

HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Remote meeting held on 10th November, 2021.

The Committee agenda is available [here](#).

The Meeting recording is available [here](#).

Present: Councillor A.M. Collins (Chair); Councillor. J. Aviet (Vice-Chair); Councillors B.E. Brooks, C.A. Cave, S.M. Hanks, R. Nugent-Finn, A.C. Parker and S.D. Perkes.

Also present: Councillor Dr. I.J. Johnson; C. Ireland (Citizens Advice Cardiff and Vale Representative), W. Hennessy and H. Smith (Representatives from Tenant Working Group / Panel).

529 ANNOUNCEMENT –

Prior to the commencement of the business of the Committee, the Chairman read the following statement: “May I remind everyone present that the meeting will be live streamed as well as recorded via the internet and this recording archived for future viewing”.

530 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE –

These were received from Councillors J.C. Bird and L.O. Rowlands; G. Doyle and V. John (Tenant Working Group / Panel Representatives).

531 MINUTES –

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 13th October, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

532 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST –

No declarations were received.

533 PRESENTATION – COMMUNITY INVESTMENT STRATEGY –

The presentation on the Community Investment Strategy was given by the Operational Manager, Public Sector Housing in conjunction with the Council’s Digital Engagement and Volunteering Officer, the Youth Worker in Charge of the Inspire2Achieve / Inspire2Work Project and the FSF (Finances Skills and Futures) Project Co-ordinator. The key points raised were:

- Community Investment, the core focus was on improving tenants' lives and to build stronger communities. There was a need to look at not just the physical, 'bricks and mortar' aspects of improving housing for tenants but also the need to improve and invest in the social fabric as well ('the people behind the front doors');
- Due to the above, a dedicated Community Investment Team had been created several years ago (2015) by the Council, which had subsequently expanded; coupled with this, a Community Investment Strategy had been launched in 2016 which had made significant progress in addressing the community investment focus and increasing funding, as well as expanding its role;
- The Council had an opportunity to pause and reflect on what had been achieved within the existing strategy in order to identify best practice and key lessons, as well feeding these into the new Community Investment Strategy currently being drafted;
- The team were also taking a more area-based approach such as at St. Lukes Avenue in Penarth, where there were number of initiatives being undertaken, including a 'food pod' scheme;
- Firstly, concerning the 'Opportunity Knocks' project:
 - Set up in 2016/17, consisting of a partnership between the Inspire to Work scheme, Vale Homes and Newydd Housing (later, also including Adult Learning Wales) in order to support young people and adults into employment (from pre-employment support through to training in relevant skills or qualifications and opportunities to gain experience within the workplace) with a pooled budget, and representatives from each part of the combined team providing various facets of support i.e. working face to face with young people and adults within the community, preparing training events and organising logistics as well as procuring outside training resources;
 - The Project worked very well, with strong cross partnership links and collaboration, as well as working closely with Third Sector organisations in order to support clients;
 - All residents within the Vale of Glamorgan could apply for this project, but there was a particular focus on the housing side with tenants in social housing through the partnership with Newydd Housing and Vale Homes;
 - Primarily referrals to this project came via the staff team, but other organisations could also refer in for support for people;
 - The project delivered a wide variety of qualifications, experience courses and training, based on a quarterly timetable which was informed by feedback received from service users and external agencies i.e. the Job Centre and on local employment trends identified, such as courses on HGV driving and social care due to demands there. Training included Security (SIA licence), Information Technology, food safety, health and safety, child / vulnerable adult protection, CSCS (construction industry) through to more specialist training like forklift driving for warehouse work;
 - The project supported clients into work experience and apprenticeships in collaboration with local businesses and building projects, as well as

