

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 July 2016 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Gerard Rice (Chair), Chris Baker (Vice-Chair), Jan Baker, Sue MacPherson, Jane Potheary and Joycelyn Redsell

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

**In attendance:** Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health  
Matthew Essex, Head of Regeneration and Assets  
Richard Parkin, Head of Environment  
Dulal Ahmed, Housing Enforcement Manager  
Dawn Shepherd, Housing Strategy and Quality Manager  
Kenna-Victoria Martin, Senior Democratic Services 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.

### **1. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 14 March 2016 were approved as a correct record.

### **2. Urgent Items**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **3. Declaration of Interests**

No interests were declared.

### **4. Update on the Housing and Planning Act 2016**

The Housing Strategy and Quality Manager presented the report to Members explaining that a report had been put before the Committee last year and Officers were back with a further update for Members following the Housing and Planning Act 2016 receiving royal assent in May 2016.

Members were notified that Officers had provisions in place and were awaiting further information on the legislation and guidance from the Government.

During discussions Officers advised of the three key changes to local authority and private Housing which were to be introduced by the legislation:

- Fixed Term tenancies

- Pay to Stay provisions
- Sale of higher value Council houses

Members were taken through the changes and the following was highlighted:

- The 2016 Housing and Planning Act required all Local Authorities to issue only fixed term secure tenancies;
- The tenancies were to be for a minimum period of two years and a maximum of ten years. There was an exception where children under the age of 9 were living in the property, then the tenancy could be extended up to the 19th birthday of the child.
- The Council could determine the length of period that tenancies for properties without children would be given, provisions for the elderly and those with disabilities could also be included;
- Six months before the end of the fixed term the Council were to review the tenancy;
- The Council were to charge a higher rent to a tenant on a 'high income'. High income would initially mean over £31,000 in England, outside London;
- The Pay to Stay scheme was likely to affect around 700 households within Thurrock and any receipts were to be paid to the treasury The Act also required the Council to pay a sum equivalent to the market value of any 'higher value' Council housing stock which would become vacant during the year. Members were notified that Officers were awaiting further details regarding the definition of 'higher value'.

The Chair of the Committee enquired as to the consultation period within the recommendations of the report. The Housing Strategy and Quality Manager explained the consultation would be started following the meeting with the plan to report back to the Committee in October, prior to Cabinet in November.

Councillor Redsell queried as to who was on the working group and whether the new legislation would affect the right to buy scheme. Officers confirmed that the right to buy scheme would not be affected by the legislation. She continued by explaining the working group was currently officer based, however Members would be invited to the consultation

Councillor Potheary sought clarification if a child was under 9 years; if once the 10 year period was finished if a family would be removed from their property. Officers explained that the Council had discretion within the Tenancy Policy to grant a further fixed term tenancy.

Councillor MacPherson commented that the minimum tenancy was for 2 years, she further sought as to how a tenant could end their tenancy if they so wished. The Housing Strategy and Quality Manager informed the Committee that tenants could end their tenancy in the usual way at any time.

The Chair of the Committee clarified that Officers were awaiting further guidance and information from the Government and confirmed with Officers that a report would be presented to the Committee at their October meeting.

The Housing Enforcement Manager reported to Members the extension of Mandatory Licensing for Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in doing so he explained:

- At the end of December 2015, the Government consulted on the proposals to extend the scope of mandatory licensing of HMOs, following the new definition to extend the scope of mandatory licensing of HMOs Thurrock has over 300 two storey HMO buildings, including shared houses and single tenancies on its private sector housing database;
- The Council were proposing new fees to be implemented in 2017/2018, with the proposed fees reflecting the administrative costs to license the HMO changes;
- Should the two storey HMO definition be adopted, it would require 300 HMO landlords in the borough to be licensed and;
- The new fees took into account the local housing supply conditions in the private rented sector and would encourage private landlord authorisation to ensure decent standards in properties; where there were several people sharing basic facilities and further required landlords to be a 'Fit and Proper' person to be granted a licence.

The Housing Enforcement Manager continued to advise the Committee that Essex Police were supportive of the initiative as it may assist in reducing crime and disorder related to poorly managed HMOs.

Councillor Rice, Chair of the Committee commented that he welcomed the new regulations.

Members enquired as to how the Council would find HMOs and how would the needs of young people be assisted. Officers stated that the Council knew of 300 HMO within the borough and this was largely linked to complaints and Housing Benefit data. It was confirmed that through the consultation Officers would incorporate the needs of young people.

The Committee queried as to different services within the Council working together such as: Planning, Council Tax and Benefits. The Housing Enforcement Manager confirmed that his team were working alongside Officers in Planning, Building Control and Trading Standings.

**RESOLVED that the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee:**

- 1. Note the new legislative requirements of the Housing & Planning Act 2016;**
- 2. Approve a public consultation to inform a revised tenancy policy;**
- 3. Approve a public consultation into an extension of HMO licensing and new fees 2017/18;**

4. **Agree to review the outcomes of the consultations at the next Overview & Scrutiny meeting in October with a view to making recommendations to Cabinet in November.**

## 5. **Housing Repairs and Maintenance Working Group**

The Head of Environment introduced the report to the Committee informing them following a number of queries raised regarding the progress with the Housing Repairs Service, the previous portfolio holder for Housing, suggested a cross party member working group.

