

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Social Mobility Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday, 13 June 2018 at 6.00 pm

Councillors Present:

K Sudan (Chair)

M L Ayling, T G Belben, R S Fiveash and K L Jaggard

Officers Present:

Karen Dodds	Head of Crawley Homes
Heather Girling	Democratic Services Officer
Chris Harris	Head of Community Services
Karen Hayes	Head of Finance, Revenues and Benefits

Apologies for Absence:

Councillors I T Irvine and L Vitler

1. Disclosures of Interest & Whipping Declarations

No disclosures or whipping declarations were made.

2. Minutes

The Chair welcomed members of the public and then the minutes of the meeting of the Social Mobility Scrutiny Panel held on 17 April 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Witness Sessions

The Chair provided some background information on the Panel. It would be important to ascertain findings in a meaningful way, documenting individual "life journeys" indicating turning points (positive or negative) which Members could ascertain could have made a difference. Some Members believed that 'life chances' referred to fulfilling potential and included ensuring everyone was given a chance to fulfil their aspirations and ambitions.

Members felt it may be beneficial to obtain a cross-section of views from individuals and Open House was suggested as a possibility together with other sources.

It was recognised the Panel would need to focus on areas where the Council had power and influence going forward.

Witnesses were asked to offer views on identifying areas of housing provision, housing options and challenges in terms of providing support together with any alternative ways of working and views on Social Mobility in relation to housing provision.

The Head of Crawley Homes and the Head of Finance, Revenues and Benefits (CBC) updated the Panel on various aspects including:

- Data was provided with reference to lettings, rentals together with recent benefits figures.
- The demand for affordable rented housing outweighs supply and the Council provides help in accessing and sustaining private rented accommodation through the Crawley Deposit Service.
- It was recognised that shared accommodation within HMOs makes an important contribution to meeting housing need particularly for the under 35 age group. Historically mandatory licensing covered three storey HMOs with 5 or more occupants forming two or more households. From 1 October 2018 mandatory licensing will be extended to include all HMOs with 5 or more occupants forming two or more households. This will give the Council more opportunities to work with private sector landlords in improving standards within the sector.
- The Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018. This included providing a personalised housing plan tailored to include specific, personalised housing advice, practical information and support in following up on options to secure accommodation and prevent homelessness.
- Promoting home ownership for first time buyers remained a Government priority. However a significant proportion of the take-up of schemes such as Help to Buy was from those who would have bought anyway but have used the scheme to access either a better property or one in a better location. The Council seeks to ensure that the take up of low cost home ownership opportunities within the borough is restricted to those with a local connection.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the possibility that social housing grouping and tenure mix may have a negative effect as there would be a lack of mix within neighbourhoods.
- Acknowledged that at times there were difficulties engaging with relevant agencies particularly mental health services.
- Recognition that there was a good approach already in operation between balancing needs and constraints, under challenging circumstances.

RESOLVED

That Panel Members thanked both the Head of Crawley Homes and the Head of Finance, Revenues and Benefits for their attendance and contribution.

4. General Updates & Actions for Next Meeting

The Chair updated Panel Members on work that had been recently undertaken:

- Invites had been issued to Councillor Burrett (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) and Deborah Myers (Director of Education & Skills) – WSCC. As yet confirmation for that date had not been received from either party and the Chair agreed that this would be followed up as a matter of priority. An alternative date or witness invite was proposed (Avril Wilson, Executive Director Children, Adults, Families, Health & Education).
- Communication had not been made with Head Teachers to request attendance at the education establishment to discuss the provision of initiatives, support and challenges. However WSCC is currently consulting on a new Draft School

Effectiveness Strategy and seeking views from everyone that is involved in education provision across West Sussex. The Chair therefore suggested contacting Head Teachers to seek views on the draft strategy.

Following the comprehensive witness sessions the following actions points were agreed:

RESOLVED

1. That the Chair confirm the witness sessions with the following:
 - Councillor Burrett (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills) and Deborah Myers (Director of Education & Skills) – WSCC (or seek alternative)
2. That the Chair write to Head Teachers to seek views on the Draft School Effectiveness Strategy 2018-2022.
3. That Panel Members document any “life chance” or “life journey” stories.
4. That Panel Members identify a clear set of questions to ask representatives attending witness sessions – 23 July 2018 and 11 September 2018.
5. That an approach be established for Community voluntary group(s) involvement.

5. Recommendations

Following the witness sessions and the action points above, it was agreed that the following be determined for possible inclusion in the draft report.

RESOLVED

1. That consideration be given to a 'tenure blind' approach to design wherever possible.
2. That a priority action list be drafted documenting specific information required by CBC to inform a better response and liaison from other agencies. This would be in order to engage with relevant agencies particularly mental health services.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Social Mobility Scrutiny Panel concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.07pm

**K Sudan
(Chair)**