- ‘try a trade’ days to try out various areas in construction for clients to find the right job ‘fit’;
 - Job clubs were also offered and had been successful in getting service users to improve their CV writing and interview skills;
 - More informal training was also offered on confidence building, overcoming anxiety, developing communication skills as well as being incorporated into more mainstream courses;
 - In terms of achievements, data from 2019/20 listed a number of positive outcomes, such as 140 residents had been supported via the Vale Employability Road shows and 60 residents had been helped with CVs and interview skills as part of pre-employment training, as well as the project helping to create a number of apprenticeships / work placements within the Council and 369 weeks’ worth of training via the Council’s housing development programme;
 - A case study was provided which illustrated the help given and the success that could be achieved through the project in helping a young person facing a number of challenges and needs in getting the relevant qualifications and work placement / apprenticeship within the building sector.
- Regarding the Finance, Skills and Futures (FSF) project, this:
 - Ran alongside with Opportunity Knocks, was funded by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and received referrals from Inspire to Work, Money Advice and Atal Y Fro on managing finances (including matters relating to Universal Credit claims), developing skills and training for securing future employment;
 - It provided an adaptable, gradual, sustainable and holistic approach or ‘journey’ around financial support for clients referred to them and then if required looked at their clients’ future needs or aspirations i.e. improving clients’ skills for employment or volunteering and related areas such as helping them to handle anxiety due to financial issues or gaps in skills, with some clients simply ‘dipping in’ through to others needing closer, more intensive forms of support;
 - The FSF had, within 8 months of the project starting, already met its 12-month target regarding the number of clients with 10% per cent of clients so far having found employment and 3% having found volunteering roles;
 - Two case studies were provided, illustrating the work done by the FSF Officer in helping a person deal with their issues with anxiety, leading them to overcome this and to engage in volunteer work. FSF had helped another person deal with debt, which then progressed to building their skills and employability leading them to gain employment within the Council. Their journey had also illustrated the need for FSF to carry on supporting people even once they had gained employment due to needing support on transitioning from benefits to employment;
 - The FSF Project Co-ordinator would share the FSF referral form with the Committee as anyone could refer people to FSF who were struggling with Universal Credit, etc.
- The Timebanking programme was also outlined:
 - The programme had received funding from Public Health Wales / Public Service Board in order to expand the Timebanking programme.

- This was a recognition scheme for volunteers who received ‘credits’ in order to use for a range of activities across the Vale and the country;
- Tempo ran the scheme, which was funded by the Welsh Government, so currently the credits did not cost the Council as they previously had done so;
- Partners had also been brought onboard with the Timebanking programme such as Benthgy, and their ‘Library of Things’ where people could borrow items at a low cost, such as garden, gym and DIY equipment. Their shop in Barry was funded via the Council’s Timebanking team and was based within the Awesome Wales Zero Waste shop and would also be using e-vehicles going forward in order to help deliver items. They were currently looking for volunteers (a Project Support Officer was currently utilised) and if Members wanted further details on volunteering these could be provided and time credits would also be provided;
- The team worked with Vale Plus and schools around delivering time credits whilst ensuring volunteering was at the forefront within these organisations as well as assisting the Digital Champions (a Vale Homes supported initiative) by providing volunteers to help the project and support Council tenants and initiatives such as litter picking;
- The ultimate aim of the programme was to end social isolation and to reach and enlist people who would not normally volunteer;
- A case study was cited, illustrating the work done by the team in helping residents ending their social isolation by providing suitable projects to build up their confidence and skills.
- Finally, the work around the ‘Clean Slate’ project was detailed:
 - This was quite a broad project and approach to an estate (St. Luke’s in Penarth) within the Vale with significant anti-social behaviour issues i.e. fly-tipping and funded through various bodies (i.e. Welsh Government, Keep Wales Tidy and the community budget award) as well as helping tenants or residents receiving Universal Credit (UC);
 - The estate would be helped in the following areas:
 - Better connected – working with local people to get better digital connectivity and to get online via the Digital Champions and installing Wi-Fi within the existing structures there;
 - Cleaner – installation of wooden pallet boxes so that residents could put their bins and recycling in these, thereby removing litter and mess within the estate as much as possible, as well as providing advice to residents on recycling waste, etc;
 - Greener – funding had been secured via Keep Wales Tidy, to deliver community garden and green spaces, over the next few years with the local community helping with these activities;
 - Healthier – delivery of a ‘Food Pod’, a ‘pay as you can afford’ shop (open between 2-4pm Monday and Friday) within the area helping to feed the local and wider community struggling to feed themselves or their families, which received donations via Fair Share, local supermarkets as well as the Salvation Army. Toiletries and other non-food items were also provided. Funding for a second pod had also been provided, in order to move the current pod to a new location and using the old one for residents

and local community activities and training (looking to get this completed by Christmas 2021).

