

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Morpeth on Friday, 30 August 2019 at 11.00 a.m.

PRESENT

Councillor J. Reid
(Chairman, in the Chair)

COUNCILLORS

Cartie, E.
Dunbar, C.
Dunn, E.

Gallacher, B.
Gibson, R.
Pattison, W.

CABINET MEMBER

Riddle, J.

Planning, Housing and Resilience

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

P. Soderquest
S. Nicholson

Head of Housing and Public Protection
Scrutiny Co-ordinator

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors E. Armstrong and J. Beynon.

14. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC held on 3 July 2019, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

15. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the Forward Plan of key decisions (September to November 2019). (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix A).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

16. CABINET REPORTS PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE

The Committee was advised of Cabinet decisions regarding issues previously commented on and been subject of report by this Committee. (Copy enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix B).

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

17. SCRUTINY OF CABINET REPORTS

The Committee was advised that the following report would be considered by the Cabinet on 10 September 2019. Members were requested to comment on the respective reports.

17.1 Food and Feed, Safety and Standards Service Plan 2019/20

The purpose of this report was to present to the Cabinet, for its consideration and endorsement, the Food and Feed, Safety and Standards Service Plan for 2019/20. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix C).

Councillor John Riddle, Cabinet Member: Planning, Housing and Resilience and Phil Soderquest, Head of Housing and Public Protection presented the report to the Committee.

The Committee welcomed this very good report and highlighted the following issues:

- whilst they acknowledged that the Administration was working with officers to resolve potential issues arising from Brexit, they noted that there were implications for ensuring that food safety standards for goods to be exported to the EU would have to comply with their standards. Such goods would therefore need to be certified as such - a chargeable service that the Council could provide;
- Members sought clarification regarding the figures in the table at 4.2 on whether there was a commonality regarding the complaints across each heading or whether they were separate incidents;
- the Committee were advised that there was no legal requirement for food retail premises to display its food hygiene rating, although it is available via the Food Standards Agency website. Members felt that retailers would be better motivated to improve standards if they were legally obliged to exhibit their rating, and
- the publication of this report should encourage the Council to reaffirm its willingness to prosecute where there are serious failings in food hygiene or standards.

RESOLVED that

- (a) subject to the comments above, the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendation in the report, and
- (b) the Committee's thanks be conveyed to staff for all their hard work as set out in the report.

17.2 Northumberland County Council Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2019

This report presented the new draft Northumberland County Council Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2019, the purpose of which was to inform how Northumberland County Council's Housing Service would assist and support tenants experiencing or threatened with domestic abuse. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes as Appendix D).

Councillor John Riddle, Cabinet Member: Planning, Housing and Resilience and Phil Soderquest, Head of Housing and Public Protection presented the report to the Committee.

The Committee welcomed this very good report and highlighted the following issues:

- whilst members noted that the Policy referred to it being applied regardless of gender or sexuality in the definition, they felt that this should be emphasised more prominently throughout the document. Councillor Riddle was keen to endorse that point and agreed to amend the final draft accordingly;
- the Council's housing and property service staff had been trained in spotting signs of abuse and had already reported a number of incidents to the MASH team. Members were advised that the Council was liaising with other housing providers in the county to encourage the provision of similar training for their staff;
- members recognised that this raised safeguarding issues, particularly for children living in abusive households;
- there was a suggestion that the Homefinder website should include a reference that tenants had to comply with this policy;
- in the list of definitions of domestic abuse in heading 3, the phrase "but is not limited to" should be added against each one that states "can include", for example: **Physical abuse** can include, *but is not limited to* hitting, punching, kicking, slapping, hitting with objects, pulling hair, pushing, shoving, cutting or stabbing, restraining, strangulation, choking.
- the list of forms of discriminatory abuse, as also set out in that part of the report, had been legally defined;

- scalding and burning should be added list of physical abuses, and
- there was a suggestion that the Council should upload a video on the relevant websites showing the type of behaviour that is not acceptable for tenants, similar to those posted by other authorities. This could also be used as a training tool.

RESOLVED that, subject to the comments above, the Cabinet be advised that the Committee supported the recommendation in the report.

18. **REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR**

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report

The Committee reviewed and noted its work programme for the 2019/20 council year. (Report attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E).

With regard to the Northumberland County Council Housing Services Domestic Abuse Policy 2019 item, members requested that the implementation of the policy be monitored by the Committee. It was suggested that this could be done as part of the update on the anticipated Government Guidance on Domestic Abuse in the new year.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Chairman _____

Date _____