

Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 July 2018 at 7.00 pm

Present:	Councillors Gerard Rice (Chair), Luke Spillman (Vice-Chair), Clare Baldwin and Joycelyn Redsell Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative
Apologies:	Councillors James Baker and Andrew Jefferies
In attendance:	Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health Richard Birchett, Interim Head of Housing Tisha Sutcliffe, Democratic Service Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 February 2018 were approved as a correct record.

2. Urgent Items

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

4. Implementation of Mandatory Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation and the introduction of an Additional Licensing scheme

This item was presented by the Interim Assistant Director of Housing. The report outlined arrangements for the implementation of the extension of mandatory licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and proposals to introduce additional licensing for HMOs not covered in the mandatory provisions. The new legislation changed the definition of HMOs that required licensing and provided the authority with the opportunity to encourage landlords to provide better private rented accommodation in the Borough.

The legislation also gave Local Authorities the power to extend licensing to HMOs not included in the Mandatory Licensing requirement where HMOs were identified as a problem in specific neighbourhoods.

The Interim Assistant Director of Housing identified some minor errors on the report and the appendix, which will be corrected.

Councillor Spillman wanted clarity on how the number of HMOs set out within the report had been identified. The Interim Assistant Director Housing stated that the service gathered information from and shared intelligence with a number of organisations and agencies, different departments of the Council such as Council tax, Benefits and others to establish an accurate database of landlords and agents.

The Interim Assistant Director of Housing advised the information shared on page 18 point 4.6 will be published on the Council's website and written confirmation will be distributed to landlords within Thurrock. Councillor Redsell questioned what the solution would be if some Landlords were not informed. It was confirmed most landlords are made aware as the Authority proactively sought to inform them.

1. RESOLVED the Committee:

1.1 Commented on and noted the Central Government changes to implement a mandatory HMO licensing Scheme on 1 October 2018

1.2 Commented on and noted the duty to raise awareness of the new changes

1.3 Commented on and noted Additional HMO Licensing falls outside the scope of mandatory HMO licensing

1.4 Commented and noted on proposal to carry out consultation on the introduction of Additional Licensing of HMOs not covered by the Mandatory scheme

1.5 Commented and noted the council adopted the Essex Amenities standards for houses in multiple occupation to develop good quality HMO stock within the Borough and will carry out public consultation with landlords, letting agents and tenants on updating these standards in 2018.

5. Service Review of Homelessness Domestic Abuse and Mental Health presentations

This item was presented by the Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health. This subject came before Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee earlier in the year and at the request from the Chair of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 February 2018, a review was to be undertaken to allow Officers time to carry out an in-depth survey on 18 cases of homelessness as a result of domestic abuse and single applicants suffering with mental health issues.

There had been room for improvement within the services, although there had been positive feedback and a reduced number of residents placed in temporary accommodation.

Councillor Spillman agreed there had been an improvement and welcomed the report however he felt there needed to be procedures in place to ensure future errors did not reoccur.

Councillor Spillman recommended a review of the findings of the report and when the report is completed to ensure adequate training for staff members is implemented as it would be beneficial to ensure they are dealing with customers effectively and appropriately.

It was recommended by the Chair and Committee Members for this item to be presented back to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 6 months.

Councillor Redsell agreed with the previous statement. She felt front line staff were in danger on a daily basis. The Authority need to ensure there is safeguarding in place for staff whilst at work. Councillor Redsell wanted clarity around the 1,395 applications that were received according to page 25.

Director of Adults, Housing and Health will gather the information and share with the Members following the Committee meeting. There was a discussion around the refurbishment of the reception area and the need for more security, although the current situation was interim and the work will be completed in around 8 weeks.

Councillor Baldwin highlighted that residents request for call backs from the homeless department which were not happening. Interim Assistant Director of Housing explained there had been some issues with temporary members of staff. However due to a new telephone recording system and posts being filled with permanent employees the issues continued to be resolved. There were some difficulties with homeless officers attempting to contact residents but failing due to many residents on pay as you go telephones and there being no opportunity to leave voicemails.

Councillor Spillman shared his concerns about moving vulnerable residents and families into temporary accommodations outside of the Borough. This could put them in danger meaning they may be targeted by criminals or worse, being sexually exploited. There needs to be more safeguarding in place to ensure this did not happen.