- The Operational Manager, Public Sector Housing, added that a new Community Investment Strategy was currently being developed for the next five years in consultation with staff and partners in order to update this. This would also be brought back to the Committee at a later date for consideration.

Following the Officers' presentation, the subsequent questions and comments were raised by the Committee:

- The Chair asked the following:
 - Regarding the funding for Opportunity Knocks, it was explained that contributions, either financial or time / resourcing, were made by Inspire to Work, Vale Homes, Newydd Housing and Adult Learning Wales. A breakdown of the contributions / funding would be provided to the Committee.
 - On waiting lists, it was confirmed there were no waiting lists as such, although previous lockdowns due to the pandemic had caused short term backlogs which had been quickly cleared. Courses could be set up once there was sufficient client demand or on a more individual, bespoke basis.
 - On instances where the Opportunity Knocks approach had not worked, the project had had a few instances where clients had strong internal barriers to progressing within the project or had to return to prison or had disengaged for other reasons; however, the project maintained an 'open door' policy where such individuals could always re-join.
- Councillor Nugent-Finn asked the following:
 - On collaboration with Kickstart, the project did provide positions for young people at Kickstart such as catering, food hygiene and First Aid courses and supporting them to apply for Kickstart positions, as well as covering the first couple weeks of travel on any follow up placements.
 - On referrals, it was confirmed that anyone could be referred to Opportunity Knocks by any person. The project was also looking to set up a single, 'go to' web page on the Council's website that people could access for training, other related activities and providers that Opportunity Knocks were involved in.
 - On encouraging clients or service users of the project to go into occupations where there were major staff shortages, such as social care, the project and the wider Housing team had been involved with recruitment drives for social carers, etc. but it was a challenge to engage clients into entering such professions due to pay and the nature of the work.
 - Regarding the project working with Pobl, some work had already been done with the group (such as referrals from Pobl to FSF), and this would potentially grow once Pobl became more established within the Vale.
 - Finally, about the location of the current Food Pod, it was explained that it was 'needs led' i.e. a location that may have traditionally felt overlooked, struggling with deprivation and away from areas already supported and where such a service would make a positive difference;

St Luke's already had a structure in place that could be utilised and thereby trial the Food Pod effectively; similar models were also looking to be set up elsewhere, such as in the Buttrills.

- Councillor Perkes asked:
 - On tracking users of Opportunity Knocks who did not complete the project or go on to employment, it was explained that the project did a six monthly follow up on those who entered employment in order to see if they needed further support; for those who dropped out or left before completing the courses, etc., contact would be made to see why they had dropped out or left prematurely and if any additional help to break down such barriers could be provided.
 - On the provision of confidence building for people referred to the project, external providers had been used for wellbeing and confidence building, with FSF also involved in getting additional providers to provide monthly workshops tailored to clients' needs such as confidence and anxiety on a small group or one-to-one basis.
 - Regarding any connections that Opportunity Knocks had with larger employers such as British Gas, it was explained that the main need or demand was from within the construction industry and organisations linked to the local 21st Century Schools and housing associations. For other large organisations and employers, this may require service users to travel outside of the Vale to areas such as Cardiff or Newport, which may not be practical or affordable for them.
- On Councillor Aviet's query on restarting face to face volunteering activities with Timebanking and obtaining time credits, the Digital Engagement and Volunteering Officer stated that he could assist with this.
- Regarding Councillor Brook's query on extra support for residents around the pressures arising during Winter and Christmas i.e. increased spending and rising energy bills, it was explained that the Money Advice Team and the Citizens Advice Bureau could help Council and private tenants to maximise their incomes and lower expenditures. The Council were pursuing a supportive approach for tenants with rent arrears, with taking court action, etc. being a method of last resort.
- A Tenant Representative asked about a volunteer Timebanking group that were waiting on time credits and the different approaches that the Vale and Cardiff had. The Digital Engagement and Volunteering Officer stated he would look into this (as the Cardiff and the Vale used different franchises for Timebanking) and respond to the representative directly.
- The Head of Housing and Building Services finally wished to add:
 - Regarding funding for community investment, an amount of money was received for community benefits and fed into the relevant areas.
 - Concerning Council funding for the Food Pod, this had been provided in order to pilot the scheme but ultimately it was envisioned this would become self-sustaining, with contributions eventually coming from voluntary groups who could access grant funding, which could then be replicated elsewhere within the Vale with other local or voluntary groups. The Council would then take on a more advisory, 'signposting' role in order to help develop Food Pods elsewhere.

