

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 SEPTEMBER 2012

Present:

Councillors:

Adeleke	Mahmood (Vice-Chairman)
Bassadone	Marshall (Chairman)
Conway	McLean
Flint	Organ
Hearn	R Sutton
N Hollinghurst	

Also attended:

Councillor N Harden	Portfolio Holder for Resident & Regulatory Services
Councillor M Griffiths	Portfolio Holder for Housing
Rose Kosmalski	Chair of the Tenant and Leaseholder Committee

Officers:

Elliott Brooks	Assistant Director, Housing Landlord
David Austin	Assistant Director, Neighbourhood Delivery
Rita McGinley	Group Manager, Regulatory Services
James Deane	Group Manager, Financial Services
Vicki Nash	Home Energy Conservation Officer
Trudi Coston	Member Support Officer, Democratic Services (Minutes)

The meeting began at 7:34 pm

The Chairman advised Members that the meeting would be recorded to facilitate minute taking.

OS/189/12 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2012 were agreed by the Members present and then signed by the Chairman.

Councillor Marshall advised that she had no update at present on the food bank information, which was discussed at the previous meeting, but would investigate and feed back in due course.

OS/190/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Adshead, and Co-opted Members Stuart Parker and Mavis Cook.

The Committee agreed that, in the absence of S Parker and M Cook, Rose Kosmalski could take part in the discussions.

OS/191/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

OS/192/12 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

OS/193/12 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO A CALL-IN

None

OS/194/12 QUARTER ONE PERFORMANCE REPORT – RESIDENT SERVICES

David Austin presented the item on behalf of Julie Still and sent apologies on her behalf. He highlighted various points throughout the report and drew the committee's attention to the improved figures within the appendices. He advised that the verge hardening project is moving forward and an update report would be provided to this committee, which will be incorporated into the quarter two performance report, at the next meeting in October. He informed the committee that the operational risk reports will become regular items, which will be incorporated in to each performance report for the foreseeable future.

Key points of discussion:

Councillor Flint asked if the proposed improvement works to the Old Town Hall cellar would include emergency access. D Austin replied they are proposing to equip the cellar with an elevator. Councillor Mahmood asked about the potential use of the Arches. D Austin advised that they would feature in Phase 2 of the work.

Councillor Mahmood asked at what stage the Council became involved in Domestic Violence cases, as the majority of reports would go directly to the Police. D Austin replied there is regular dialogue between the Police, the Family Intervention Officer and the Anti-Social Behaviour team. He said there are also regular meetings with the Joint Agency Group (JAG) which include the Health service, Probation service and other representatives from statutory bodies.

Councillor Mahmood said he found the Neighbourhood Action report very informative. He queried whether a list of figures could be provided to the Committee for dog fouling, litter picking, penalties etc, which could be reported back to the Neighbourhood Action Committee meetings, as these issues are discussed regularly. D Austin advised he attended these meetings and provides performance figures. He said R McGinley's team dealt with the enforcement side for dog fouling.

Councillor Mahmood suggested that areas could be cornered off for dog owners to reduce fouling in open areas. R McGinley explained they are currently working on trying to encourage owners to take responsibility for their dogs instead of having to issue them with penalties, which can be difficult to enforce.

Councillor R Sutton said in her experience, it tends to be individuals running dog walking businesses who allow dogs to foul and are not taking responsibility for them. R McGinley replied that was an issue that had been expressed in the past, and requested that any details of the individuals, times of day and vehicle descriptions are passed to her for investigation. She said the officers have difficulty in getting evidence. Councillor R Sutton confirmed she was able to pass on some details.

Councillor Organ said he was pleased to see young people being involved in local youth democracy events and is keen to see this continue. He asked if there were any events being held this year that are similar to last years youth democracy event. Councillor Harden said he went to a meeting recently and believed that a similar event would take place in October, and Members should receive an invitation for this in due course.

Councillor N Hollinghurst said he was pleased by the work carried out by the Family Intervention Officer, and the improvements in Anti-Social Behaviour responses. He expressed his concern for the length of time taken to process Housing Benefit claims, particularly for families at risk. Councillor Griffiths explained it was not under this committee's remit; however she was aware that work was being carried out on resources to improve the claim turnaround. Councillor Marshall advised that the Finance & Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee were responsible for this information and the Housing Benefit claim turnaround time is provided within the performance reports.

