

ADULT AND COMMUNITY BASED SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES AND DECISION RECORD

12 MARCH 2021

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and was an online remote meeting in compliance with the Council Procedure Rules Relating to the holding of Remote Meetings and the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

Present:

Councillor: Sue Little (In the Chair)

Councillors: James Brewer, Amy Prince, Carl Richardson and Stephen Thomas.

Also present: Councillor Cameron Stokell as substitute for Councillor Mike Young in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.2.
Councillor Tony Richardson

Officers: Jill Harrison, Director of Adult and Community Based Services
Gemma Ptak, Assistant Director, Preventative and Community Based Services
Sarah Scarr, Heritage and Countryside Manager
Trevor Smith, Head of Strategic Commissioning (Adults)
Leigh Keeble, Head of Community Hubs and Wellbeing
Neil Wilson, Assistant Chief Solicitor
David Cosgrove, Democratic Services Team

20. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barbara Ward, and Mike Young

21. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Carl Richardson and Stephen Thomas declared personal interests.

22. Minutes of the meeting held on

Received.

23. Public Question

The Chair reminded the Committee that Council on 25 February 2021 had amended the remit of the Committee and transferred responsibility for Conservation, Parks and Countryside functions (including allotments) to this Committee. A public question relating to allotments would therefore be considered by this Committee and in accordance with the Constitution, the questioner would be allowed a supplementary question relating to the response received but that no subsequent committee debate would be allowed.

A public question for the Council meeting on 25 February 2021 had been received from Mr Bob Snowdon. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.8, the Managing Director, in consultation with the Chair of Council, considered that the question would be more appropriately referred to the next relevant Policy Committee for answer to be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Protocol for Public Questions at Policy Committee meetings. The question had, therefore, been referred to this meeting of the Adult and Community Based services Committee.

Mr Snowdon's question, as submitted, was as follows and was read out by the Director of Adult and Community Based Services –

Neighbourhood services on 13 March 2020 reported consensus at allotment focus group on changes to rule book. Namely relating to access to sheds. This is untrue. The focus group has neither a constitution, voting process and its members have no powers to represent fellow plot holders.

Secondly. Councillor Tenant has seriously misled both Council and tenants and included a new and illegal rule regarding associations memberships.

Do councillor's Tenant and Little accept they have abused the process of consultation and lied to the neighbourhood services Committee and the allotment focus group.

The Chair responded, stating: -

In response to Mr Snowdon's question, I can confirm that the primary reason for a visit to a site would usually be to check levels of cultivation. Should there be a reasonable reason to look inside a structure, such as concerns about animal welfare, storage of dangerous or flammable liquid, or other breaches of tenancy, the existing Rules of Tenancy allow any officer of the Council, at any time, when directed by the Allotments Service to enter and inspect an allotment to ensure compliance with rules and regulations of tenancy. This includes any buildings on site. Should the tenant not be present on the plot, the officer would give notice to the tenant to attend the plot for the inspection to be carried out, ensuring that the inspection is always undertaken in the presence of the tenant. This procedure was discussed at a meeting of the Allotment Focus Group on 10

December 2019 to clarify the situation, rather than introduce a new practice when visiting sites.

The Focus Group was brought together to represent the views of associations, with the expectation that representatives would feed back to the wider allotment community. It is accepted that there is no voting procedure as part of the current Terms of Reference for the group which were agreed in June 2019. The Terms of Reference state that the Focus Group will, act on an 'advisory basis to assist in the development of certain allotment policies'. Given the scope of the group, whilst it is acknowledged that they do not represent all sites, it is considered that it provided an appropriate sounding board which broadly reflected the allotment community in Hartlepool.

At the meeting of the Neighbourhood Services Committee on 10 December myself and Tenant were present and heard the views of the allotment tenants present at the meeting. This provided an understanding of the situation which could be used in later decision making considering the views of tenants and associations as well as understanding the responsibility as landowner to manage sites in a safe and appropriate manner.

The report that will be presented today proposes that all amendments to the Allotment Rules of Tenancy will be put on hold until a strategy can be developed which will allow a review of the service. This review will include consideration of how the service communicates with tenants, in order to draw in the views of the wider allotment community who may not be reached through the Focus Group.

I do not believe there has been any abuse of the consultation process or any attempt to mislead the Council or Allotment Tenants. I am confident the proposals in the report that will be considered today will enable all tenants to contribute to the development of the Allotment Strategy and I would encourage all tenants to participate in the consultation process. I believe there is great potential for the allotment service to develop further and to make a significant contribution to health and wellbeing in the town and I hope tenants will work positively with the Council to make this happen.