- Opportunity Knocks and FSF support and training would also help harder to reach groups of young people such as within the Youth Offending Service or leaving care.

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the presentation on the Community Investment Strategy be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the presentation and discussions at the meeting.

534 UPDATE ON THE COMMUNITY SAFETY ACTION PLAN (DEH) –

The report, presented by the Community Safety Policy Manager, shared progress from the Safer Vale Strategy Action Plan for the first two quarters of 2021-2022:

- The Action Plan was split into two areas, ongoing actions (i.e. work that was carried out as part of the ongoing work of the partnership such as Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Referrals) and standalone actions (such as singular pieces of work identified as needed by the strategy);
- The Action Plan was driven by the Safer Vale Operational Group and ultimately governed by the Safer Vale Strategic Group;
- The Safer Vale Partnership Action Plan continued to be a working, 'live', document and a standing agenda item for the Safer Vale Operational Group. It would therefore be kept under constant review and would be updated as required i.e. actions have been added around the Needle and Syringe Programme Review recently undertaken, as well as the needs already identified through the partnership strategy 2020-23;
- The Action Plan relates directly to the Strategy's four priority areas:
 - Prevent and reduce crime and disorder
 - Engage
 - Safeguard
 - Work together
- Despite ongoing challenges presented by staff absence during Covid and increased workloads, as well as changing working practices, the partnership successfully advanced in its work against the Strategy, as demonstrated during the first two quarters of 2021-2022, where 81% of 'standalone' actions outlined in the Partnership's Action Plan received a Green performance rating;
- In terms of the Red performance rating, this related to analysing the membership of the Community Groups in the Vale, notably Neighbourhood Watch, in order to see if there were certain characteristics or parts of the community who were not represented within the groups. This was intended to help inform any service redesign or future recruitment campaigns for inclusivity. This action was being carried forward by the Chair of Neighbourhood Watch who would be migrating Neighbourhood Watch membership data on to the new national website, in order for the relevant analysis to take place;
- Notable changes to the Partnership's activity during the reporting period included:

