performance and progress for the period October-December 2013.

The quarterly performance and progress report was appended to the report. The financial information in part five of the appendix was exempt by virtue of paragraph 3 of part 1 of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The chairman informed the committee that as no members of the press or public were present, the report and appendix would be taken in their entirety.

The General Manager of Wellingborough Norse gave members an update on the 'Which Side of the Fence' litter experiment, which had taken place last November in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy. She explained that surveys carried out before and after the experiment – which saw one side of Church Street in the town centre left uncleaned for a weekend – revealed very little change in people's attitudes. She explained that this was probably because 87% of the people surveyed reported they never dropped litter in the first place. She informed members that 41% of people were aware of the experiment, and that survey results confirmed it had made people think more about litter, and made them more aware of the effort and cost of cleaning it up. She explained that even though most people didn't believe the experiment would stop people littering, the high profile of the campaign made it successful and Norse was already working on new campaigns with Keep Britain Tidy to capitalise on that success.

Members then discussed ways that Norse could be more proactive, with particular reference to replacing bin lids and helping local groups organise litter picks. The Managing Director of Wellingborough Norse added that the company was also compiling a list of parish council websites and magazines so that their services could be more proactively publicised, and also that employees were doing more work out in the community to identify issues and solutions.

Members also enquired about the regularity of the cleaning of the A45. The Managing Director explained the challenges and expense of cleaning the side of a high-speed road and confirmed the next clean up was due to take place on 28 April 2014.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 8.15pm.