Mr Snowden thanked the Chair for the chance to ask the question and he welcomed the response given and considered that putting the changes on hold to allow consultation with tenants was positive. Mr Snowden did still feel that the intention for seeking the details of associations was not discussed at the focus group and only introduced at the Neighbourhood Services Committee stage but was pleased that the review would relook at all the issues. The Chair confirmed that would be the case and that the consultation would allow all tenants to have their say. Mr Snowden welcomed the consultation and chance for all tenants to contribute.

Decision

That the question and response be noted.

24. Allotment Review Update *(Assistant Director – Preventative and Community Based Services)*

Type of decision

Key decision; General Exception Notice applies.

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the review of the current Allotment Service and to set out future priorities.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Preventative and Community Based Services reported on the recent history in relation to the Allotment Service including a review process which was commenced in 2020 by the Neighbourhood Services Committee. The Conservation, Parks and Countryside functions (including allotments) were transferred to the remit of this Committee by Council at its meeting on 25 February 2021.

The Assistant Director stated that development of a new Allotment Strategy was required to understand future priorities, identify service design and operations and ensure access, inclusion and opportunity for all residents who are interested in being part of the allotment community. Such a strategy would look to focus on the needs of the current user group and wider community that the allotments serve. It will look to evolve service operations, encourage a wider demographic to access allotments within the Borough and to make the service more customer focused. It is hoped that by doing this, the service will be more inclusive and accessible, and create stronger links into communities.

In light of the need for a new Strategy, the Assistant Director stated that the proposed rules changes previously agreed by the Neighbourhood Services Committee would be deferred with no changes being made until 2022 at the earliest and subject to the outcomes of the development of the new strategy.

Consultation and communication with tenants would be a critical part of the ongoing process and a Communication Strategy would be developed to inform the consultation process on the development of the new strategy and also to enable effective two way communication with tenants, partners and associations on a sustained basis.

The Assistant Director hoped that by working with and consulting all allotment tenants, a new strategy for the future of the allotment service could be developed that promoted inclusiveness and access and built

upon the strong promotion of wellbeing allotments brought to tenants and the wider community.

The Chair and Members welcomed the proposed development of a new strategy and the positive outlook the Assistant Director would bring to the service. A Member expressed some concern that there hadn't been any debate around the public question raised earlier and questioned who was going to be involved in the focus group. The Assistant Director indicated that there would not be a focus group representing a small number of views, the aim of the consultation would be to communicate and listen to the views of all allotment holders so the strategy and the operation of the service would have a robust base for the future working in partnership with tenants and associations.

Members requested that periodic update reports on the consultation and the development of the new strategy be brought to future meetings so Members could have an overview of the consultation process and the new strategy. The Assistant Director undertook to bring a report on the proposed consultation plan to the first meeting of the Committee in the new municipal year.

The Director of Adult and Community Based Services stated that while there may be some historic issues and tensions around the operation of the service in the past, this was a new service to the department and this Committee and would be approached in a very positive and inclusive manner with the aim of building good and responsive working relationships with allotment tenants and associations across the town.

The following recommendations were agreed without dissent.

Decision

1. The Committee noted the proposal to develop a new Allotment Strategy which would identify future priorities and service design.
2. That the introduction of changes to the existing allotment rule book be deferred until after the outcome of the review.
3. That a report on the proposed Consultation Process be submitted to the first meeting of the Committee in the new municipal year and be followed by regular updates on the consultation process and the development of the new Allotment Strategy.

25. Care Home Update (*Director of Adult and Community Based Services*)

Type of decision

For information only.

Purpose of report

To provide the Adult and Community Based Services Committee with an update in relation to care home provision for older people, and particularly the effects of the COVID19 pandemic on care home provision in Hartlepool.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Head of Strategic Commissioning (Adults) gave a comprehensive report to the Committee updating Members on –

- Residential Care Homes' occupancy rates.
- Out of Borough Placements
- Covid-19 outbreaks in residential care homes and the supply of PPE. It was highlighted that there had been no new outbreaks for 8 days and no deaths of residential care home residents due to Covid-19 for 11 days.
- Covid-19 testing and vaccinations in residential care homes
- Department support and communications with residential care homes
- Family visiting in residential care homes
- Quality Assurance and Care Quality Commission ratings.
- The management of pressures in residential care homes around staffing and placements due to Covid-19.
- The agreement with a residential care home in Stockton as a designated setting for people being discharged from hospital who have tested positive for Covid-19.

Members welcomed the report and also commented on the reference to 'myth busting' sessions in care homes to encourage the take up of the vaccinations and asked if Members could share in that information. It was indicated that the sessions had been delivered verbally to staff but the Director agreed to share information that was being produced by health partners to promote vaccine uptake.

Members commented that it had been an extremely difficult year for the care home sector and asked that the thanks of all Members be shared with them for the work they had undertaken during the pandemic to protect their residents and staff. The Chair also noted the work of a lot of domestic staff in homes who had had to step up into higher roles during the pandemic due to the pressure on staffing.