- The reduction of ASB incidents being processed by the Community Safety Team (CST), due to the Joint Enforcement Team (JET) having taken over all Covid-19 related referrals and incidents (i.e. travel and other Covid related areas of enforcement). Due to this CST could focus on non-Covid, 'business as usual' types of ASB referrals within the Vale;
- There was an increase in safeguarding referrals during the pandemic. This would be monitored through a task and finish group which had been established to look at the provision of services available for children who were at risk of safeguarding issues which included looking into the increase in violence among children in a school setting. After drilling down on the figures available for this (from the Violence Prevention Unit), it was found that figures for the Vale had fluctuated from 4-6 incidents over the most recent period. This was a small increase on relatively small numbers of such incidents, but work would continue to be done with safeguarding teams in order to evaluate and to monitor if children were being exposed to violence due to the pandemic;
- The creation of a new home starter pack so that all new tenants would receive information relating to community safety and how to navigate the various systems involved within community safety in the Vale;
- A drive to recruit domestic abuse champions within partner agency organisations and departments within the Council in order to embed the understanding of domestic abuse throughout organisations within the Vale;
- Review of the Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA) provision, which had also driven additional funding for increased numbers of IDVAs to be utilised within the Vale;
- New data sheets had been created to inform housing colleagues of important information relating to domestic abuse occurring within their housing stock. This information was vital in supporting housing to support some of their more vulnerable tenants. The Fire and Rescue Service had created an information sheet as well, with key contacts for Community Safety;
- An ASB roadshow was carried out enabling face to face contact with residents, which also allowed for consultation with residents in order to hear about their concerns, particularly after the death of Sarah Everard, and to try to resolve these, such as trying to increase feelings of safety on the streets;
- The increase in the use of deployable cameras (up to 11) which had been extremely useful in areas such as at Kings Square, Barry, in tackling ASB and identifying perpetrators;
- The partnership was working on an 'off the shelf' priority funding list in order to access funding for community safety measures more effectively in future.
- The Head of Housing and Building Services stated a lot of work had been done by CST around data and sharing data on a regional basis and the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner's Office (PCC) had outlined its commitment to helping look at additional resources around data / data sharing in order to secure additional and much needed funding from the Home Office,

etc. Traditionally the Vale of Glamorgan had not been seen as a significant hotspot for crime or ASB in comparison to other areas in South Wales.

Following the Officers' presentation, the subsequent questions and comments were raised by the Committee to the Community Safety Policy Manager:

- On the Chair's questions on deployable cameras, it was explained that deployable cameras were needs assessed by the Safer Vale Partnership, but as a rule were unlikely to be deployed in any given area for longer than a year unless any local ASB had not been fully resolved. The decision regarding where cameras should go would be largely based on ASB and crime data, recorded on South Wales Police systems.
- On Councillor Nugent-Finn's question on collaboration between the Safer Vale Partnership / CST and schools within the Vale, the CST maintained good working links with the Council's Education Department and a lot of work was being undertaken around the Youth Offending Services (YOS), safeguarding and domestic abuse via the Education Department as well.

Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein, subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the progress made against the Safer Vale Partnership Action Plan be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.

535 HOUSING AND BUILDING SERVICES 2021/22 HOUSING IMPROVEMENT WORK (DEH) –

The report, presented by the Head of Housing and Building Services and the Operational Manager, Building Services, brought to the attention of the Committee the proposed investment programme works for the improvement and maintenance of the Council's Housing Stock:

- The Vale of Glamorgan Council was investing approximately £15m in the Council's housing stock, including both new builds and housing improvements to existing homes;
- The Council was looking at a new Housing Investment Programme as part of its annual review of the Vale's 30-year Business Plan. This was in conjunction with looking to make housing more energy efficient from both an affordability and carbon reduction perspective;
- Despite the ongoing pandemic, work on housing improvement and maintenance had continued, such as gas and electrical inspections;
- Many contractors had been furloughed which had reduced work at building sites;

- Although restrictions around the pandemic had eased, there were still concerns about the safety of staff, contractors and residents when doing improvement and other works within people's homes;
- Since the gradual reopening of the economy after the easing of pandemic restrictions, there had been a big draw on materials and supplies, as well as contractors being able to pick and choose where they could work which meant higher costs and that the £15m budget previously referred to would not go as far as expected;
- Cost pressures had seen a 20-30% increase, which had impacted various housing projects and, in some cases, meant re-tendering these;
- Despite these pressures, a number of housing improvements had been achieved or progressed, including fencing and fabric first improvements in order to reduce the carbon footprint of the Vale's housing stock;
- A couple of housing improvement schemes were about to start, probably in early 2022, such as at Severn Avenue and Long Meadow Court.

Committee, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein,

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the proposed investment programme and the difficulties currently being experienced within the construction sector be noted.

Reason for recommendation

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.