

DRAFT MINUTES of the meeting of the Housing Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 November 2012 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors Rob Gledhill (Chair), Charles Curtis, Diana Hale, Steve Liddiard, Andrew Roast

Co-Opted Member: Gemma Riddles

In attendance: Ms B Brownlee – Director of Housing
Ms K Adedeji – Client Contract Manager (Interim)
Mr M Jones – Management Accountant
Ms E Sheridan – Electoral & Democratic Services Officer

The Chair informed those present that the meeting was audio recorded.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received

Cllr V Morris-Cook submitted her apologies.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2012 were approved as a correct record following clarification of an item on page 5 regarding signposting. The Director of Housing confirmed that they agreed to hold surgeries, some of which would be held in the library and provide signposting via leaflets and posters only, not run a housing counter or put a housing officer in the library.

3. ADDITIONAL ITEMS

The Director of Housing provided an update on Morrisons Performance management. The October performance report for the repairs contract was tabled to Members. The report showed the repairs completed and therefore repairs not complete within time. The Director of Housing outlined that it had been possible to solidly prove the number of outstanding repairs and following legal advice they were permitted to take away 3000 non urgent repairs and give them to two other subcontractors, Fleetwood and Total Maintenance. The contract had not been re-procured. The sub-contractors have made a commitment to complete outstanding repairs by Christmas and are visiting all householders whose repairs have fallen out of time.

Councillor Hale clarified if elderly people in sheltered accommodation automatically warranted a priority repair and the Committee were informed

that sheltered housing repairs have a dedicated team and are not immediately a priority as this would depend on the nature of the repair.

The Chair noted that this was a big step forward and questioned if tenants and particularly vulnerable tenants knew of the change regarding the contract. The Client Contract Manager detailed the process including that the contractor would make initial contact with tenants and inform tenants that the Morrison repair work had now been reallocated as a consequence of length of time outstanding. They will have Thurrock ID. Members also heard that the 3000 outstanding repairs aligned with the property spread and therefore South Ockendon and Tilbury had the largest amounts outstanding.

The Client Contract Manager informed the Committee that emergency and urgent jobs have remained with Morrisons as to take them away would lead to confusion due to the limited timeframes for completion. There will be a mechanism in place to manage this.

The Chair thanked the Director of Housing and the Client manager for their timely response to the urgent item of business.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests or whipping was declared.

Councillor Curtis apologised for not being at the pre-meeting due to the change of meeting time.

The Chair declared that he had a number of relatives living in housing properties who may be affected but no more than any other tenant.

The Chair introduced Gemma Riddles, Co-opted Member, to the Committee.

5. FUEL POVERTY INFORMATION REPORT

The Client Contract Manager introduced the report setting out measures taken to increase the efficiency of properties in Thurrock and measures taken to lever in external funding to support the process. Green Deal and Energy Commitment Obligation (ECO) were explained.

Councillor Hale asked if negotiations on behalf of other establishments such as schools and housing could be incorporated. The Client Contract Manager agreed to research this but informed the Committee that the issue is not simply how much Thurrock will have to pay, it is how much we will receive to improve the efficiency of the stock.

Councillor Roast questioned Warm Healthy Homes Partnership and the money given to private residents, totalling £1million. The Director of Housing agreed to confirm the details of this item and inform members after the Committee.

Members queried implementation of the scheme across the borough and were informed a number of factors would be considered including prioritisation by vulnerability and least efficient properties.

Councillor Curtis discussed solar panels and the Client Contract Manager informed the Committee that there are no specific measures currently in place but there will be a green study of stock and then appropriate measures will be taken.

Councillor Roast referred to the list of repairs to premises and the selection criteria. The Client Contract Manager clarified the criteria and highlighted that there will be more transparency as to the selection criteria used. The Chair invited Councillor Wendy Curtis to speak from the public gallery. Councillor Wendy Curtis was informed that the program of works would eradicate damp and mould if done properly.

The Chair referred to CESP and questioned the income arising. The Client Contract Manager informed the Committee that it was circa £20,000, certain works were being undertaken and more funding, plus a cavity wall programme that is at zero cost. The Chair referred to historical work (insulation) that may now be old or the wrong type. Members were informed that the Green study will evaluate the properties and what is put in place will address current rating for property and determine what will be required. Under the ECO programme, members heard that we will receive more than £20,000.

The Chair raised the idea of collective fuel switching following previous comments and this was discussed by Members. The Director of Housing confirmed this is a corporate not a housing issue. It was recognised that local authorities do participate in such schemes and the Director of Housing agreed to take it back to the most appropriate group.

Members congratulated officers and welcomed the schedule of works put in front of them.

RESOLVED that;

- a) **Pre-Green Deal – Members acknowledge the outcomes achieved by the private housing service through its lead in promoting the sub-regional Warm Healthy Homes Partnership and its commitment to continue to take the Essex lead in gaining the most from the Green Deal and ECO and**
- b) **Post Green Deal – Members note the continued work of the Essex Energy Consortium, ensuring continuity of approach across all sectors and enabling the scale of the partnership, to attract a direct proportion of the monies that will be available nationally.**

6. THE STRATEGIC TENANCY POLICY AND THE COUNCIL'S TENANCY POLICY

The Director of Housing introduced the report which advised Members about the changes the Council needs to consider in relation to the type of tenancies social housing landlords are able to offer following the Localism Act. Following the Act, the council acquired two obligations

1) to produce a statutory – Strategic Tenancy Policy and 2) produce and agree a Council Housing Tenancy Policy. Both policies were circulated to Members of the Committee for their comments with a requirement for the Council Housing Tenancy Policy to return to the Committee at a later date.

