

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 December 2016 at 7.00 pm**

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

Lynn Mansfield, Co-Opted Member

**Apologies:** Councillors Tunde Ojetola

**In attendance:** Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health  
John Knight, Head of Housing  
Dulal Ahmed, Housing Enforcement Manager  
Julie Curtis, HRA and Development Accountant  
Sue Kane, Sheltered Housing 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.

### **16. Minutes**

The Minutes of Cabinet, held on 9 November 2016, 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.

The Chair of the Committee took the opportunity to welcome John Knight, the new Head of Housing to the Committee.

### **19. Sheltered Housing Changes to Service – Update**

The Sheltered Housing Manager presented the report to Members informing them that Thurrock Sheltered Housing currently provided 1283 units of sheltered accommodation at 30 sites across the borough.

She continued to advise the Committee feedback from tenants' showed satisfaction levels with the Estate Officers service was good with over 80% of tenants judging the service as good or above. It was also mentioned of the 489 tenants who responded to the latest survey 35% scored the service as

excellent, Members were notified this was an improvement from the previous year.

Members were informed Anti-social behaviour (ASB) remained a concern given the vulnerability of the tenants in Sheltered Housing. However, the service was successfully managing ASB, with only 3 recorded open cases as of 28 November 2016.

It was explained that in spite of the reassuring set of survey results, the additional responsibilities for estate management had proved difficult within the sheltered housing team and therefore recently an extra 3 members of staff were employed, this brought the team to 18 Officers.

Members enquired as to whether the void level had been benchmarked against other local authorities in the area. Officers apologised as they didn't have any benchmarking figures to hand, however this could be sent to Members. However, voids were very low and there was a waiting list.

The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health stated that he had visited all but 3 of the sheltered accommodation complexes in the borough; he informed members that he was very impressed with the quality of the stock and proud of the community spirit of tenants. It was mentioned by the Sheltered Housing Manager that the team held McMillian Coffee Mornings within the complexes and raised just over £6,000.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the update report concerning the Sheltered Housing service.**

#### **20. Update on HMO Licence Fee Consultation and the Proposal of Additional Licensing**

The report was delivered by the Housing Enforcement Manager, and in doing so he highlighted the following to the Committee:

- At their last meeting, the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed to review the HMO (Houses in Multiple Occupation) licence fee changes proposed by the Private Sector Housing Service;
- The report outlined the consultation feedback and recommendations of residents, private landlords and stakeholders who would be affected by the proposed changes;
- The Government had announced its decision to extend mandatory HMO licensing. This included removing the storey rule so all houses with 5 or more people from 2 or more households are involved; and
- There were 300 plus HMOs within the borough that Officers were aware of.

The Housing Enforcement Manager advised the Committee following a telephone survey undertaken by KWest in July 2016, results showed 67% out

of 166 residents were supportive of extending HMO licencing. It was also agreed that the Council should be doing more to tackle poorly managed HMOs. It was mentioned that Essex Police and Fire Brigade were in strong support of extending mandatory HMO licensing in Thurrock.

Members were further advised landlords with more than one HMO welcomed the capped discount to support them. This would be a 20% cap per property should the landlord own more than one property.

The Chair welcomed the report and commented he felt the fees were acceptable and well controlled.

Members queried as to why temporary licences were for 12months. Officers explained that guidance advised 12 months, benchmarking against other local authorities had also been carried out.

**RESOLVED that Members:**

- 1. Note the Central Government changes to mandatory HMO licensing scheme;**
- 2. Note the feedback to Thurrock Council's public consultation on this extension to HMO licencing and on the revision of HMO licence fees to carry out this duty;**
- 3. Note the proposed HMO licence fee charges for 2017/18 to Cabinet in January 2017.**
- 4. Note the proposal to explore the option of Additional HMO licensing to properties below the Government's mandatory definition. This assessment will test it's appropriateness for additional licensing powers in Thurrock.**

**21. HRA Business Plan and Budgets 201718 Onwards**

The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health introduced the report informing Members the item was to be present to Cabinet in February.

The HRA and Development Accountant addressed the Committee and notified Members that the report set out the current position and progress in developing a new HRA Business Plan for 2017/18.

She continued by informing Members there was uncertainty around previously announced government proposals and the Housing White paper due in December should give Officers clarity.

It was mentioned that inflation had been included at 1% for salaries, 1.5% for repairs linked to contractual uplifts and 0% for all other costs during the Business Plan.

Members were advised that in line with the governments rent policy a 1% reduction has been applied to all rents for 2017/18. Furthermore, in addition to the general services provided to all tenants and leaseholders the Council

provided a range of specific services. These services included communal lighting, door entry systems, lift maintenance and maintenance for the grounds.

The HRA and Development Accountant explained that other Councils currently charged tenants for the costs of a range of services depending on locally delivered services via the HRA, these included Basildon, Havering, Barking and Dagenham and Medway.

The Committee were advised the Council had two main options;

- To continue with the current arrangements and only charge leaseholders the actual costs of the services provided, or
- To introduce service charges for tenants as well.

Members were further advised should they decide to introduce charges for tenants the Council could do so immediately or on a phased basis.

During the Committees discussions the following was raised:

- If tenants living in high rise flats owned their property would they have to pay the same costs as those who were renting. Officers explained that all costs would be calculated in the same way so that costs were fair for tenants and leaseholders;
- Members asked if the proposed charges would force more people into the a benefit cap. It was explained that all service charges would be worked out with the Rents team and that would show if anyone would be affected.

The Chair of the Committee raised concerns as to the service charge for people living in sheltered accommodation. He asked that Officers awaited the Government White Paper and report back to Committee once all guidance had been issued.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**That the report be brought back to the next meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, once the Government White Paper has been released.**

## **22. Council Spending Review Update**

The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health delivered the report to the Committee stating that the report had been presented all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

It was mentioned the report summarised the main changes to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2017/18 through to 2019/20.

The Committee were advised that at the current stage there were no specific housing general fund savings proposals.

Members were further advised the Medium Term Financial Strategy position included the assumption of a 3.99% increase in council tax each year, which included 1.99% general increase and 2% adult social care precept.

The Committee commented that the report mentioned where the budget gap could not be closed through recommendations it was likely that reductions or full cessation of services would be looked at. Members enquired which services would be subject to cessation. The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health stated that there were no formal proposals to close services at the present time. He continued by advising services may be delivered in a different way.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the revised MTFs position and the Council Spending Review approach and timetable.**

**23. Housing Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme**

Members discussed the Work Programme, with the Chair seeking that the Pay to Stay Update report be removed from the February meeting.

The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health sought if the Committee would be happy for Officers to incorporate a number of the items for February meetings into one report. It was confirmed Members were happy for this.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated, in line with Members discussions.**

**The meeting finished at 8.00 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**