

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Community, Environment and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2014

Present: Councillor D Mortimer (Vice Chair as Chair) , and
Councillors Black, Butler, D Mortimer, Mrs Parvin,
Sargeant, Mrs Stockell and Vizzard

13. THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHETHER ALL ITEMS ON THE AGENDA SHOULD BE WEB-CAST

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

14. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

- Councillor Round;
- Councillor Wilson;
- Councillor Joy;
- Councillor Watson; and,
- Councillor Munford.

15. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

- Councillor Black was present as substitute for Councillor Wilson;
- Councillor Butler was present as substitute for Councillor Round; and,
- Councillor Vizzard was present as substitute for Councillor Joy.

16. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES

There were no visiting members present.

17. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures.

18. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

19. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 AUGUST 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 August 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20. ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES BEFORE THE POINT OF CRISIS (UPDATE)

Sarah Robson, Community Partnerships Manager and Sarah Shearsmith, Community Development Team Leader, presented the update to the committee on the recommendations made as a result of the committee's review entitled 'Accessing Mental Health Services Before the Point of Crisis 2013'.

Sarah Robson highlighted the main points to note since the update was published and responded to questions raised by the committee.

The updates and discussion on the recommendations were as follows:

Update and discussion - Review Recommendation 1 (a-d)

Alison Broom, Maidstone Borough Council's Chief Executive and the council's representative on the West Kent Health and Wellbeing Board was championing, on an on-going basis, a single point of access to mental health services.

The Assertive Outreach Service (AOS) provided with several local partner agencies was going well and had been extended to October 2014. Outreach work provided support to clients with finding accommodation and work etc. However, there were some cases where support was provided and the client returned to living on the street because of complex mental health issues. Sarah Robson explained the difficulty was engaging with a wider range of partners to provide the services required to support these clients, such as substance misuse.

Sarah Robson explained two additional police officers had recently taken up their post and staff were engaging with them and sharing the knowledge and information gathered by the service.

The Street Triage service was provided mainly in the town centre where there was easy access to parks and urban areas where drug misuse was greater. However, needles were being found in suburban areas too.

Sarah Robson advised the committee of the many reasons people lived on the streets. The reasons ranged from substance misuse (choosing to fund a habit rather than pay their rent); inability to find accommodation because of no local connection; foreign nationals; choosing it as a lifestyle.

Professional begging was an issue with the street population. This was people who received benefits and begged on the street. Sweeps of the town were being carried out with local police officers to tackle this

problem. The issue was how to instigate sanctions to disrupt this behaviour.

Sarah Robson went on to explain there was a need to engage with and support addicts.

Councillors were encouraged to increase their knowledge and understanding of street populations by getting involved, e.g. working on the Urban Blue bus, attending the Crime and Disorder Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 14 October 2014, where a report on the Street Population would be presented.

The committee was informed there were particular times of the day when the street population was high, e.g. before 8am when people were going to work; when people were coming home from work, and; before and after the opening of the day care centres.

The committee discussed a new piece of work being carried out with people who hoard. The difficulty was hoarders have complex mental health issues but were still deemed to have mental capacity to live independently. This made it difficult to get agencies to engage in supporting people with this issue. Kent County Council were developing a Hoarding Protocol for Kent, but were unable to make other agencies engage with it.

Sarah Robson commented that mental health was the 'golden thread' of the Health Inequalities Action Plan. Other agencies were engaging with this including GPs, Clinical Commissioning Groups, The Community Safety Group, West Kent Health and Wellbeing Board, but there was still more to do in terms of case management.

It was agreed greater clarity was needed on how much of the Section 256 funding was provided to Maidstone Borough Council.

Update and discussion - Review Recommendation 2

Sarah Shearsmith explained a number of issues had been faced with the In the Stone website. The web site provided links for young people to find help and support with mental health issues. The website would be re-launched during September/October 2014. This would be heavily promoted and would be followed by the launch of a new app for mobile phones.

