

Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 December 2018 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Gerard Rice (Chair), Luke Spillman (Vice-Chair), Andrew Jefferies and Joycelyn Redsell

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

Apologies: Councillors James Baker, Clare Baldwin

In attendance: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director Housing Management
Dulal Ahmed, Housing Enforcement Manager, Adults, Housing & Health
Andrea Clement, Assistant Director and Consultant in Public Health
Ryan Farmer, Housing Strategy & Quality Manager, Adults, Housing & Health
Tina Mitchell, Team Manager, Strategy, Communications & Customer Services
Julia Curtis, HRA and Development Accountant
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.

16. Minutes

The minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 2 October 2018 were approved as a correct record.

17. Urgent Items

There were no items of urgent business.

18. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

19. Fees & Charges Pricing Strategy 2019/20

The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health presented the report and explained it was a brief update on the Fees and Charges pricing strategy for 2019/2020 which would also be presented at all other Committee meetings and will be going to Cabinet in February 2019.

The proposed fees and charges related to those that affected the General Fund and not the HRA.

Councillor Redsell asked whether the Mobile Homes site licensing fees and charges were referring to traveller sites.

The Housing Enforcement Manager, explained that the Council has a statutory duty to inspect mobile home sites with planning permission. The new fees covered the licensing function to inspect, monitor and enforce license conditions at mobile home sites. The three Council run traveller sites in Thurrock are:

- Ship Lane, Aveley,
- Gammons Field site, Grays,
- Pilgrams Lane Site, North Stifford

Their rent charges cover the Council's management and revenue costs to manage these sites. The Committee explored fees and charges for traveller sites as they seem to have increased.

Councillor Pothercary asked why the report had a Housing Benefit table. The Director confirmed the fees and charges report would be updated before the report is presented at Cabinet in February 2019.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. The Committee note the revised fees, including those no longer applicable, and that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the proposals currently being considered within the remit of this committee.**
- 2. The Committee note that director delegated authority will be sought via Cabinet to allow Fees & Charges to be varied within a financial year in response to commercial requirements.**

20. Healthy Housing for the Third Age: Improving Older People's Health through Housing, Annual Public Health Report 2018

The Assistant Director and Consultant in Public Health presented the report and explained it was a statutory duty of the Director of Public Health to prepare an independent report on the health and wellbeing of the local population each year. Last year's report focussed on the sustainability of Children's Social Care in Thurrock and this year it has focused on the current and future needs of older people with respect to housing. The report focuses on four key areas for older people's housing:

1. The need to build a bespoke range of specialist homes
2. The need to build mainstream homes which are suitable across the life-course,
3. The need to ensure existing housing is a suitable for older people

4. The need to develop health places which incorporate the age friendly features.

These changes suggest that it will help mitigate the effects of unhealthy, unsuitable, unsafe or insecure homes.

The Chair wanted to highlight that the residents' health is very important and it would be beneficial for older residents to move into smaller accommodation if needed which would also prevent the cause of accidents if they are moved into bungalows. Furthermore this would give younger people the opportunity to buy properties in Thurrock, although the Chair wanted to clarify that this was not a suggestion for older residents to be forced out of their homes.

Councillor Redsell highlighted that the classing of older people as being over 55 needed to be considered in the context that people of that age could be very active. The Committee highlighted that the examples used in the report were not local ones. In response Officers felt local cases would have more relevance and this would be amended before the report is presented at Cabinet.

Officers explained the report promoted healthy living and supported residents to remain in their homes and was not about building more specific complexes for older people.

The Committee briefly debated the effects of loneliness that might occur from people staying in their own properties for longer. Officers explained LAC (Local Area Co-Ordinators) were in place to tackle loneliness, who had done very well by interacting with older residents to ensure they were not feeling lonely or isolated.

Councillor Spillman shared his concerns about older residents aged 50 - 60 on a low income and questioned the effects on their health and wellbeing. The proposals in the report could impact on them being able to privately rent and would leave them in a challenging situation which would impact on their health.

With regards to Occupational Therapy services the Director highlighted that the Council was in an improved position than in previous years as the waiting time for an initial assessment was 2 - 4 weeks.

