

Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 September 2015 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Cathy Kent (Chair), Clare Baldwin, Sue MacPherson, Tunde Ojetola and Graham Hamilton (substitute for Chris Baker)

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

Apologies: Councillors Chris Baker (Vice Chair) and Jan Baker

In attendance: Councillor Lynn Worrall, Cabinet Member for Housing
Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing
Kathryn Adedeji, Head of Housing - Investment and Development
Richard Parkin, Head of Housing - Community & Needs
Dawn Shepherd, Strategy Manager, Housing, Business Improvement
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services 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.

The Chair thanked Barbara Brownlee for her contributions and hard work to the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee and wished her well in her new role.

10. Minutes

The Minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 17 June 2015, were approved as a correct record.

11. Urgent Items

There were no items of urgent business.

12. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Hamilton declared a non-pecuniary interest that he was a Landlord of a property in the borough.

13. Repairs Policy and Service Update

The Director of Housing presented the report which provided the committee a good overview of the repair policy which contained updates on how the principles were set out and how these were being achieved within the first six

months since both the new policy and the contract were implemented in December 2014.

The key highlights the Officer referred to were:

- Repair satisfaction
- Reduction in repairs expenditure
- Increased social value outcomes

The Officer referred and explained to members the Ward Satisfaction Financial Year Comparison diagram.

The Officer explained the geographical spread of damp and mould works across the borough and explained the difference between the requests received and the remedial work identified.

Councillor Hamilton asked the Officer what the trade operative qualifications that were on offer. The Officer explained that there were over 50 different operatives and would report back to the Chair with the information.

Councillor MacPherson asked the Officers if the number of member enquiries had gone down in relation to the work currently being undertaken by the Transforming Homes Programme. The Officer confirmed that a significant number of enquiries were still being received; an approximate figure was down by 50 calls.

The Officer stated that support was available to residents on the cleaning up and how best to deal with damp, mould and condensation.

The Officer also confirmed that the age of apprenticeships currently being offered were for 16-19 year olds and provided pathways into employment but not specific jobs in the council.

Councillor Ojetola asked the Officer how feedback was undertaken from resident satisfaction surveys. The Officer confirmed that the same methodology was used for every survey using a 5 point response from Excellent to Terrible. The repairs service survey contains 20 questions with a 10% sample being analysed.

The Chair asked the co-optee member for their opinion on the Transformation Homes Programme. Lynn Mansfield agreed that the repair times and operatives had improved.

Although Lynn Mansfield disagreed that help was available for the cleaning up of damp, mould and condensation. Only those residents were being advised to open windows and use bleach to remove the mould.

Lynn Mansfield was concerned about the lack of help available for vulnerable people and how they were expected to do more for themselves, which in some cases was not feasible.

The Director of Housing confirmed that Housing will be renewing their IT systems to Northgate by the end of the year. Currently they were using Mears repairs system MCN and Saffron.

Councillor Ojetola asked Officers if asbestos was being covered in the Transformation Homes Programme. The Director of Housing confirmed that a very detailed procedure was followed to address asbestos to comply with all the correct procedures. The Officer will supply details on how many times testing for asbestos had been carried out and how many incidents that had to be dealt with.

The Chair stated that on the whole the repair service had started well and would like to congratulate staff on the progress made so far.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the continued progress was made in the delivery of responsive repairs to Council managed homes.**
- 2. That the ongoing work being done to address the incidence of Damp, Condensation and associated Mould.**
- 3. That the outline and understanding of statutory landlord's requirements on how to deal with asbestos will be provided by the Director of Housing.**

14. Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2010-15

The Director of Housing informed the Members that there was a change to the recommendations in the report. The Board should read "The Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee" and the word approved should now read "to note".

The Officer presented the report which sets out the local authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness and for securing that sufficient accommodation and support were, or will be, available for people who become homeless or who were at risk of becoming so. The local authority must ensure that all organisations whose work can help to prevent homelessness and/or meet the needs of homeless people were involved in the strategy.

The Officer stated a full consultation plan had been undertaken and that the four main causes of homelessness in Thurrock were:

- Eviction by parents, family or friend
- The ending of an Assured Short hold tenancy
- Violence or harassment
- Mortgage or rent arrears

It was agreed by the Members and Officers that the key area was the homelessness prevention programme.

The Officer informed the Members that London Boroughs were using Thurrock to house their residents and paying very high incentives to landlords.

Councillor Hamilton asked the Officer if reviewing the Action Plan just once a year was a too long a period.

The Director of Housing confirmed that the annual review will be an overview of that year and that the forum will continue to meet in between this period. Those Members interested in attending the forum were to inform the democratic officer for referral to the Officer.

