

## **PUBLIC**

**MINUTES** of a meeting of the **IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – PLACES** held on 17 November 2021 at County Hall, Matlock.

### **P R E S E N T**

Councillor S Bull (in the Chair)

Councillors N Gourlay, J Nelson, P Niblock, R Redfern and J Siddle.

Also in attendance was Councillors C Hart and C Renwick, C Brailsford and C Henning (Place), A Glover and A Noble (Children's Services) and C Flinton (Commissioning, Communities and Policy)

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors D Collins and D Greenhalgh.

#### **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest

**15/21** **MINUTES** **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22 September 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**16/21** **PUBLIC QUESTIONS** There were no public questions.

**17/21** **DRAFT DOMESTIC ABUSE SUPPORT IN ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY** Councillor Carol Hart was welcomed to the meeting and provided the Committee with a brief introduction to the report. Christine Flinton, Head of Community Safety attended the meeting to provide Members with the details and implications of the draft Strategy.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 had introduced a new statutory duty for upper tier local authorities to provide accommodation-based support for victims of domestic abuse and their families and to develop a strategy outlining its intentions in consultation with partners. The statutory guidance specified that the draft strategy should be published by 26 October 2021 and the final version by 5 January 2022.

Grant funding of £1.47m had been made available to the Council in 2021-22 through the former Ministry of Housing and Local Government to meet the new statutory duty. This funding would continue in subsequent years, but it was not yet known if it would be at the same level.

The draft Strategy covered both County and City and had been informed by a needs assessment which had been conducted with the support of the

Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Governance Board. The needs assessment had a broader focus than accommodation-based support and provided a holistic view of domestic abuse across the County. It had been informed by data from a range of partners and consultation with specialist services providers, professionals and the wider community including survivors of domestic abuse.

The draft Strategy, which was attached at Appendix 2 to the report, had been published on the Safer Derbyshire website on 26 October 2021 to meet the timescales set out in the statutory guidance and prior to publication it had been considered by the Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Governance Board which had representation from County Council departments such as Children's Services, Public Health and Adult Social care, as well as wider stakeholders. Implementation of the Strategy will be supported by a commissioning plan.

The Strategy will need to be agreed by both the County Council and City Council prior to publication. To ensure that the final strategy was published by 5 January 2022, it was proposed that the Cabinet Member for Health and Communities formally agreed the strategy from a County Council perspective. Following publication, work to develop the broader holistic domestic abuse strategy will take place and further reports in progress will be presented to Members in due course.

Councillor Gourlay asked if the Strategy could be updated to reflect the Derbyshire figures from the British Crime Survey rather than the national figures which were currently included. Christine Flinton would look into this matter and provide a response after the meeting.

Alison Glover, Head of Child Protection attended the meeting to inform the Committee of the Achieving Great Futures programme. The programme was about transforming how we supported children, young people and their families to improve outcomes.

A diagnostic had been undertaken in partnership with Newton Europe to identify significant opportunities to further improve the outcomes for children, young people and their families in Derbyshire. Opportunities had been identified which aimed to improve the outcomes for 7,000 vulnerable and disabled children and their families. These workstreams included:

- reducing demand and early intervention
- getting the right placement for children who needed care
- planning permanence outside care
- children in need plan progression
- transitions to adulthood
- transport

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked Christine Flinton and Alison Glover for their most informative presentations.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee (1) notes the new statutory duties imposed on the Council by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 to provide accommodation-based support for victims of domestic abuse and their families and to develop a strategy outlining its intentions in consultation with partners;

(2) notes the development of the draft Derbyshire Domestic Abuse Support in Accommodation Strategy for consultation and its publication on the Safer Derbyshire website on 26 October 2021; and

(3) provides comment on the draft Derbyshire Domestic Abuse Support in Accommodation Strategy, prior to the Strategy being considered by the Cabinet Member for Health and Communities.

**18/21**      **COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE REVIEW** The Chairman welcomed Councillor Carolyn Renwick and Claire Brailsford who were attending the meeting to update Members on the Countryside Service Review following a pause in the work in March 2020 due to Covid-19 and set out the proposed next steps.