Councillor Jefferies asked whether the Council had explored the opportunity to provide more flats that offer additional support.

Councillor Pothercary praised the report author for the detailed and very positive report, although she felt concerned that the developers did not want to meet the needs of older people. Officers stated it was for the developers and the council to meet the residents' needs.

The Chair stated that most of the sheltered housing in Thurrock was of its time, having been built in the 1980s and 1990s and the scope of those

buildings were limited at that time. The Committee highlighted the figure of 8,000 residents on the housing waiting list and the incentives to encourage single occupants living in larger properties to relocate to smaller accommodation was discussed.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. The committee noted and commented on the content and recommendations contained within the report.**
- 2. The committee considered how the findings of the report can best be used to influence wider corporate strategy**

21. Out of Hours Procedures for Sheltered Housing

The Assistant Director Housing Management presented the report and outlined the out of hours' procedures in place in sheltered accommodation following a request made at the last Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Spillman revealed the report was initially influenced by a particular incident in Thurrock and the concerns are with the emergency services attending to residents in a timely manner.

Officers confirmed some procedures were already being implemented to allow emergency services easy and quick access to properties including a master key being supplied to all Sheltered Housing Officers and implementing a key safe outside all sheltered housing properties in case of an emergency.

Councillor Spillman asked how these procedures were being communicated with residents. Officers advised that all sheltered housing residents were made aware at the beginning of their tenancy agreements.

The Committee wanted clarity on how the pendant alarms were being tested monthly as stated in the report. In response Officers explained that a new central control system was in place which alerts the care line before the battery on the pendant runs low, and when it was installed all the residents were asked to test them regularly, in addition to this the care line staff make outbound calls to residents to ensure their pendants are being tested. Councillor Redsell praised the care line and the technology in place to keep older residents safe in their homes.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers and comments upon on the out of hour's provision in Sheltered Housing**

22. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan and Budgets 2019/2020

The Officers presented the report which represented the updated HRA Business Plan for 2019/2020. It was highlighted that the Business Plan is a statutory requirement and the HRA needs to be financially viable, whilst being able to continue to deliver the Council's housing priorities.

Councillor Spillman asked for confirmation on the funding that could be borrowed now that the HRA borrowing cap had been lifted. Officers advised it was still work in progress and the HRA cap was lifted and a further report on the HRA new build programme will be brought back to the Housing Committee in February 2019.

Officers also agreed there is an aspiration to build more council homes in Thurrock. The Committee expressed the need for homes in Thurrock and the Chair stated, if there is not enough land they would potentially need to be built in the green belt; in the 1950s this was something which was done regularly.

Councillor Redsell asked for details on the upkeep and maintenance of garages. She commented whether it would be beneficial for the garages to be knocked down and used as public car parks. The Committee suggested if the budget was low, the Youth Offending Service could always provide support and help repair the garages.

Officers addressed the comments regarding garages and advised the Committee that the Council are aware of the maintenance on garages, which will be discussed during February's Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting and a report will be shared.

During the discussion Councillor Pothercary asked whether measures could be put in place to prevent residents falling behind on rent due to the introduction of universal credit changes. Officers reassured the Committee that the Council were being proactive with the support offered for people on Universal Credit to prevent people falling into arrears.

Councillor Pothercary also shared her concerns with the external wall upgrades to high-rise tower blocks in light of the cladding concerns raised from the Grenfell Tower incident. She felt safety assessments of refurbishments should be undertaken before they were installed. Officers noted these comments and advised it would be discussed at Cabinet, although the safety checks had been done. Officers added the work was being undertaken because the cladding was close to reaching its lifespan and needed replacing.

Councillor Spillman also raised concerns with sprinklers in the high rise tower blocks as this was previously mentioned at the Housing Overview and Scrutiny in October. The Director confirmed this would be discussed at the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2019.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comments on the assumptions reflected in the HRA Business Plan, as summarised in the report.**
- 2. That Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee comments on the budget information which is also provided.**

23. Housing Allocation Review 2018

The Housing Strategy & Quality Manager, explained the purpose of the report was to outline the reason why Local Authorities are required to have an up to date Allocations Policy. The report sets out a number of recommended changes and matters for consideration regarding the current Housing Allocations Policy.