The officer confirmed that the Action Plan was a changing “living” document and this was necessary in order to meet emerging needs

Councillor Ojetola asked the Officer what the plans were for holding the Equalities Impact Assessment. The Officer confirmed that the initial assessment had been carried out and that face to face sessions were being held. A report will be available for Members.

Councillor Ojetola asked the Officers how Thurrock was addressing the economic impact and what the long term plan was. The Officer confirmed that there was a shortage of houses in Thurrock but there were clear plans to build new homes alongside the regeneration plans and Gloriana.

The Director of Housing stated work was undergoing with regard to working with Thurrock landlords, offering them stability, finding them suitable tenants, training and offering support.

Councillor MacPherson asked the Officer why a private landlord would do this when they could get higher rents elsewhere. The Officer agreed but stated that it was a rent payment guarantee for a landlord over a certain period of time.

The Members, the Portfolio for Housing and the Chair congratulated the team on all their hard work and being awarded the Bronze Prize in the National Practitioner Support Service Gold Standard Award.

Councillor Ojetola asked the Officer for Leaving Care Team stats. The Officer will confirm the numbers and inform Members accordingly.

Councillor Hamilton stated that it was good that a bidding war had not started with other local authorities as this could easily get out of hand.

Lynn Mansfield asked the Officers how Thurrock deal with private accommodation homelessness. The Officer confirmed that Thurrock had a duty to assist and follow set legislation that were in place, following the same assessments and priority procedures.

The Director of Housing confirmed that the Action Plan was on track and items for September 2015 were already in place.

Councillor Worrell stated that homelessness was a massive problem and had recently written a report for the Thurrock Gazette on this confirming that until the London Boroughs stop using Thurrock as an overspill the problem will continue to grow.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the Thurrock Homelessness Review 2015 document.**
- 2. That the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee to note the Thurrock Homelessness Strategy Action Plan 2015-20.**
- 3. That the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee to note an annual review of the Action Plan.**
- 4. That the Director of Housing refer to Cabinet the following:**
 - a) The Equalities Impact Assessments**
 - b) Emphasise the difficulties with retaining Thurrock Landlords**
 - c) Leaving Care Stats regarding failed tenancies**
- 5. That members will supply the democratic officer names of those who would attend the homelessness forum.**
- 6. That the Leaving Care Stats be available to Members.**

15. Elizabeth Gardens - Local Lettings Plan

The Director of Housing informed the Members that the Allocation Policy had a clause which allowed the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee to agree the proposal for a local lettings plan.

The Director of Housing introduced the report which detailed how the local lettings scheme could be used to allow the allocations of two bedroom properties in Elizabeth Gardens, which were outside of the usual requirements where there were no suitable nominees waiting. This would resolve the issue of losing nominations to applicants with no local connection to the borough and ensure that the Councils own waiting list of applicants take priority over the waiting lists of Hanover Housing Association who manage the scheme at Elizabeth Gardens.

All Members agreed to recommend the local lettings plan for a temporary one year period.

Councillor Hamilton asked the Officers if the two bedrooms could be altered to become a one bedroom flat. The Officer confirmed that the Elizabeth Gardens belonged to Hanover so Thurrock were unable to make any alterations to the room sizes.

Councillor MacPherson asked the Officers that after the temporary one year period would residents then have to move out of the two bedroom flats. The Officer confirmed that this would not be the case.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee approved the Local lettings plan for nominations to the two bedroom flats at Elizabeth Gardens for a period of one year.**
- 2. That the local lettings plan allows nomination of the two bedroom properties to applicants outside of the usual bedroom size requirement where there were no waiting applicants who meet the usual criteria.**
- 3. That when the local lettings plan is used to nominate applicants, couples will take priority over single applicants for the two bedroom properties.**

16. Work Programme

Since the publication of the agenda a number of amendments to the work programme had been proposed, which along with the amendments agreed earlier in the meeting, included:

- That an update on the results of the Rent Modelling (1% rent reduction option) be added to the work programme for November 2015.
- That an item on Housing Services Performance Update be moved on the work programme from November 2015 to January 2016.
- That an item on Housing Strategy Action Plan be moved on the work programme from November 2015 to January 2016.
- That an item on Housing Investment Programmes Update be moved on the work programme from November 2015 to February 2016.
- That the item on Update on Right to Move to be removed from the work programme and members supplied with a briefing update at the 6 January 2016 committee.
- That an item on Flexible Tenancies be included on the work programme for November 2015.
- That an item on Homelessness Prevention Strategy be included on the 2016/17 Work Programme for September 2016.

Members were in agreement with the proposed changes to the work programme, following which the Chair requested that an updated work programme be circulated to the Committee and Officers following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted, subject to the amendments detailed above.

The meeting finished at 8.53 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**