Councillor Redsell felt, most Councillors are aware of the "hotspots" in Thurrock whereas Officers are less aware.

Director of Adults, Housing and Health clarified the investigations on moving families into temporary accommodation is limited and if they were at risk of harm they would be removed immediately.

RESOLVED the Committee:

- 1.1 **Commented on and noted the analysis of the specific cases**
- 1.2
- 1.3 **Commented on and noted the common themes highlighted in the report**
- 1.4 **Commented on and noted the improvements already underway with the homelessness service.**
- 1.5 **Commented on and noted the report and review the report in October 2018.**

Commented on and noted the importance of ensuring staff members are kept safeguarded, ensure they receive adequate training.

6. Procurement of the Internal and External Redecoration programme

This item was presented by the Interim Assistant Director of Housing. There had been a 5 year programme for internal decoration for properties of vulnerable residents. The Chair questioned whether this included more than one room per year in a property, which was confirmed as one room per year.

Councillor Spillman requested figures for repairs and decorators who have visited and wanted more information in regards to the report as it was not clear whether this was good value for money. This information would be gathered and reported back to members.

The Chair asked if elderly residents would need to apply to be put on a waiting list before they receive the decoration. Interim Assistant Director of Housing confirmed there were a number of residents in the borough who require help and is those the residents would need to be on a waiting list to ensure the help is provided fairly.

Ms Mansfield asked if all elderly and vulnerable residents were aware of the support they could receive. The Interim Assistant Director of Housing stated until the support is requested the residents would not be aware.

Director of Adults, Housing and Health will supply all Members with the information, to ensure the procurement is not delayed.

The Chair felt it would be best intentions to move this item and all Members of the Committee agreed.

RESOLVED the Committee:

1.1 The Committee commented on the proposed process to commence procurement of the Internal and External decorating programme for a period of up to 5 years (3 years with an option to extend for up to two years in any combination subject to performance and funding).

7. Gas Servicing, Repair and Renewal

The Chair stated that many residents had difficulties getting through to the advertised hotline as they were often disconnected. Director of Adults, Housing and Health advised the reasons were due to the hotline reaching excessive numbers, however this was rectified and will no longer be an issue.

The Interim Assistant Director of Housing informed that officers were aware of the quality service this system needs and will continue to make improvements.

Councillor Spillman expressed how frustrating it had been for the residents and Ward Councillors. There had been other areas in Thurrock that had improved. However there remained an issue in terms of the communication, repeat visits and no compensation being offered to the low income residents. The repairs team had often attended the homes of residents with the wrong equipment and requested from the resident to use theirs. Over the Christmas period the service offered was not acceptable, especially in the area where there were majority council homes.

The Director of Adults, Housing and Health advised the contract with the current provider will end on 31 March 2019, so potentially another winter with the service. There had been discussions with the highest members of staff at the current provider and it was made clear that the performance was unacceptable and they would be monitored this winter to ensure the residents were receiving the support they needed.

Councillor Redsell mentioned an incident with an elderly resident; the current provider visited and asked to borrow the resident's equipment before they were left in the property without any heating; this should not have happened.

Ms Mansfield mentioned another incident with a 72 year old vulnerable resident.

The Director of Adults, Housing and Health stated, as Officers they were unable to choose the staff hired by the successful contractor. However, it would continue to be monitored.

The Chair explained the current contractor had sometimes struggled to provide the appropriate service to residents, which is unacceptable.

Mr Spillman said the Committee need to see quality and value for money with the service. He wanted to see a procurement contract with local Tradesman and to offer apprenticeships. In future the Local Authority needs to avoid using the cheapest services to ensure the same issues do not re-occur.

RESOLVED the Committee:

1.1 Commented on the process set out in this report to commence procurement of a combined domestic and commercial gas servicing, breakdown, repair and installation contract for a period of three (3) years

with the option to extend for a further two (2) years in any period combination.

8. Work Programme

The work Programme was discussed and updated:

1. October 2018 – Update report on garages.
2. October 2018 – Review on Implementation of Mandatory Licensing of Houses In Multiple Occupation and the introduction of Additional Licensing Scheme.

The meeting finished at 7.50 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**