

Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 June 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors James Halden (Chair), Sue Shinnick (Vice-Chair), Steve Liddiard, Joycelyn Redsell and Neil Speight

Sue Hodgson, Housing Tenant Representative

Apologies: Councillor Luke Spillman

In attendance: Ewelina Sorbjan, Assistant Director Housing
Dulal Ahmed, Housing Enforcement Manager
Ryan Farmer, Housing Strategy and Quality Manager
Abim Mabadeje, Homelessness Assessment and Prevention Manager
Mohammed Ullah, Repairs & Planned Maintenance Manager, Adults, Housing & Health
Chris Wade, Rehousing Manager
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

The Chair welcomed officers, members, and co-opted member to the committee. Stated that three items had been added to the work programme on Value for Money, Right to Buy Receipts Refreshed and links between Mental Health and housing.

Members agreed to "walk about" visits over the summer period to look at those estates with higher complaint levels and those with higher compliment levels.

Members agreed to a visit to Mears office.

The Chair stated he had spoken with the chair of the Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee to work alongside the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in regard to a task and finish group to look at the delivery of private and housing stock in the borough.

Members agreed that a standing invite to all Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committees should be sent to the HealthWatch Chief Operating Officer.

ACTION 1 – Democratic Services to work with Officers on suitable dates/times and locations for walk about and Mears visits - **Democratic Services, Ryan Farmer, Mohammed Ullah**

ACTION 2 – Democratic Services to liaise with Officers on the terms of reference, activity plan and the assignment of officers for the task and finish group. **Democratic Services**

ACTION 3 – Democratic Services to share the terms of reference with the clerk of the Planning Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
Democratic Services

ACTION 4 – Democratic Services will invite the HealthWatch Chief Operating Officer to the remaining of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committees. **Democratic Services**

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 7 March 2023 were approved as a correct record.

2. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items of business.

3. Declaration of Interests

Sue Hodgson declared an interest in that she served on the Mears Panel and received expenses.

4. Terms of Reference

Members noted the terms of reference.

5. Houses of Multiple Occupation - Update report

The report provided an update on the council's performance on ensuring that Houses of Multiple Occupation were licensed in accordance with Mandatory Licensing scheme as stipulated under Part 2 of the Housing Act 2004.

A PowerPoint was presented to Members and can be found from the following link:

[\(Public Pack\)Houses In Multiple Occupation Agenda Supplement for Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 20/06/2023 19:00 \(thurrock.gov.uk\)](#)

Following the presentation the members discussed the following:

- The committee noted there was an imbalance and evidence that more should be done to deliver properties for smaller households or one person households. To look at the growth of E / G properties to offset the financial burden of having smaller properties that were not paying the same amount as larger properties. Officers agreed to take away and work alongside planning and regeneration colleagues, to apply influence for the need for one-bedroom properties and how possible it would be to make the planning process for HMOs more difficult.

- Members raised concerns on how the number of HMOs had increased over the last five years.
- Members requested the inclusion of eastern wards of the borough when the renewing of the additional HMO licensing scheme took place and to expedite where possible.
- Members were informed that recognised IT systems were used.
- Members were informed a review of the current system that would form part of the evidence file for the new scheme was scheduled to come into play next year.
- Members raised concerns on staff resource within the team and were updated that vacancies would be filled by August.

ACTION 5 - Officers to work alongside planning and regeneration colleagues to deliver smaller households or one person households. **Dulal Ahmed, Keith Andrews**

RESOLVED

1. **That the Committee noted and commented on the report.**
2. **That the Committee noted the local household need for 1-bedroom properties in the borough has increased in line with Thurrock's population. Officers agreed to take away and work alongside planning and regeneration colleagues, to apply influence for the need for one-bedroom properties and how possible it would be to make the planning process for HMOs more difficult.**
3. **That the Committee noted the Private Housing would produce a new business case to extend its Additional Licensing Scheme for another 5 years covering the whole of the borough.**

6. Procurement of Repairs and Planned Maintenance Housing Contracts

This report presented the procurement of the repairs and planned maintenance work with finances for the delivery of these works being allocated within the HRA 30 business plan. Members were informed the recommendations fit within the objectives of the Thurrock Improvement and Recovery Plan 2022 for the Council to be a more streamlined and financially sustainable council.

