

Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 17 February 2016 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Tunde Ojetola, Graham Hamilton (Substitute) (substitute for Chris Baker), Steve Liddiard (Substitute) (substitute for Clare Baldwin) and Joycelyn Redsell (Substitute) (substitute for Sue MacPherson)

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

Apologies: Councillor Jan Baker

In attendance: Dermot Moloney, Strategic Lead Housing
Susan Cardozo, Housing Asset Investment & Delivery Manager
Dawn Shepherd, Strategy Manager, Housing, Business Improvement
Jenny Shade, 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.

33. Minutes

The Minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on the 6 January 2016, were approved as a correct record.

34. Urgent Items

There were no items of urgent business.

35. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Hamilton declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of the Agenda as he was a landlord.

36. Changes to Extra Care Services

The Officer presented the report to Members which outlined the changes and the implications for residents at the extra care schemes at Piggs Corner and Kynoch Court.

The report was presented as considerable savings to budgets had to be made and to achieve this one area identified was the provision of extra care housing.

It was noted that a report had been presented to Members at the January Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee outlining the proposed changes on the social care provided. The comments received by Members were noted and were recommended to Cabinet on the 10 February where it was agreed.

As of 1 April 2016, a concierge service will be introduced at Piggs Corner; this will be manned 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. This service will provide:

- Reception Service
- Controlled Access
- Help with Enquiries
- Daily Safety and Security Inspections

A dedicated sheltered housing officer will also be recruited to manage the scheme during office hours.

The Officer stated that the new service will incur an extra cost which will be added to weekly rent. This charge will attract Housing benefit subsidy, therefore tenants in receipt of housing benefit will be able to claim the additional cost as part of their benefit claim.

Tenants who are not in receipt of housing benefit will have the extra charge met through transitional relief so that no existing tenant will be worse off financially.

Tenants at both schemes were originally consulted on the potential changes and will now be written to outlining the changes.

The Officer confirmed that during the course of transition, each resident will be assessed to ensure that the necessary arrangements for their care and support were maintained.

Current residents at Kynoch Court would be offered the opportunity to move to Piggs Corner or Elizabeth Gardens if they preferred, based on property being available. The Officer confirmed that current residents would be given priority. It was also confirmed that at this time only one resident had requested to move.

Councillor Liddiard agreed with the recommendations and said it made sense to move residents if they preferred.

Councillor Redsell stated her concern that Elizabeth Gardens was not now the home that it had started out to be, with the increase of dementia residents now in situ.

All Members and Co-optee Member agreed that the report should have come to Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee before it went to Cabinet in February. This would have allowed Members to comment and not just have the opportunity to note the changes. It was agreed that minutes from this

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be forwarded to Cabinet Members for their information.

Councillor Ojetola agreed to take this to the Constitution Working Group to which he is a member and clarify the role of scrutiny committees.

RESOLVED

That the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the changes outline in the report.

37. Housing Investment & Development Programmes (2015/16)

The Officer presented the report to Members that provided an overview of the key achievements in the first three quarter of 2015/16 relating to the management of Council Housing Assets through the Housing Investment and Development Programme.

The Officer provided a detailed briefing on the continued progress made in the delivery of the various components of the housing repairs, maintenance and capital works programme. Members were referred to figures in the report that detailed the progress made and that figures were being monitored monthly.

The Officer produced a leaflet on “Damp Condensation and Mould” that Thurrock Council was being used to educate residents on these issues. Copies of the leaflet were handed out to all committee members.

The Officer briefed Members on the development of the Housing Asset Management Strategy and the delivery of housing repairs, investment and regeneration programmes. Work is underway to draw the agreed principles together into the new Strategy which will set in place the approach, principles and objectives for the housing asset management to go forward. The three proposed objectives for a new Housing Asset Management Strategy were:

Objective 1 – Maintaining and Improving Housing Standards in Existing Stock

Objective 2 – Understanding and Optimising Performance

Objective 3 – Informing the standards and performance in new build council owned properties

Councillor Redsell noted the introduction of the mobile phone “App” and asked that consideration be given to those residents who do not the facility of an IOS or Android smart phone and that some residents like to talk to someone to register an issue. The Officer confirmed that the call centre will continue to be available for those residents.

