

Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 June 2019 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Lynn Worrall (Chair), Chris Baker (Vice-Chair), Qaisar Abbas, Andrew Jefferies and Joycelyn Redsell
Lynn Mansfield, Tenant Representative
- Apologies:** Councillors Colin Churchman
- In attendance:** Councillor Bukky Okunade, Chair of Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Jennifer Smith, Vice-Chair of Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Carol Hinvest, Assistant Director of Housing
Detlev Munster, Assistant Director of Property and Development
Lorrita Johnson, Housing Solutions Manager
Chris Seman, Investment Planning & Performance Analyst
Kenna-Victoria Healey, 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 5 February 2019 were approved as a correct record.

2. Urgent Items

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Homeless Hostels, Housing First and Crisis Intervention

The Housing Solutions Manager presented the report to Members outlining the Council currently commissioned the three individual contracts aimed at supporting homeless households, identifying rough sleepers and providing initial advice to prevent homelessness within the borough, all of which were due to expire in March 2020. The Projects were the Homeless Hostels and Crisis Intervention Service, Housing First Project and the Rough Sleepers Outreach Service.

Members were further advised that the report sought permission to go out to tender to bring all of the services under one procurement process, with a view to a new contract starting in April 2020.

It was queried by Councillor Okunade, Chair of Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee as to whether the Housing offered to young people after care was adequate to meet their needs. She continued to ask if all services were being supplied by one provider, why were all three were commissioned differently. It was explained the services were commissioned at different times and with them all coming to an end at the same time, this was the best way to go out to tender for one contract for all services. Members were assured that Officers felt the service was adequate, with monthly meeting were taking place with the provider and it was felt support offered to young people was more detailed and checked by Officers within Children's Services.

The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health mentioned in addition, a building comprising of 10 rooms at Brooke House, had been purchased and was currently being refurbished ready to assist with tenancy support.

During discussions Members were informed that only 16/17 year olds lived in housing offered to young people and that they had support from support workers 24 hours a day. The aim was to encourage independence within young people.

Councillor Redsell queried as to process the Council had with regards to homeless Servicemen and women within the Borough. Officers commented that the Rough Sleepers Outreach Service, identified rough sleepers every night in the Borough, of which there were 9 rough sleepers identified, none of which Soldiers. It was commented that the Veterans Charter was built into the Housing Policy and priority housing as given to ex-servicemen and women.

The Chair of the Committee welcomed the report and the enquired as how Officers were to monitor the contracts merging into one. The Housing Solutions Manager explained that quarterly review meetings with the provider were in place and should it be necessary these could be amended to monthly, meaning if any risks were identified they could be dealt with quickly.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted and commented on the proposed service model for homeless support and crisis intervention prior to the report being submitted to Cabinet.

5. Housing Performance 2018/2019

The Assistant Director of Housing introduced the report highlighting that 2018/2019 ended with a strong performance for the Housing service. Despite

some challenges, rent collection remained strong and had been consistently above the profiled target throughout the 2018/19 financial year. The year-end outturn was 98.8% which was an improvement of 0.3% in comparison with 2017/2018.

She continued to inform the Committee the average time to re-let voids had improved significantly. During 2018/2019 it took an average of 26.64 calendar days to re-let a void property which was an improvement of 4 days in comparison with 2017/2018. This continued improvement in relation to void re-let time demonstrates the collaboration between the teams within Housing responsible for the performance of this indicator, partnership working with repairs contractors and improved internal processes.

Members discussed the tenant satisfaction rating, with many stating that it wasn't good enough, as it meant that at least a third of tenants were unhappy. Officers commented that the surveys were undertaken independently and were part of high benchmarking with 5 points including Fair, Good and Excellent. The Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health mentioned that if the rating included Good, Excellent and Fair the Council would be receiving outcomes of 90% plus.

The Committee were advised by the Assistant Director of Housing the service had been working with the Communications Team to improve communication with residents, following the recent Tenants Conference, which was now to become an annual event. Officers continued to advise that an email newsletter was to be created and sent to residents, which would hopefully aid with improving feedback given by residents.

It was enquired as to how residents were chosen to undertake the Council's survey. The Investment Planning and Performance Analyst explained that 10% of 2500 repairs were chosen at random and the survey carried out was independent of the Council and the figures could be used in benchmarking exercises. Members were further advised that the wording of the questions were clear and residents were asked why they rated the way they did.

The Tenant Housing Representative questioned as to whether the Transforming Homes Scheme covered when someone left a property and someone new moved in. It was confirmed if at the time the tenant had refused to allow the Council to inspect the property, then it would be inspected when it was void and if any repairs were necessary they would be carried out to a letting standard.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny noted and commented on the report.

