

Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10 December 2014 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Gerard Rice (Chair), Barry Johnson (Vice-Chair), Chris Baker, Oliver Gerrish (substitute for Sue Gray) and Tom Kelly (substitute for Susan Little)

Apologies: Councillors Sue Gray and Susan Little

In attendance: Barbara Brownlee, Director of Housing - Thurrock Council
Dermot Moloney, Business Improvement Manager
Stephanie Cox, 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.

7. Minutes

The Minutes of Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 16 July 2014, were approved as a correct record.

8. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items of business.

9. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

10. Housing Allocations Scheme - First Year Review

The Director of Housing briefly introduced the report which outlined the results of the review of the Housing Allocations Policy that had been undertaken. The Allocations Policy was now a year old having been introduced in May 2013 after extensive consultation.

The Director of Housing outlined that a review of the scheme had showed that overall the scheme was working well. The Director further added that a number of small changes had been identified and recommended for approval, and that these had been documented in appendix 2.

Democratic Services advised the Committee that the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee did not have the decision making authority to approve recommendations for implementation, rather the Committee were asked to refer the resolutions as detailed below for consideration by Cabinet as the appropriate decision making body. As a result the Chair reworded the

recommendations so that it was clear that Members were only recommending for approval the recommendations as printed in the agenda.

A Member asked for clarification regarding the Working Households provision and requested that Members for all political groups be consulted on the proposals. It was explained that members had been consulted extensively on this when introduced last year and the Department was happy to continue with briefings. The policy stated that 15% of properties would be allocated to let for applicants where a member of the household was working. However it was further reported that as this was difficult to achieve in practice, although 15% was still the target, wording be amended to state 'up to 15%' instead to allow an element of discretion. The Committee agreed to this amendment.

A brief discussion took place on the family connection criteria, during which the Director of Housing confirmed that qualifying applicants must have a family member who lived in the Borough for at least 5 years but there was no set criteria that stated that the applicant had to reside in the UK.

Members requested that the introduction of this additional criterion be examined and the Director of Housing agreed to examine to see whether this would be possible although she advised she thought this very unlikely as it is it may well be unlawful to differentiate in this way between family members.

The Committee were advised that in circumstances where homeowners were able to meet their own housing needs by selling their property they would be expected to do so, however if the applicant was divorced and were unable to sell their property due to dependent children living at the property they may not be required to do so providing they are within the financial qualification criteria thresholds outlined in the allocations policy. Members were also advised that if enough capital could not be raised through the sale of the property then the applicant could also qualify for the housing waiting list as long as all qualification criteria were met.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That members recommend for approval changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme identified in Appendix 2 and the subsequent amendments made to the Allocations Scheme document in Appendix 3.**
- 2. That Members recommend for approval the downsizing policy and incentive scheme (Appendix 4).**
- 3. That Members recommend for approval the policy document regarding the discharge of the homeless duty into the private sector (Appendix 5).**

11. Work Programme

The Director of Housing advised Members that a budget update report will be brought back to the Committee in January 2015 for review.

RESOLVED: That the work programme be noted.

The meeting finished at 7.10 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**