

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 2 October 2018 at 7.00 pm**

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

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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.

### **9. Minutes**

The minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10 July 2018 were approved as a correct record.

### **10. Urgent Items**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **11. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **12. Fire Safety Update**

Presented by the Interim Assistant Director Housing, Richard Birchett, the report updated Members on the fire safety measures undertaken by the Council and addressed the question of retrospective installation of sprinklers in the Council's 15 high rise blocks.

An ongoing programme of improvements within the 15 high rise blocks were implemented and all safety critical issues were rectified immediately and as part of the programme smoke and heat detectors were installed in each individual flat.

The high rise flats were designed to be safe buildings for residents and there was nothing to indicate otherwise. Since the incident with Grenfell Tower the key issues were rectified within the borough, which was evident when an incident took place in George Tilbury House. The fire only affected the flat where the fire started, the flat below with water ingress and the windows of

the flat above. During the incident the Fire brigade advised residents to stay inside their properties as it would have been the safest place. The fire doors in the building were there to prevent the smoke and heat for around 30 minutes as confirmed through a fire inspection.

Fire suppressant and sprinkler systems became mandatory for all high rise buildings over 30 metres in height in England in 2007. However building regulations are not retrospective and therefore it is not a requirement to fit them into the 15 high rise blocks. Sprinkler systems are in place in the bin rooms on the ground floor which were monitored by the concierge and control rooms.

It was estimated the total cost of retrospectively fitting sprinkler systems into the 15 high rise blocks would cost around 3.3million, although there had been £10,000 granted for each high rise block from ECFRS this would not fund the installation of sprinklers.

The Chair asked for an update on the Guidance and Regulations from the Government on fire doors, as the information available to the council and set out in the report was limited. The Interim Assistant Director Housing, Mr Birchett advised that there were on-going discussions between the Government and the fire door manufacturers on the type of testing that would be required on all new fire doors..

Councillor Spillman expressed how disappointed he was with the lack of information in the report as during the last Full Council meeting, Members had asked for information to be clarified and he did not feel this was done.

The Interim Assistant Director Housing, Mr Birchett specified that a review was completed and a range of safety measures were in place in the high rise blocks, and there had been no specific direction from the Government to owners of high rise blocks to retrospectively install sprinklers.

Councillor Spillman highlighted that other Local Authorities had installed the sprinklers and at Full Council it was unanimously voted for the report to be brought back with more information.

The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health, Mr Harris agreed to bring the report back to Committee, and confirmed that the Government had not issued any guidance or regulation on retrospectively fitting sprinklers in high-rise blocks..

Councillor Jefferies said the biggest reassurance for residents was to feel safe in their properties. He went on to ask for more information regarding the George Tilbury House incident.

The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health, Mr Harris explained the fire took place in one flat and the fire brigade attended rapidly and the fire was immediately put out. An analysis was done after the fire and it confirmed

that water penetrated to the flat below and smoke impacted on the exterior windows of the flat above. There were only 4 flats affected by the fire.

The Interim Assistant Director Housing, Mr Birchett explained to the Committee, the fire took around 40 minutes to be put out, and it was tackled through the front door. The report from the fire brigade indicated that the fire doors worked appropriately along with the landing fire restrictions.

Councillor Jefferies advised that if the fire brigades felt the sprinklers were needed then this would have been included in the report, however there were no recommendations.

Councillor Rice explained that there would need to be relevant funding for the sprinklers.

The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health, Mr Harris advised that a report regarding the budget would be presented at the following Committee, and the Local Authority would require external support as there is no funding in the HRA.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**1.1 The Committee is asked to comment on the contents of the report and the ongoing fire safety work undertaken by the housing service to ensure all council rented properties are safe.**

### **13. Housing Green Paper on Social Housing and consultation on use of Right to Buy receipts**

The report was introduced by the Interim Assistant Director Housing, Mr Birchett, which gave an update of the Housing Green Paper on Social Housing and consultation on use of Right to Buy receipts.

*The Government issued the Social Housing Green Paper on 14 August 2018 proposing “fundamental reform to ensure social homes provide an essential, safe, well managed service for all those who need it”. The Green Paper puts forward a number of proposals and seeks respondents’ views on a range of issues, including new proposals for “league tables” for social landlords, a new inspection regime, proposals to extend the ways in which social tenants can buy their homes and the intention to withdraw measures that would have forced councils to sell high value property when empty and to provide fixed term tenancies. This report follows the chapter headings set out in the Green Paper, including the questions posed by Government and provides comment where appropriate.*

Alongside the Green Paper the government published consultation seeking views on options for reforming the rules governing the use of Right to Buy receipts from the sale of council houses and whether they should reform the commitment that every additional home sold is replaced on a one for one basis. The Consultation would be coming to an end on 9 October 2018. One

of the main points in the Consultation would allow a 3 month period during which the Local Authority could return receipts without any interest added.

The Chair asked if as a Local Authority would the receipts of a Right to Buy properties be able to replace a newly built property otherwise the Local Authority were being forced to sell a property by legislation.

The Interim Assistant Director Housing, Mr Birchett outlined that build costs in Thurrock were relatively high and sale values were relatively low and it would be difficult to develop schemes to deliver one for one replacements of homes sold through the Right to Buy and the receipt for the Right to Buy properties would not cover the cost of a newly built properties. There were currently no headroom in the HRA for additional borrowing to build more homes.

Councillor Spillman asked for the number of Council properties being sold each year and when the last time there were properties put forward. The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health, Mr Harris confirmed an average of 100 properties per year and 3 schemes were put forward around 2-3 years ago which had been approved by Planning and would potentially be built by 2020. The Local Authority would be more than happy to build more homes in Thurrock however there is no funding for these properties.

**RESOLVED:**

**1.1 That the main points of the Government's Social Housing Green Paper be noted.**

**14. Verbal Update on Additional Licensing of Houses of Multiple Occupancy Consultation**

The Interim Assistant Director Housing, Mr Birchett updated the Committee on the implementation of the Mandatory licensing for Houses of Multiple Occupancy. He advised that the Mandatory scheme had come into being on Monday 1 October and that there had been 61 applications either for a Licence or for a temporary suspension of the need for a licence pending the disposal of the property. 24 of the applications were not known to the Licensing team. There were large amounts of Houses of Multiple Occupancy within the borough and Officers were working closely with them. The Consultation on Additional Licensing had been well received and majority feedback was from residents who wanted Additional licensing across the Borough. The next stages in implementing licensing would be brought back to the December meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

**1.1 That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented on the information shared.**

**15. Work Programme**

Members discussed the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for the upcoming meetings. The Vice-Chair requested for an updated report on the Fire safety in High rise blocks, he also requested for a review on the out of hours response and sheltered accommodation.

The following reports were to be added to the work programme:

- Older people's Health and Housing annual report
- Housing allocation review
- Additional Licensing scheme (update)
- HRA business plan
- Further report on Fire safety
- Sheltered Housing / Out of House response.

**The meeting finished at 7.45 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](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**