6. Exploration of Selective Licensing of Private Rented Accommodation

The report was outlined by the Assistant Director of Housing who explained Selective Licensing was introduced in the Housing Act 2004, to tackle a variety of problems Local Authorities experienced in their local housing market, such as, significant and persistent problems of anti-social behaviour, poor property conditions, low housing demand, high levels of crime.

She continued to explain Local Authorities had the power to introduce Selective Licensing with Secretary of State approval for any scheme covering more than 20% of their geographical area or affecting more than 20% of private rented homes in the local authority area. The business case for Selective Licensing was required to be evidence led and all applications were considered on a case by case basis.

Members remarked they welcomed the report; however it was commented only if a resident reported a HMO that the Council would be made aware of them. The Assistant Director of Housing notified the Committee that Officers were looking into promoting the service. It was mentioned that a press release had been signed off to work with the private sector and landlords.

During discussions it was confirmed that the Council had enforcement powers and did use them if required too. It was further confirmed that if landlords did not comply with the statutory grounds then their licence would be revoked.

The Chair of Committee enquired as to the licence fees being in the region of £500 to £600, given that the Council had in the region of 14,000 properties in the Borough which could require a licence, as this would bring in high revenue to the Council. The Assistant Director of Housing explained that the fees hadn't yet been agreed and fees were over a 5 year period with half being paid at the application stage.

RESOLVED that the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1. Noted and comment on the exploration of a Selective Licensing scheme covering all or certain parts of the borough;**
- 2. Noted that a business case will be produced to support selective licensing areas of high levels of private rented accommodation;**
- 3. Noted the approval steps for a Selective Licensing designation as set out in paragraph 5 and;**
- 4. Noted and comment on the public consultation exercise to gather views and representation about the proposed scheme.**

7. New Council HRA Home Building Programme

The Assistant Director of Property and Development presented the report in doing so, he informed Members Cabinet approved the preparation for the delivery of up to 500 new Council homes for Thurrock residents over the next

5 to 10 years through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Cabinet also agreed to refer decision to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its consideration and advice on ensuring the successful delivery of the new Homes Delivery Programme. He continued to advise the Committee each approach and project would require different governance and approval arrangements whilst following similar project management disciplines.

Members were then informed that the first phase of 200 homes had been proposed and sites would need to be quickly identified and assessed so that the programme could commence in a timely manner.

Councillor Baker questioned as to where the 500 new homes were to be built. The Assistant Director of Property and Development stated there were a variety of methods to be used to identify possible sites, however as yet there was no distinctive list.

The Chair of the Committee queried that there was no distinctive list, when the report stated the Council had undertaken a significant review of its estate through Retain, Release, and Reuse programme. She continued that she welcomed new housing and homes in the Borough; however she felt that the process should include consultations with Ward Councillors, the Portfolio Holder and residents, before the Committee were asked to endorse the program.

During discussions Members commented they felt the programme was ambitious and that if it was an individual developer and not the Council then the sites would not be known to Members until the Planning application stage, where any objections could be heard. It was mentioned that some Members had concerns that if consulting with residents and other Councillors before the initial process had begun, could slow down the overall development.

It was commented that it was important to have Members and residents on the journey of the development, with Officers using the Your Place, Your Voice consultation to assist with looking at recommended sites in more detail. It was further stated that residents would get the opportunity to speak at the planning application state.

The Chair of the Committee enquired if it was possible to consult on the first 200 homes and to report back to the Committee at their October meeting. She further asked if Officers had thought about infrastructure within the development, such as the impact on Schools or Doctors.

The Assistant Director of Property and Development explained the planning process would look at all of the concerns raised by Members. He continued by stating the development was still in the early days and that sites had not yet been selected, even for the first 200 homes.

Following discussions between Members of amending recommendation 1.1, the Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health suggested the recommendation read:

That Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the delivery of a New Homes Delivery Programme, including the consultation detailed at points 5.3 of the report

The Committee agreed this wording.

RESOLVED that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- 1. Endorse the delivery of a New Homes Delivery Programme, including the consultation detailed at points 5.3 of the report.**
- 2. Endorse the delivery arrangements in place to ensure the successful delivery of a new Council Homes Programme through the HRA.**
- 3. Update the work programme to receive regular updates on the new Council Homes Programme to assist in its successful delivery.**

8. Housing Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2019/2020

The Committee discussed the work programme for the up and coming year. The Chair of the Committee encouraged Members to think of items they would like to have presented by Officers and to contact either herself or Democratic Services.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the following reports be included on the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2019/2020:**
 - Update Report - New Council HRA Home Building Programme – December 2019**
 - Tenant Satisfaction Survey - October or December 2019**

The meeting finished at 8.55 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