

**MINUTES of the meeting of Housing Services Overview and Scrutiny
Committee held on 13 March 2013 at 7:00pm**

Present: Councillors Rob Gledhill (Chair), Charles Curtis, Diana Hale,
Steve Liddiard, Bukky Okunade

Apologies: Councillors A Roast and V Morris-Cook
Ms B Brownlee – Director of Housing

In attendance: Ms K Adedeji – Client Contract Manager
Mr R Parkin – Head of Housing
Ms E Sheridan – Electoral & Democratic Services Officer

The Chair informed those present that the meeting was not audio recorded.

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Roast and V Morris Cook.

16 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 30 January 2013, were approved as a correct record.

17 ADDITIONAL ITEMS

The Chair welcomed and introduced Mr R Parkin to the Committee.

18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

19 DAMP AND MOULD IN HOUSING STOCK

The Head of Housing introduced the report and gave an overview of the key items. The Committee were informed that the report is the result of joint working with Public Health to identify how damp and mould affects residents health, the housing stock and the tenants. Members were told that a pilot was undertaken on the Flowers Estate which focused on the refurbishment of Heat

Exchange Units. The actions undertaken were outlined as per paragraph 2.3 of the report.

The Head of Housing confirmed that wider rollout of the programme would look at the other causes of Damp and Mould and what can be done to address these.

Members discussed the report and reminded the Housing Service to look at Tilbury which the Ward Member identified as the oldest housing stock in Thurrock. The Client Contract Manager responded that the survey would address this across the whole of Thurrock and £2million has been set aside within the Capital Programme to address this.

Members questioned the outstanding Heat Exchange Units within the Flowers Estate that had not been refurbished and received assurance that this work will be undertaken.

Members questioned if private housing and emergency housing was covered in the survey. The Head of Housing confirmed that Emergency lets were inspected prior to use and need to meet a minimum standard. Work with Landlords is undertaken to increase the standard.

Members questioned how an isolated house, not situated within a formal estate would be identified for upgrade. The Client Contract Manager confirmed that this may take longer to identify if not visited by Housing Officers but that this had been recognised and ways for tenants to report and contact the Housing Service would be advertised. Engagement was an important part of the process, would be fully advertised and residents can self-identify.

The issue of a three year timescale was identified by Members especially if there is a risk to health. Members received assurance that such work would be prioritised.

Members raised the issue of areas without area housing offices and highlighted the need for a plan for tenants to receive advice.

The Committee agreed that it was a good noting report but requested further scrutiny on actions taken and planned for the future.

The Co-opted member highlighted that from a tenants point of view damp and mould is a big issue and this action needs to be communicated to tenants on a regular basis.

A second recommendation was proposed by the Chair and seconded by Vice-Chair that the Committee receive an update report outlining the work undertaken and the lessons learnt to the July meeting.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- a) notes and support the Joint Housing and Public Health pilot to tackle the issues of damp, condensation and mould growth in housing
- b) receive an update report outlining the work undertaken and the lessons learnt to the next meeting of Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

20 PRIVATE LANDLORD PARTNERSHIPS

The Head of Housing introduced the report which advised members of the on-going work with private landlords, the statutory duties and the work to maximise good quality accommodation. The priorities as per paragraph 2.2 of the report were outlined. The impact of the Localism Act and homeless people was highlighted to members.

Members questioned accreditation and asked the Head of Housing if the long term aim was to become a letting agent. The Head of Housing responded that there is an option for a social letting agency but it cannot be a cost to the council.

Members highlighted HMO (houses in multiple occupation) and problems arising with this housing including anti-social behaviour. In particular they questioned the number of properties registered, those not registered and those that may fall just below the threshold for inspection. The Head of Housing confirmed the need to focus on the 20 properties they have a legal duty to inspect and will then prioritise the remainder. Members were informed that Housing planned to bring in their own resources to strengthen the impact on anti-social behaviour.

Landlords with only a small portfolio of properties were identified as missing from the work plan and the Head of Housing agreed to respond to the Chair on how work to engage with this sector will be planned.

RESOLVED that the Committee

- a) note the report and have provided comments for inclusion in the planned work of the Private Housing and Home Solutions Team**
- b) receive a further report to provide progress and outcomes and the partnership work progresses.**

21 THURROCK COUNCIL HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE SERVICE

The Client Contract Manager outlined the report and informed members of the work undertaken since the contract with Morrisons Facilities Services had been terminated and the contract purchased by the Mears Group. This contract had begun on February 1st 2013. Members were informed that the

contract was now in week 5 and emerging issues were being firmly tackled. The Council had implemented learning and this was within the contractual framework.

Members questioned the emerging issues and were informed that these consisted of legacy issues, notably a backlog of 3000 repairs. This resulted in Mears inheriting a two and a half month demand on day one which was very challenging. As a result Mears are looking to increase the number of permanent staff and one subcontractor is on notice as a result of missed appointments.

The co-opted member informed the Committee that she had personally met with Mears and spoken to residents. Residents had praised the work undertaken by Mears. The co-opted member asked if residents would be involved when the new contract is tendered especially as Mears were the original choice of the Tenants Group. The member requested a guarantee that residents would be involved and listened to when evaluation takes place.

The Client Contract Manager assured the committee that the evaluation process looks to get best value not the cheapest solution and gave an assurance that residents will be listened to. Members also asked for an appropriate level of weighting to ensure that cost vs. value is evaluated accurately.

Members questioned how work undertaken by the contractor is signed off. The Client Contract Manager outlined a number of ways in which this is done including an independent survey on a sample of residents, post inspection regimes and quality, technical work surveys and surveys undertaken by Mears personally. The Committee heard an example from the co-opted member of such a technical inspection which had identified work outstanding to be done that the tenant had not identified, and which the contractor was not satisfied with.

The Chair suggested that a 'meet and greet' with Mears would be appropriate and provide feedback on how the contractor is performing.

Members congratulated the Client Contract Manager and her team on the report and the work undertaken.

RESOLVED that the committee note the contents of the report.

22 WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted the completed work programme and discussed the following items:

- The outstanding site visits were requested to be progressed for April with a maximum of three estates to be visited.

- The new kitchen project was discussed and members were informed that there may be an option to view a tenants kitchen, with their permission. This was identified for mid-April. The Client Contract Manager was requested to highlight the project and visit to the Press.
- The work programme should reflect that the Client Contract Manager is the responsible officer for Damp and Mould.
- A six-monthly budget update
- Fuel poverty and the switch over – update required.
- Review of Warden Services
- Mears contract update
- Rent Setting
- Impact of benefit caps, evictions, rent collections and welfare reform.

RESOLVED:

That the completed work programme is noted and a new programme is compiled.

The meeting finished at 8.19pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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or alternatively e-mail esheridan@thurrock.gov.uk**