

Nottingham City Council

Housing and City Development Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at Loxley House, Nottingham on 16 October 2023
from 10.00 am - 12.09 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Sam Harris (Chair)
Councillor Sarita-Marie Rehman-Wall
(Vice Chair)
Councillor Kevin Clarke
Councillor Neghat Khan
Councillor AJ Matsiko
Councillor Michael Savage
Councillor Adele Williams

Absent

Councillor Nadia Farhat

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor Jay Hayes	- Portfolio Holder for Housing
Jane Garrard	- Senior Governance Officer
Amy Goulden	- Head of Community Safety
Kevin Lowry	- Director of Housing
Adrian Mann	- Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Sajeeda Rose	- Corporate Director for Growth and City Development
Phil Wye	- Governance Officer

10 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Nadia Farhat – work commitments

11 Declarations of Interests

None.

12 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

13 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

Councillor Jay Hayes, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Sajeeda Rose, Corporate Director for Growth and City Development, Kevin Lowry, Director for Housing, and Amy Goulden, Head of Community Safety, presented the report and delivered a presentation outlining the current situation in relation to homelessness and rough sleeping in Nottingham. The following information was highlighted:

National position

- (a) nationally, the number of Statutory Homeless cases that are successfully accommodated at the end of prevention duty is 45%, which is the lowest since 2018. At the end of 2022 100,000 households were in temporary accommodation;
- (b) private rents increased by 5.1% in 2022, which is the highest in year increase since 2016, and in the first quarter of 2023 only 5% of properties in the private rented sector (PRS) were affordable at Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates. Low income households face a £372 per month deficit between their rent and LHA;
- (c) the National Housing Federation estimates 8.5 million people have an unmet housing need nationally. Bed and Breakfast and Hotel use has increased 5 fold since 2009, and 1 in 100 households in England are experiencing acute homeless need due to freezes on Housing Benefit, dwindling social housing supply and a general lack of affordable homes. 88% of councils reported an increase in cases evicted from PRS with 93% expecting a deterioration in the coming year;
- (d) the number of social housing lets has decreased. In Nottingham over 10 years these have reduced from around 2000 to around 1000. This is partly due to reduced affordable housing development, increased mortgage costs and interest rates leading to fewer sales.

Homelessness

- (e) Housing Aid has been rebranded to Housing Solutions, with the emphasis on helping households to find the right option for them. It has undergone significant recruitment, expanding from 42 to 91 full time equivalent staff. Recruitment has been both internal and external, and has resulted in more managerial capacity. All staff have received relevant training, and partnership working is being maximised. The current transformation work planned within Housing Solutions is expected to be fully implemented from April 2024, and is intended to achieve ongoing cost savings;
- (f) best use of the Council's housing stock is being managed, incentivising people to downsize. Capacity for additional new build property is always looked at, but the number of homes being bought under the right to buy scheme means that it will always remain a struggle to keep up. When people are identified as having local connections elsewhere than Nottingham, they are referred to other areas.

During the discussion and in response to questions from the Committee, the following points were raised:

- (g) an Empty Homes Officer oversaw the number of properties that were empty to bring them back into use, but it was not possible to sustain this post in the context of needing to achieve cost savings. However, work is still underway to ensure that empty homes are brought back into use in a timely manner;
- (h) the number of people on the waiting list for social housing is extremely high Those that are homeless will be prioritised for a property, but the 'hidden homeless' who may be sofa surfing could have a long time to wait. There has been ongoing work to revisit the allocation policy so that these people have more chance of gaining a

property and, in particular, to ensure that people do not refuse temporary accommodation in the belief that they will be offered permanent accommodation more quickly if they are sleeping rough;

- (i) the Council had a policy to not house families in high-rise flats. This has now been changed so that families can be housed more quickly, but is used as a temporary arrangement and used sparingly;
- (j) the communication strategy is critical so that citizens know where to go for advice and this works across the other workstreams within Housing Solutions;
- (k) the Committee suggested that Council officers at food banks for citizens to approach for advice could be a good way to contact the wider community and identify those at risk at an earlier stage to help prevent homelessness;
- (l) the Council is aiming towards the elimination of the use of nightly temporary accommodation such as hotels and bed and breakfasts by 2026-27. The amount of legitimate temporary accommodation has been increased, which is better for budgets but also better for households and families;
- (m) the Council is now able to keep receipts from the sale of properties through the Right to Buy programme. However, these homes are sold at a discount and often have debts associated with them so this is not enough to build a replacement property. There is also the difficulty of finding sites and the increasing costs of construction. There is some grant funding available for new build property, but this comes with conditions and usually requires match funding;
- (n) there is an alignment between housing need and planning. The Council has little power to make private developers build their approved schemes to completion and avoid land banking. Housing trade bodies are encouraging the Government to adopt a 'use it or lose it' policy. The Council has participated in the national review of the Government approach to supported housing;
- (o) as the homelessness position is so significant the Council needs need to elevate the involvement of charities and partners and emphasise the challenge to support citizens.