In September 2018, a fundamental review of the Countryside Service had commenced. The Review was undertaken in the context of the Council's Enterprising Council Strategy to identify areas of service improvement, consider how the Service could achieve its savings target of £400,000 a year and to make a recommendation on the optimum delivery model going forward. In August 2019, the initial findings were presented, and action was recommended in two key areas:

1) To restructure the Service to relocate the Public Rights of Way functions to Highways and the Access and Greenways team to Sustainable Travel.

2) To progress proposals to create a Public Service Mutual (A Public Service Mutual (PSM), as defined by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, was an organisation which had a) left the public sector; b) continued to deliver public services and aimed to have a positive social impact; and c) had a significant degree of staff influence or control in the way it was run. The PSM would be an independent organisation, created as a charitable company limited by guarantee, with a trading subsidiary carrying out non-primary purpose trading. The PSM would be contracted by the Council for a range of in-scope services) for the Wider Sites and Destination Sites teams of the Countryside Service to a detailed business case stage. The proposals were to create a PSM which would be a charitable organisation, with a trading-arm, that would allow the Service to access more revenue streams and innovate in order to maintain service levels, whilst delivering a revenue saving to the Council.

The relocation of Public Rights of Way and the Access and Greenways Teams (to Network Planning in the Highways Service) were completed in January 2020.

A detailed Business Case for the PSM had been completed between

September 2019 and January 2020. This established that the level of savings that could be achieved would not reach the level of £400,000 per annum and that any significant savings would be based on a series of stretching assumptions. During February and early March 2020, discussions had been ongoing with relevant departments to resolve some outstanding technical considerations (e.g. pensions, legal form and contract value) with the intention of presenting proposals to Cabinet in March/April 2020. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a decision was taken to pause the project for at least 12 months.

Following the creation of Place Department and recruitment of a new Executive Director and Director, the review was re-examined in order to agree a future operating model for the Service and provide certainty for the staff. In this re-examination, two additional factors had been taken into account:

- the impact of Covid-19 and the importance of the Countryside Service (and its assets) to residents and visitors.
- the Council's newly developed Climate Change Strategy and action plan.

The pandemic and lockdown had demonstrated how important open spaces were to the people of Derbyshire – providing many thousands of people with places to exercise and simply leave their houses safely. It had re-asserted the role of the Service and its assets as central to the objectives of the Council. The post-Covid-19 'new normal' was yet to be fully understood and that introduced new risks to any business case, particularly one involving a complex outsourcing. There may be opportunities out of the Covid-19 crisis that a more dynamic and nimbler independent organisation could take advantage of. However, increased uncertainty presented a potential risk to both the PSM and the Council.

As outlined, the purpose of the review was to ensure that the Service maximised its impact, delivered areas of improvement and was financially sustainable with an optimum delivery model going forward. Whilst these drivers remained, some key considerations had altered since the beginning of the Review and raised concerns and put into question the appropriateness of externalisation of the Countryside Service.

On this basis, it was being proposed that officers be authorised to develop a new business plan with an updated in-house delivery model for the Countryside Service. This business plan would reappraise currently paused investment opportunities, identify further invest to save opportunities and set out a forward vision for a remodelled in-house Service. This could include creation of a local authority trading company or concessionary arrangements for potentially commercial assets.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked Councillor Carolyn Renwick, Claire Brailsford and Chris Henning for their comprehensive update.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee supports that: (1) the Countryside Service was a critical part of the County Council's offer to residents and visitors; and central to Derbyshire's climate change agenda;

(2) the Service remains managed within the County Council, albeit with development of strong relationships with partners; and

(3) the Service draws up a new commercially focused business plan, supported with new staff to ensure that it continues to meet the Council's needs in future, with implementation in the next financial year.

**19/21**      **FUTURE HIGHWAYS MODEL SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP** A meeting of the working group had been arranged for 14 December 2021 commencing at 10.00am and the Chairman was keen for the group to have cross-party representation. The following Members had expressed an interest in being involved in the working group: Councillors N Gourlay, J Nelson, P Niblock, R Redfern and J Siddle. Any further requests could be submitted to Roz Savage.

Meeting finished: 4.06pm



