



## CABINET

**MEETING** : Wednesday, 11th July 2018

**PRESENT** : Cllrs. James (Chair), Watkins, Noakes, D. Norman, Organ and Cook

### **Others in Attendance**

Cllrs Hilton, Haigh (not present for items 21-26), Pullen and Coole (not present for items 21-26)

Managing Director

Corporate Director

Head of Policy and Resources

Head of Communities

Head of Place

Head of Cultural and Trading Services

City Growth and Delivery Manager

Housing Services Client Officer

Community Engagement Officer

Democratic Services and Elections Officer

**APOLOGIES** : None

## 15. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th June 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to the following addition which was not available at the time of publication:

### **Minute 3 Public Question Time**

Written response of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Neighbourhoods concerning homeless and vulnerable people:

Thank you for attending the recent Cabinet meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June at Gloucester City Council to ask a question of the Leader of the Council. As discussed on the night, my portfolio has recently expanded to include homelessness and housing. Your questions relate to both this matter and other subjects where I am already involved with our partner organisations, therefore I am replying personally and on behalf of the Council. Please note, I have produced this response to avoid time and resource being redirected from housing staff whose priority is the frontline. Each representation they have already responded to you on in relation to your concerns has been time consuming and therefore I would hope

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we could consider how we may be able to work better together in the future. I would hope that this would be a more productive and meaningful way to ask questions and raise your concerns.

I will be spending time over the next few months learning more about housing and homelessness which will involve me following the pathways experienced by those seeking housing support and considering what further improvements can be made. I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you personally and receive your concerns.

You refer to record numbers of working and vulnerable people using the Foodbank. It would be helpful to know which source you refer to when making this statement?

I am not aware of our local Foodbank recently issuing figures, however I would be grateful to see them if they have been made available. The reasons behind demand for emergency food assistance are complex and overlapping and this has been acknowledged by Government and charities in a number of independent reports on the subject. Gloucester Foodbank opened in 2008 due to need at that time, despite a large welfare state, and in 2018, although the employment rate being at an all-time high, many people still find themselves in need for a wide range of reasons. In my other role as a Caseworker to the MP, I issue Food bank vouchers and therefore I can offer some insight into the complexities of individual's circumstances and reasons for referrals.

You refer to record numbers of people on the housing list and you are correct that the demand for social housing far outweighs the supply. However, not all people on the waiting list, of 3,984 at the time of writing, are priority need or homeless. I do agree the housing market is broken and more homes need to be built. Certainly an area that Cllr Organ and I will be focusing on. It's worth highlighting the positive that since 2010, nationally 357,000 affordable homes have been delivered, three times as much council housing has been built since 2010 than in the previous 13 years, but more needs to be done. The announcement of an extra £2 billion in funding for the 2016-2021 Affordable Homes Programme, increasing the total funding to over £9 billion is really good news. The additional £2 billion is expected to provide around 25,000 socially rented homes. The Right to Buy programme has also helped over 65,000 social renters to buy their own home at a discount since 2010, demonstrating that it's important to have a mix of options for those people who may be on the waiting list for varying reasons.

You refer to a figure of 130 displaced families and the types of temporary accommodation offered in an emergency. We currently have 175 households (this includes single individuals) in temporary accommodation. There is currently not enough temporary accommodation to meet the needs of all households presenting with emergency need and if necessary, and as a last resort, they are placed where accommodation is made available, which can be outside of the County. This is not what we would like to happen and the housing teams are working very hard on preventing homelessness and the need for temporary accommodation in the first instance. The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018, and supported by charities Shelter and Crisis, provides more resource and focus on prevention and moving forward we would expect to see positive results and will be monitoring the impact this legislation has on reducing the need for temporary

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accommodation. I can assure you that the housing team work very hard to find accommodation for the families and I will be reviewing how best to engage with landlords in the City to try and encourage more capacity in the private rented sector as well as working with Cabinet on the acquisition of housing for use in the City in an emergency. In the future, please feel welcome to raise individual housing cases with me directly so I can work with officers to ensure they are receiving the support they need, rather than waiting until formal council meetings or using the media to highlight cases where we can't fully reply.