Rough Sleeping

Kevin Lowry, Director for Housing, continued the presentation and highlighted the following:

- (p) rough sleeping has increased by 26% in the last 12 months, with 15% of rough sleepers being women. Increasingly, people who have options to be housed continue to sleep rough due to mental health issues or substance abuse;
- (q) monitoring has been enhanced, including a new workbook providing detailed information about the individuals and their circumstances in the days following the monthly count, and a multi-agency meeting to discuss the plans;

- (r) there is going to be a renewed focus on the activity of the street outreach team, including ensuring the specific targeting of people who are housed and new rough sleepers. Services are being mobilised, including a 10-bed women's service and a 20-bed hub;
- (s) a series of joint operations (including Police, Community Protection, and the Street Outreach and Substance Misuse teams) will be taking place. The focus will be around those not engaging with support from services and hotspot areas for drinking and drug taking;
- (t) planning for winter is underway, with a planned 'sit-up service'. Collectively with partners, 35 emergency bed spaces will be provided. In addition to this, the Emmanuel House winter shelter will be running from the University of Nottingham campus, which will add another 27 bed spaces. Out of city cases will be provided with one night's accommodation only;
- (u) the Home Office has changed its policy in relation to the housing of newly recognised refugees and survivors of trafficking, now giving a 7-day 'notice to quit' from Home Office accommodation, when 28 days' notice had been given previously. This is resulting in an increase in people at risk of homelessness and presentation to the Council for support, leading to extra pressures and costs on the service. The Council has made strong representations to the Home Office that this process is increasing the burden on local services and is insufficiently supported.

During the discussion and in response to questions from the Committee, the following points were raised:

- (v) rough sleeping increases the risk of criminal or sexual exploitation, and modern slavery, so these people are very vulnerable and in need of close support;
- (w) the re-homing of Ukrainian refugees is ongoing, and is largely based on goodwill and housing in spare rooms. A number have moved into PRS homes, but this is a complicated transition managed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. There is an expectation that the funding will finish in March 2024;
- (x) if somebody refuses to engage in entering suitable accommodation, particularly during the winter period, the Council will persist and continue to make approaches, identifying the multiple needs that people may have. The Police and Community Protection do have some powers to move people on, sometimes to other cities, and a judgement call must be made as to whether this is the best approach;
- (y) the 5 'sit-up' centres are designed to be an acceptable alternative to traditional accommodation, where people can retain their social connections and avoid rough sleeping in the cold winter weather;
- (z) partner organisations providing services commissioned by the Council all go through the Council's compliant procurement route, looking at cost per unit and the cost to providers of providing the service, and regular work is carried out to ensure value for money in commissioning;

- (aa) if a Nottingham citizen is released from prison it is the duty of the Council to secure suitable accommodation. The Council is often given very little advance notice of releases, so this can also lead to pressure on the service .

Resolved

1) to request further information on:

- a) the number of individuals and families presenting to Housing Solutions as being at risk of homelessness due to being served a Section 21 eviction notice in relation to their private rented accommodation;**
- b) the current levels of empty social housing and how quickly these void properties are re-tenanted;**
- c) the level of referrals made to Adult Social Care where additional service requirements need to be met to help people previously sleeping rough to stay in accommodation (such as Supported Living arrangements); and**
- d) the recent levels and trends of enforcement action undertaken by the Police and Community Protection in relation to rough sleepers;**

2) to request written updates on:

- a) the implementation of the proposed transformation work within Housing Solutions for April 2024;**
- b) the outcomes of this transformation work; and**
- c) the progress made towards achieving the ending of the need to use one-off night-time accommodation by 2026-27;**

3) to recommend that:

- a) all possible steps are taken to engage with both the Home Office and the Probation Service to seek to receive viable advance notice of upcoming evictions and releases, so that support can be provided in an effective and timely way; and**
- b) the Portfolio Holder for Housing gives consideration to how the Council and its partners could engage with these Government departments at a national level in relation to the impact of their current eviction/release processes on the ability of Local Authorities to discharge their statutory duties for the prevention and relief of homelessness in an effective way.**

4) to recommend that:

- a) partnership work is progressed with other local Councils both on where temporary accommodation can be provided effectively and in supporting refugees/asylum seekers to present for housing support within the right local authority area; and**
- b) consideration is given to what partnership working opportunities in relation to addressing homelessness and rough sleeping might arise as a result of the establishment of the proposed Combined County Authority;**

- 5) to recommend that appropriate steps are taken to ensure an effective communications campaign at the community level so that:**
- a) people at risk of homelessness are aware of the Housing Solutions support offer; and**
 - b) winter sit-up services for rough sleepers are as known about and as welcoming as possible.**
- 6) to recommend that all appropriate steps are taken with partners to ensure the safety of rough sleepers, prioritise support effectively, provide appropriate refuges and combat exploitation.**

14 Work Programme

The Committee noted the work programme