Councillor Redsell asked the Officer the names of the 3 high rise blocks currently undergoing lift refurbishment in Grays. The Officer stated that the information was not to hand but this would be forward to Members.

Councillor Hamilton stated that all contractors should display an identity badge with their full name, contractor name and if possible their qualification/trade.

All Members and Co-Optee Member stated that they had experienced complaints from residents in their wards that contractors were not displaying these, that contractors arrived late or arrived at very inconvenient times with no warning and some contractors did not even speak English.

The Officer confirmed that all contractors were required to carry identity badges and only attend by appointment. The Officer suggested that for any further specific cases received these could be forwarded to the team for investigation.

The Chair asked Officers if a reminder could be sent to residents, especially the elderly residents, to ask and check for identity of contractors before letting them into their premises.

The Officer stated that this is already being done with posters advertising this on premises, in hubs and that letters sent out remind residents to check identity badges.

Lynn Mansfield stated that it was unfair to ask elderly residents to check identity when they were already feeling valuable.

A discussion between Members and Officers took place on voids and how important it was to reduce the turnaround time. Officers confirmed that this was being achieved by identifying as soon as possible when a property will be available but a process still needs to be followed.

The Officer advised that up to six potential residents may be considered for shortlisting after the bidding cycle closes so that documentation can be checked beforehand to confirm eligibility. In this way void times are minimised.

Councillor Hamilton asked Officers if Housing had to pay council tax on void properties. The Officer confirmed that the information was not to hand but this would be forward to Members.

Councillor Ojetola stated that it would have been useful for Officers to have presented the Annual Report with an update from 2014/2015. Members agreed that the item be added to the work programme for the next municipal year.

Councillor Ojetola asked Officers what the void period for standard properties in number of days now stood at. The Officer confirmed that this was currently 32 days year to date.

Councillor Ojetola asked Officers how many people were involved in the Resident Satisfaction Surveys reported. The Officer confirmed that the information was not to hand but this would be forward to Members.

Councillor Liddiard asked Officers for progress on the new build plans for Calcutta Road in Tilbury. The Officer confirmed that activity continues on this site with the plans being refreshed and re-designed.

The Chair asked Officers that were all new builds built under the required standards, with particular attention to the specification around safety.

The Officer confirmed that yes safety is the highest priority and that each new development is designed to meet stringent safety standards.

Councillor Hamilton asked if Carbon Monoxide detectors were installed in new builds. The Officer confirmed that the information was not to hand but this would be forwarded to Members.

Lyn Mansfield asked Officers why new buildings with 2 bedrooms were still being built when the most needed were 1 bedroom properties. The Officer confirmed that this was a learning outcome from developments that had already been built and that greater consideration would be given on future new builds. Assessment of the housing needs of residents can be obtained from the housing register, the detailed housing needs survey undertaken last year in Thurrock and the strategic housing needs analysis.

Councillor Redsell asked Officers if they were aware that National Grid were currently working on the high blocks in Grays.

The Officer thanked Councillor Redsell for drawing this to their attention and stated that they were unaware and would check if the council had been advised in advance.

Lyn Mansfield asked Officers why people who had received allocation letters have not yet moved into Derry Avenue. The Officer confirmed that lettings were at an advanced stage and that residents will be moving in imminently.

The Chair thanked Members for all their comments and asked Officers to consider the recommendations.

RESOLVED

- 1. It was noted that the continued progress made in the delivery of various components of housing repairs, maintenance and capital works programmes which have a positive impact on the living conditions and quality of life for council tenants.**
- 2. It was noted that progress made with the delivery of new homes within the borough.**

3. It was noted and agreed the proposed outline objectives for a new Housing Asset Management Strategy.

38. Work Programme

The Work Programme was noted.

RESOLVED

1. It was noted that the item Annual Report 2013/14 be added to the work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year work programme.
2. It was noted that the item Mould and Damp will be added to the work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year work programme.

The meeting finished at 8.17 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