The very sad case you referred to of a man who took his own life in accommodation referred to by P3 is a tragic example of where agencies and organisations could have done better collectively. My father took his own life and therefore this is both personal to me and an area I am involved in reviewing in my role as District Council representative on the Health and Wellbeing Board. Unfortunately suicide is another complex subject which has a huge impact on families and communities and not solely linked to one type of housing tenure, nor is their specific evidence that the type of housing has led to suicide. One case cannot be looked at in isolation and the cause and effect determined. I am very keen to review evidence collected by Suicide charities as they often attend inquests and record verdicts. Analysis of these reports may show trends that we could review in addition to the work undertaken by County partners.

I would welcome your thoughts on the Gloucestershire Suicide Prevention Strategy. There are other examples where the City Council can influence this agenda and you will note proposals in our forthcoming car parking strategy to ensure future provision considers design. Mental health first aid training has also been provided to car parking attendants and we have had positive feedback about how this has helped distressed and vulnerable individuals who they have been in contact with.

You refer to an example of an individual with a Criminal Behaviour Order highlighted by the media. CBO's are obtained through the courts using our "safer and attractive street" work which seeks to engage individuals found to be begging using the "engage, support and enforce" approach. Generally we are not able to comment on individual cases, however, you will have seen in the Gloucestershire Live article on this case that this particular gentleman had breached a suspended sentence from the Crown Court as well as breaching the CBO over 14 times, this is why he was in court and the judge sentenced him as he saw appropriate from the evidence before him. The comment about begging for food was part of the judges summing up, both the prosecution and defence confirmed that he had indeed been begging for money. The case was taken forward by the Police, not the City Council and was no way related to any proposals for a PSPO. The fact that the Guardian reported in this context was very misleading. The Street aware partnership attempt to engage with and support every person they see begging and or rough sleeping in Gloucester. They know the names and circumstances of each one. Only when engagement and support is refused, or anti-social behaviour continues does enforcement become a possibility. Even when cases are taken to court, positive requirements have been requested as part of any order, for example asking for referral for support with substance misuse. We are in the process of working with the courts (both criminal and civil) to try and secure more positive requirements being granted so that individuals can be supported further. We are committed to

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“breaking the cycle” to try and help people lead happier and healthier lives. An objective I am sure we do share.

The results of the PSPO consultation and the proposals will be heard by Cabinet in July after being reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny committee in two weeks' time.

You refer to a 20% reduction in Environmental Health officers. Based on your previous representations, I assume you relate this to work required to housing standards in the private sector? Following the “Together Gloucester” restructure of the council officers are required to work less in silos but cover wider areas of work with their skills and expertise. I can assure you that the standards of private sector housing are important to us and a great deal of work has been happening to drive up standards and tackle rogue landlords across the spectrum of tenure. There has also been new powers provided to local authorities to deal with this behaviour which we agreed by the Cabinet in May and will be used where appropriate. Please feel welcome to share specific examples of poor standards with me directly or to the City Council through the normal reporting methods.

You refer to the 50% reduction of the service level agreements with the CAB and Law Centre. A matter well debated and reported. Gloucester City Council remains one of the most generous funders of the VCS in the County and continues to support organisations, despite many councils, of all political leadership, up and down the country stopping funding altogether. How people access advice and support has changed with the advancement of the internet and need for accessibility outside of normal hours. We are trying to work with the organisations to ensure the service is what we need for our constituents, particularly those who are most vulnerable, for the future. A great deal of additional financial support has been provided over the past few years towards rent and building costs, as well as support to lever in other funding, that's additional to the service level agreement. We are yet to receive any feedback that I have seen that provides evidence that people living in the City are unable to get advice when they need it. We are in continuous dialogue with the agencies and will respond to any concerns they may have. Please do provide me with any feedback or evidence you may have?

There are many achievements that we are proud of in Gloucester through the work and efforts both the council and partners are making. Some are individual and cannot be shared, others like the reduction in rough sleeping, the achievement of Purple Flag status, the delivery of new homes, the countless numbers of new activities and groups seed funded by grants or the work of our members in raising monies for vital charities. None of which you mention but all of which have a positive impact on our City and those we seek to serve.

I hope my reply is substantive and helpful and more importantly offers you reassurance that we are working hard to address really important issues. I would welcome your engagement and support in these efforts and always welcome constructive input.

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**Time of commencement: 5.00 pm  
Time of conclusion: 6.03 pm**

**Chair**