During the discussion the following was acknowledged:

- The chair had concerns on how the report did not have the analysis or evidence base required to demonstrate what was undertaken on the last contract, such as performance, value for money and satisfaction to be able to compare with as to why the report recommended the new direction.
- Concerns were raised on the current level of service, poor management, poor due diligence and engagement of providers named in the report.

- The chair questioned the level of on-going compliance control to which he was informed there was a central compliance team in the housing directorate.
- Comments were made that contracts should stipulate the extend of spend within the borough for materials and use local suppliers.
- Comments were made on how the inspection of work undertaken and contractors' performance would take place and how this should be built into contracts.
- Members were informed of survey results for contractors as satisfactory with an overall target of 85%, a comment was made that every target should be 100% satisfactory and there needed to be more accountability of the work undertaken.
- There was concern from members that too much sub-contracting was taking place and control of those works were not being controlled.
- Members agreed to establish a working group for members to consult, inform, influence, and oversee the procurement process of the procurement process.
- Members agreed to add a further recommendation that there would be an expectation for the working group to complete its task by the end of September 2023.
- Officers to share detailed plans, with key milestones, for the procurement process with the members of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

ACTION 6 – Democratic Services to liaise with Officers on the timeframes, terms of reference, activity plan and the assignment of officers to this proposed working group. **Democratic Services, Mohammed Ullah**

ACTION 7 – Detailed procurement process plan to be shared with members. **Mohammed Ullah**

RESOLVED

1. **The Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommended the formation of a working group to consult with officers and experts with a view to producing a detailed report in advance of the procurement of a domestic and commercial gas servicing, breakdown, repair and installation contractor and to determine the most beneficial length of contract.**
2. **The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended the formation of a working group to consult with officers and experts with a view to producing a detailed report in advance of the procurement of a domestic and commercial gas servicing, breakdown, repair and installation contract repairs and maintenance (including communal and external decorations) contractor and to determine the most beneficial length of contract.**

3. The Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommended that both recommendations 1.1 and 1.2 include the expectation that the working group completes its task by the end of September 2023.

7. Hostel Management Executive Summary

The report examined the benefits and operational risks of bring the hostel management service in house as the current contract was due to end in September 2023.

During the discussion the following was highlighted:

- Assessment of capacity to bring in house would need to be considered.
- Saw this as an opportunity to integrate more services, share experiences and skills.
- Officers stated the services would be brought in house in its entirety with a complement of staff, not setting up a new team but to inherit the team that had successfully been provided by the current provider. The current provider had a proven concept with no overspends.
- Members were given the reassurance that during any transition period the services would not be scaled down.

Members agreed that a visit to Brooke House be organised.

ACTION 8 – Democratic Services to liaise with officers on a member visit to Brooke House. **Democratic Services**

At 8.37pm, the meeting went into exempt session.

At 8.56pm, the committee resumed in public session.

8. Work Programme

Members discussed the work programme.

The Chair requested an item be added on the Complaints Systems.

ACTION 9 - Democratic Services to update the work programme with the above item. **Democratic Services**

ACTION 10 - Democratic Services to re-circulate the Garages Update briefing note. **Democratic Services**

ACTION 11 - Officers to prepare Lowen Road, Local Lettings Policy Briefing Note. **Ryan Farmer**

ACTION 12 - Officers to prepare Headstart Housing Briefing Note. **Ryan Farmer**

ACTION 13 - Blackshots - Officers to ensure the steering group/working group, at ward councillor level, is set up. **Keith Andrews**

ACTION 14 - Blackshots – Officers to share a detailed plan with key milestones at Housing Overview and Scrutiny committee level and share with members. **Keith Andrews**

The recording of the meeting can be found from the following link:

[Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday 20 June 2023, 7:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

The meeting finished at 9.03 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