Update and discussion - Review Recommendation 3

Sarah Shearsmith explained the work that had been done with the SAFE project (Suicide Awareness for Everyone). Work had continued, delivering awareness programmes to secondary schools within Maidstone, after further funding was confirmed in April 2014.

Work would continue with the schools using assemblies to raise awareness of where to get help and support. Other activities planned included a

SAFE awareness event on 10 October 2014, to coincide with World Mental Health Day, and training young people as volunteers in Safeguarding and Mental Health Awareness.

Update and discussion - Review Recommendation 4

Sarah Shearsmith advised the committee, as part of the SAFE scheme, a pilot project with Year 7 pupils had been carried out. Pupils had been surveyed at the beginning of term to establish their understanding of mental health and how they were coping with the transition from primary school. The same survey would be carried out after six months to monitor any changes.

Update and discussion - Review Recommendation 5

The draft letter to the Corporate Director of Education at Kent County Council was presented to the committee.

The committee agreed the contents of the letter provided the following was added:

- The full name of the committee to include 'Maidstone Borough Council's' at the beginning;
- A paragraph be added to highlight the issues faced by young people aged 16-16 years old and their transition from children's services to adult services.

The committee discussed dementure and how local businesses could help raise awareness of the condition and provide assistance when necessary rather than calling the police. Ideas discussed included a 'fob' system that helped people identify sufferers and awareness training for staff.

Sarah Shearsmith informed the committee a dementure awareness session held at Maidstone Borough Council could be rolled out to the wider community.

RESOLVED: That:

The current position with regard to the recommendations of the Accessing Mental Health Services Before the Point of Crisis review be noted.

21. REVIEW OF THE EMPTY HOMES PLAN 2013-15

In the absence of an officer the committee agreed to discuss the report.

The council's Empty Homes Plan was adopted in January 2013 and set out three priorities to support empty homes being brought back into use across the borough:

- Priority 1 – Minimise the number of empty homes through the council's interventions;

- Priority 2 – Maximise opportunities for returning homes back into use through initiatives and incentives, and;
- Priority 3 – Maximise the effectiveness of enforcement action to bring empty homes back into use.

The Empty Homes Plan included an action plan to return empty homes back into use. Performance against the action plan was reported as follows:

- Between January 2013 and July 2014 212 empty homes had been returned to use following the council's intervention;
- Between November 2012 and October 2013 statistics showed the number of empty homes across Maidstone reduced by 11% from 1,401 to 1,239;
- The number of long-term empty homes reduced by 1.4% from 420 to 414;
- The number of empty homes across Maidstone as a percentage of the total dwelling stock fell from 2.11% to 1.85%.

During discussion the following questions were raised:

- Would funding beyond 2015 be available to staff the Empty Homes initiative?
- Would the empty homes bought back into use be used as 'windfall' figures to reduce the objectively assessed housing need figure for the Local Plan?

RESOLVED: That,

The Community, Environment and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of the report.

The following questions be send to the Head of Housing and Community Services:

- Would funding beyond 2015 be available to staff the Empty Homes initiative?
- Would the empty homes bought back into use be used as 'windfall' figures to reduce the objectively assessed housing need figure for the Local Plan?

22. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME AND SCRAIP UPDATE

RESOLVED: that,

1. The Private Rented Sector Update report be programmed in for a future meeting;

2. An update report on the second collective switching campaign be presented to the committee at their 10 February 2015 meeting by Programme Manager (Financial Inclusion and Maidstone Families Matter);
3. The CAMHS review topic be replaced with Maternity Services in the Borough (are they working?) Review at the meeting of 9 December 2014;
4. Ann Barnes, Police Crime Commissioner (PCC) and the Borough Commander be invited to the Crime and Disorder meeting scheduled for the 14 October 2014 to provide:
 - An overview of the role of the PCC;
 - An update on performance to date;
 - Outline of the plans for the future;
 - Their views on the Crime and Disorder Overview and Scrutiny Committee and how they can work together in the future.

23. DURATION OF MEETING

6:30pm to 8:35pm