Councillor Roast questioned the statement regarding lower levels of community stakeholding within fixed term tenancies and the impact on communities and was informed that stable communities tend to take care of estates but this was not referring to specific estates within Thurrock. Councillor Hale welcomed the introduction of probationary tenancies and Members and officers agreed that expectations of residents and tenants need to be managed.

Councillor Curtis raised the issue of the succession of adult children within the Tenancy Policy. The Director of Housing informed the Committee that the right of succession is no longer an automatic right in law and the council will choose to keep that policy. Members queried the number of successions and the Director of Housing confirmed, after debate, that it was a further right of succession as outlined in the report. Members debated the generosity of the policy and agreed that adult children should have a right of succession to a tenancy but not guaranteed to the existing property. The Director of Housing suggested this should be to 'an appropriate sized property' and was incorporated within the Allocations Policy. It was agreed that this should be added to this Policy for clarity. Following questioning on Right to Buy and inheriting discounts, the Director of Housing agreed to take legal advice and circulate a briefing note to Members.

The Committee agreed the rights of succession as listed on page 36 of the report and it was noted that although there will always be extenuating circumstances, they agreed with the wording. The Director of Housing suggested she would try to find a form of words to allow more flexibility and bring them before the Committee.

The Chair raised the issue of the number of properties to be built and the Director of Housing confirmed that work was scheduled to be taken to the Development Board the following week and the report can be brought to a future Housing Overview and Scrutiny.

The Chair debated the Fixed Term Policy and highlighted initial research he had undertaken showing 12 authorities with Fixed Term Policies. None had mentioned the problems highlighted by Thurrock in their report. The Director of Housing informed the Committee of the reasons why this option had not been selected including cost of administration, ability to legally enforce and rent increases. The Chair also confirmed that the Right to carry out Improvements will remain even if not Fixed Term Tenancy. The Director of

Housing confirmed that this will come from the new Tenancy Policy if we give that right.

Ms Gemma Riddles highlighted that the Panel had been led to believe that Fixed Term Tenancies were the way forward and would incorporate a financial review to determine if the family still qualified for social housing. The Director of Housing clarified the situation to Members, agreed to check minutes of meetings and apologised if the wrong information had been given in the briefing.

Members further discussed Demoted Tenancies and Introductory Tenancies.

The Committee confirmed the Strategy may go forward to Cabinet on 12 December.

The Draft Tenant Management Policy was discussed and Members heard that this is the day to day detail for tenants but it is not complete and still out for consultation.

Members of the Committee raised the issue of Home Contents Insurance and the Director of Housing confirmed that they would campaign for tenants to sign up and give comparative examples of insurance costs.

The Chair referred to Rent Arrears and asked if this tied in with the Fair Debt Policy. The Director of Housing confirmed the Director of Resources is carrying out a review and this can be contained within it. Further reference was made to vulnerable adults and the Arrears Panel and questioned the pressure this puts on the social care team.

Members discussed the supply of Carbon Monoxide detectors in properties and if they were supplied. The Director of Housing confirmed that she would investigate and respond to Members.

The Chair and the Committee raised the issue of asbestos within properties. The Director of Housing confirmed that blanket guidance would not be issued to existing tenants but it would be pointed out to new tenants and it could be added to the void checklist. Following further discussion, the Director of Housing agreed to refer to responses given at full Council to questions on asbestos to ensure promises given are captured by the Housing Department and also agreed to consider the cost of a full asbestos survey.

The Chair raised further issues in the policy relating to parking, pet care, incomplete sections plus spelling and grammar which were noted by Officers. Community Forums were highlighted and it was noted that taxis are not provided for community forums and the relevant paragraphs should be reworded.

Resolved that Members

- a) **note the report and the comments are taken forward as part of the planned development of both the Strategic Tenancy Policy and the Council's own Tenancy Policy and**
- b) **receive a further report concerning the comprehensive tenancy policy at Housing Overview and Scrutiny in March.**

6. BUDGET 2013/14 – GROWTH AND SAVINGS PROPOSALS

The Management Accountant introduced the Growth and Savings Proposals and outlined that the Committee had savings before them to agree as no items for growth had been submitted. The medium term financial strategy and report to Cabinet was presented to the Committee and the summary showed there is still a budget deficit for next year of £3.463 million once the proposals have been agreed.

The proposals were outlined in turn by the Director of Housing as follows:

Budget Code HG200 – Private Sector Housing Administration. This is an accounting treatment and makes no difference. It uses capital instead of revenue and doesn't alter a budget or affect the HRA.

Budget Code HG211 – this item uses in-house resources instead of producing a change control with Serco for surveying.

Budget Code HG251 – this item is simply doing more for less and making efficiencies; a genuine saving.

RESOLVED that

a) the Committee notes and reviews the proposals for budget growth and savings in 2013/14 and future years as set out in appendix 2 to the report.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was discussed and the following items noted:

- The next meeting is scheduled for March 2013. A meeting was requested to be scheduled in February 2013.

Additional items

- Rent
- New housing sites / new build and the way forward

Site allocations were discussed and members expressed a wish for site visits. Ms G Riddles drew member's attention to a housing consultation on Tuesday,

11 December at Seabrooke Rise from 7.30 – 9.30pm and Ms Riddles agreed to invite members of the Committee. Councillors Hale and Liddiard offered their apologies for this date.

The meeting finished at 9.13 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Elaine Sheridan, telephone (01375) 652580,
or alternatively e-mail esheridan@thurrock.gov.uk**

DRAFT