A Member expressed concern at the ending of the additional financial support from government. Reference was also made to the forthcoming Government White Paper and it was suggested that a presentation on this be given to the Committee in the new municipal year. A member was also concerned at the situation around respite care which had not been possible during the pandemic placing significant pressures on family carers in particular.

The Director stated that there were regular communications with the care home sector and Members comments would be shared with them. Management and staff in the town's care homes were owed a huge debt of gratitude for their work during the pandemic and the Director was aware they valued the support they received from the Council.

The Director also indicated that the Health and Wellbeing Board would be receiving reports and information on the proposed Government White Paper which would be shared with this Committee. The Director also acknowledged the issues around respite care and confirmed that people were being offered other opportunities to access respite care where possible within the COVID restrictions.

Decision

That the report be noted.

26. Community Hub Strategy (*Assistant Director – Preventative and Community Based Services*)

Type of decision

For information only.

Purpose of report

To present the Committee with a proposal to progress with a Community Hubs Strategy.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Assistant Director, Preventative and Community Based Services reported that despite their closure due to the pandemic, the Community Hubs had remained very active in providing existing and new services to the public in response to the pandemic and also to support people to stay connected and engaged in positive activities and opportunities. This has included:

- Developing and implementing Hartlepool Support Hub providing support to the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV), Critically Vulnerable and Self Isolating.
- Providing a click and collect service from the Mobile Hub and South Hub
- E-books service (with increased stock) via Borrow Box
- Delivering the Summer Reading Challenge with 544 children completing the challenge online.
- Hosting virtual reading groups, maintained our home delivery service to those unable to leave their homes, supported schools and care homes with books and crafting materials.
- Widening the digital offer providing at least one online activity a day and providing some low level exercise opportunities via mobile Motor Med bikes and online chair exercises.

The closures had, however, allowed a period for some reflection on the services provided through the hubs and how they would need to meet the new challenges that local communities would face once lockdown restrictions were eased and normal life started to resume. Feedback on the services provide during lockdown had been very positive and the library digital services, for example, had seen an 800% increase in usage.

The development and publication of a strategy would be well informed and establish the foundations for the long term management and development of the Community Hubs. Consultation would be conducted over the summer period allowing time for anticipated ongoing deployment of services to Covid-19 response and recovery. It was anticipated, therefore, that a completed strategy would not come back to Committee until October 2021 at the earliest for approval.

Members asked for some detailed statistics on the current state of the book stock and the usage of the digital library offer and how that compared with the previous twelve months. The Assistant Director commented that those statistics would be shared with Members. The Director of Adult and Community Based Services commented that while the digital offer had proved very popular, the home library service continued to provide valuable services to people who are housebound, many of whom live alone or have significant health issues.

Members also commented that the review of the strategy for the future of the Community Hubs should include development of the excellent work that had been done during the pandemic on addressing inclusion and tackling the issues of loneliness and isolation in cooperation with partners and the voluntary sector. The Assistant Director stated that the integration with the community and person-centred planning would form a key part of the consultation process.

The Chair and Members commented that staff on the service had adapted to the new ways of working through the pandemic extremely well and should be congratulated for their work. The Director assured Members their comments would be shared with staff. Many services had developed significantly during the past year and the new strategy would look to build those adaptations into the service going forward.

Decision

That the proposal to progress with the development of a Community Hubs Strategy inclusive of future library service be noted.

27. Annual Report of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020 *(Director of Adult and Community Based Services)*

Type of decision

For information only.

Purpose of report

To present to members the Annual Report of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2019/20.

Issue(s) for consideration

The Director of Adult and Community Based Services submitted the annual report of complaints and compliments for adult social care. The Director stated the report had been delayed this year due to the pandemic but would return to its normal schedule next year.

The Chair welcomed the report indicating that while the number of complaints had increased slightly she considered that reflected confidence in the system and how easy the department had made the process. A Member noted the compliments reflected the high quality of the services provided by the Council and how well regarded they were.

The Director thanked Members for their comments and acknowledged that the key to the complaints system was that lessons were learned and shared across services.

Decision

The Committee noted the contents of the Annual Report of Complaints and Compliments 2019/20 and that the report will be published online following the meeting.

28. Any Other Items which the Chairman Considers are Urgent

None.

The Chair noted that as this was the last meeting of the municipal year she wished to record her thanks to Members and officers for their attendance at meetings a support throughout the year.

Councillor Thomas indicated that this would be his last meeting of the Committee before retiring for the Council in May and recorded his thanks to Members and officers for their support during his time as Chair of the Committee and during his time as a Councillor. The Chair stated that Councillor Thomas's expertise and experience would be missed.

The Chair also recorded her thanks to Officers for their support and her thanks to Members.

The meeting concluded at 11.45 am.

**H MARTIN
CHIEF SOLICITOR**

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