He continued to notify Members the ultimate aim of the working group was to make recommendations that would further improve tenant satisfaction. Members were further informed the working group made a number of recommendations, which included:

- Review of tenants rating the service as “fair” in satisfaction surveys and not just poor or terrible;
- Implementation of quality pledge ID Cards for Mears operatives that provide the name, photo and Trade that each operative is qualified in and;
- Undertaking the customer surveys, and to present feedback to Housing Overview and Scrutiny annually.

The Head of Environment advised Committee Members that following winter 2015/2016 there was a high level of discontent with the Gas Breakdown and Repairs service that Mears were providing tenants. Thurrock worked with Liberty Gas to transfer the repairs and maintenance function over to them. Since Liberty Gas were completing boiler servicing on behalf of the Council and they were able to offer a “3 Star Service”, to include repairs and maintenance on a price per property basis.

Officers discussed the issue of damp and mould and advised the Committee that following customer satisfaction surveys only 44.7% of respondents rated the service as Good or Excellent and that only 33% of residents said that the work undertaken fully resolved the issue. During the discussion it was mentioned that to tackle the issue of damp and mould was not only a case of repairing but also a change in lifestyles.

Members commented that Repairs Satisfaction was reported to have 86.4% of tenant last year rating the service as good or excellent. Officers confirmed that in June following a satisfaction survey 86% of Thurrock residents rated the service good or excellent. The Committee were informed there was new leadership at Mears, which Officers were confident, would assist in approving the service offered to residents in relation to communication. Members were further informed that previously 29% of residents had rated the service with poor communication.

The Committee discussed the use of dry masters within Council properties to help residents living with damp and mould. During the discussion Officers

commented that with limited resources it was more a situation of educating tenants on things they could do to help with tackling damp and mould within their homes.

## **RESOLVED**

1. **That Housing Overview and Scrutiny are asked to note the recommendations made by the working group and note progress made in terms of implementation.**
  - *Implementation of quality pledge ID Cards for Mears operatives that provide the name, photo and Trade that each operative is qualified in.*
  - *Inviting the company undertaking the customer surveys, KWest, to present feedback to Housing Overview and Scrutiny annually.*
  - *Consider providing new tenants with photographs of void properties before the work was completed so there is an understanding of the work that has to be undertaken.*
  - *Review of tenants rating the service as “fair” in satisfaction surveys and not just poor or terrible.*
  - *Providing information / communication or training on the repairs process for Councillors to ensure they know where to direct tenants to for general enquiries / concerns*
  - *Add an additional question to customer surveys to see if tenants are happy with the way there call was handled by the contact centre*
  
2. **That Housing Overview and Scrutiny are also asked to note the update on the changes made to the Responsive Repairs Contract and to ask for an update regarding the Damp and Mould working group to come back later in the year.**

## **6. Housing Development Update**

The Head of Regeneration and Assets presented the report to Members explaining the following:

- A number of reports had been received by Cabinet, outlining the work being undertaken to explore the potential to bring forward the regeneration of the Borough’s key housing estates;
- It was proposed that the overall objective of the estate regeneration programme should be to broaden and increase the range, quality and quantity of affordable housing for existing and new residents;
- The programme also planned to support the provision of the facilities and services necessary to support growing communities.

Officers stated that discussions were focused on the opportunities available in the borough and to assist with the programme 11 principles has been collated, these were stated within the report.

Councillor Pothecary enquired if lessons had been learnt from the previous discussions with local people in respect of Seabrooke Rise. The Head of Regeneration and Assets explained that the main learning point to emerge from that work was on the timing of local engagement. In the previous work there had been an understandable desire to engage with local people at the earliest possible point to give them the opportunity to shape any proposals for their estate. However, engaging so early meant that the Council had been unable to answer residents' immediate questions which, alongside the Council's lack of a track record in estate regeneration, gave rise to significant concerns about the motivation for the proposals.

He continued to explain that the work now being undertaken, including the preparation of the principles contained within the report, was intended to provide a much more rounded understanding of the issues, opportunities and challenges to any estate regeneration programme. Over the coming months, the service and housing needs would be assessed and proposals developed which could be assessed for financial viability before any engagement activity was undertaken. Whilst it was acknowledged that this could result in abortive work in the very likely event that the plans were changed through discussions with residents it did mean that there would be a clear base position and the Council would be able to commit to particular proposals in response to likely questions and challenges.

During discussions it was raised that figures showed there was a need for more, smaller properties (i.e. one and two bedroom homes). It was discussed that, if possible, Officers wanted to use the estate regeneration programme to address service needs as well as providing new homes and so include provision for GP surgeries, nurseries and schools.

In reviewing the proposal to offer Hogg Lane South to Gloriana for consideration as a development site, Members stated that it was fundamental to take school places into account when looking at the programme. It was commented that schools in the area were not expanding and with a limited number of school places available to children already in the borough the development of the site could cause a further impact on schools. The Head of Regeneration and Assets notified the Committee if a site became available with space to include a primary school the Council could apply for Section 106 contribution for education.

**RESOLVED that the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee:**

- 1. Note the progress of Housing Development and Estate Regeneration Programmes;**
- 2. Consider and comment upon the emerging principles which would underpin any future Estate Regeneration Programme; and**
- 3. Consider the proposal to offer the Hogg Lane South site as a development opportunity for Gloriana in advance of a future report to Cabinet.**

## **7. Work Programme**

Members discussed the work programme for the current municipal year.

**RESOLVED that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Members agreed:**

- 1. A report on the budget is presented to the October or December meeting;**
- 2. An update report on the Housing and Planning Act 2016 is brought to the October meeting;**
- 3. An update report on Housing Repairs is brought to the December meeting.**

**The meeting finished at 9.05 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)**