The recommended changes include:

- Removing of band 5 on the housing list
- Revisiting “families local connections”
- Employment
- Financial threshold
- Cancelling inactive applicants

Councillor Spillman expressed his disagreement with the removal of band 5 on the Council housing list as there was no ethical reason behind it, although it gives residents false hope of being housed.

Councillor Redsell asked Officers what they expect will change by removing band 5. Officers responded that it would allow properties to be allocated to those most in need i.e. bands 1- 4.

The Committee discussed “the family connections” criteria as there are a large amount of modern families in the borough which this policy would need to take into account.

Councillor Spillman felt unhappy with the report and stated that he would not be supporting the recommendations as he felt that Cabinet needed to take into account how families would be affected by this policy.

Councillor Redsell asked whether local employment held any weight in the eligibility criteria for social housing. Officers confirmed all applicants on the housing register were invited to take part in the consultations however only 539 responses were received.

Councillor Pothercary mentioned “Key workers” as they may not meet the local employment criteria, due to their income. Officers explained “key Workers” would focus on graduates and not necessarily include Doctors due to their income.

Officers explained that the Local Authority was under a legal duty to house residents, although few residents housed each year are band 5, only 15 - 50 residents on band 5 are housed each year. Officers added that Basildon Council have a 6 year minimum for living in the borough.

The Chair highlighted as part of the Local Plan, the Council proposed 10,000 Council properties over 20 years. There are 8,000 residents on the waiting list, and it would not be appropriate for the properties to be empty which would be the case if band 5 was removed.

The Director explained to the Committee that band 5 would not be abolished until (2019) and all residents currently on band 5 will have a small chance of being accommodated.

The Committee asked in particular what residents would be placed on band 5. The Director explained band 5 was for residents who are adequately housed in either privately rented homes or living with family members and are waiting to be accommodated by the Council but meet the other eligibility criteria.

Councillor Spillman said the residents on band 5 could also be individuals aged 40 or above living with their parents as it is exceptionally difficult for them financially to rent privately.

The Chair proposed for Members to move a motion as the committee seemed against the removing of band 5 on the housing list. He felt it would prevent the younger generation from getting social housing. Councillor Jefferies disagreed with the Chair's comment as it would not impact on the younger generation.

The Director advised that the Local Plan was out for consultation and the commitment was to build homes. The Committee stated that the new builds would need to be affordable homes.

During the discussion all Members decided that the recommendations **3.1.7, 3.2.3, 3.4.6, 3.5.12** would be approved and the Chair, the Vice-Chair and Councillor Pothercary disagreed with recommendation **3.3.4 - Banding and Lists, Matters for Consideration**.

RESOLVED: That:

1. Members commented on the relevant sections of the report:

3.1.7 – Local Connection – Matters for Consideration

3.2.3 – Financial Qualification – Matters for Consideration

3.4.6 – Key Workers and Working Households – Matters for Consideration

3.5.12 – Applications, Bidding and Offers – Matters for Consideration

24. Consultation Update on the Housing Option of Additional Licensing scheme

The Housing Enforcement Manager presented the report and explained in December 2016 the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed for Officers to introduce an additional licensing for privately rented properties. The scheme would provide protection to HMO tenants if approved.

Councillor Redsell praised Officers and agreed there had been positive impact in the borough.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. Note the new extended mandatory HMO licensing scheme came into force on October 1 2018**
- 2. Note Additional HMO licensing falls outside the scope of mandatory HMO licencing of private rented property which is let to 5 or tenants who form two or more households**
- 3. Note the proposed Additional Licensing designated areas in the borough will be subject to licensing for private rented property which is let to 3 to 4 tenants who form two or more households**
- 4. Note the outcomes of the public consultation exercise with a view to making recommendations to Cabinet.**

25. Work Programme

Members discussed the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for the upcoming meetings and the Chair requested for an updated report on the Housing Allocations Review 2019 for February's Committee meeting.

The meeting finished at 9.55 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**