Councillor Organ asked for the definitions and variations of vehicle crime and criminal damage. D Austin agreed he would provide the definitions to the Committee.

Councillor Bassadone said she thoroughly enjoyed the Olympic and Paralympic Torch events within the borough, the celebration for double Bronze Medallist, Max Whitlock, and expressed her thanks to the officers for all their hard work.

Councillor Marshall said reference had been made to a project with Age Concern on page 7 of the report, and queried what the project was. D Austin advised he would investigate and email the information to the committee.

Councillor Marshall asked if the committee could have feedback from the Neighbourhood Action group meetings. D Austin agreed he could provide a report on the matter. The Committee agreed it would be added to the work programme.

Outcome:

'Neighbourhood Action Group feedback' to be added to the work programme as an item to be scheduled. The report was noted.

OS/195/12 QUARTER ONE PERFORMANCE REPORT – REGULATORY SERVICES

Rita McGinley introduced the report and highlighted various points throughout the background information. At the previous meeting, R McGinley indicated that her team had experienced computer terminal server issues, which were likely to affect their performance figures for quarter one. However she advised that the slippage had been less than anticipated and they hoped to be back on target by quarter two.

Key points of discussion:

Councillor Mahmood asked how HMOs (houses in multiple occupation) were regulated. R McGinley replied her team regularly work with meet Agents to ensure the properties meet the necessary requirements and legislation. She said HMOs can be challenging, as people often cut corners and do not inform the Council if they are operating. She requested that everyone reports any HMOs.

Councillor Adeleke referred to the HEEP scheme, and asked how Dacorum's performance compared to other authorities within the scheme. V Nash confirmed she had the figures but not to hand. She agreed she would circulate to the committee.

Councillor N Hollinghurst asked if they had issued any Home Improvement Orders under the 2004 Act. R McGinley said she would investigate and inform the committee in due course.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

OS/196/12 QUARTER ONE PERFORMANCE REPORT – HOUSING LANDLORD

Elliott Brooks advised that there are four new performance indicators that have been introduced, which have been listed on page 44 of the report. He felt that all the indicators reflected how well his team have been performing and MITIE had also improved. He

referred to page 46 and explained that they had re-evaluated the average cost of a void property, and believed the cost to be approximately £2,150k, which he would attempt to amend on Corvu system. He particularly drew the committee's attention to the indicator for community alarm call response performance, which had improved again this quarter, and asked the committee to consider whether they would like more detailed information and performance data to be reported at the next meeting.

He reminded everyone that the Tenant & Leaseholder Conference is due to be held on Saturday 29th September 2012 at the Civic Centre and welcomed all to attend.

Key points of discussion:

Councillor Bassadone asked if attendees for the Tenant and Leaseholder Conference would be required to pay for parking. E Brooks replied it was something they were investigating.

Councillor Conway raised concern that the average time taken to re-let a sheltered property was too long. E Brooks explained that during the quarter, they had been trying to refresh the system and let long-term void properties. He said they plan to complete an analysis of refusals for sheltered properties, as it seemed to be an ongoing issue.

Following a short discussion on the community alarm call response performance, the committee agreed they would like this item presented at the next meeting as an update report but containing more in-depth data and information about missed calls and calls answered outside the target time.

Councillor Marshall referred to the average time taken to re-let a property, and queried the details of how many long term void properties there were. E Brooks said they had the void data for empty homes which can be broken down and reported back to the committee. The Committee agreed that, in future Quarterly reports, it would like figures on the number of general needs properties void for 31 days and over and, for sheltered properties, 50 days and over.

Councillor Organ suggested it would be helpful to have a percentage of the make-up of all properties. E Brooks said he would provide this information.

Councillor Hearn asked if the difficulties to let particular properties were dependent on the type of accommodation. E Brooks advised there were particular blocks of properties and styles that are more difficult to let.

Councillor Adeleke sought clarification between non-urgent repairs and urgent repairs. E Brooks explained that an urgent repair is completed at the first visit, but a non-urgent repair is a standard repair which would have an appointment made for an inspector to visit the property and a return visit to carry out the repair.

Outcome:

The report was noted and an update report for the item 'Community Alarm call response performance' is to be added to the work programme for 31 October 2012.

OS/197/12 QUARTER ONE PERFORMANCE REPORT – FINANCIAL OUTTURN

James Deane introduced the report and highlighted key variations of figures in the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and the Capital Programme. He welcomed any questions from the Committee.

Key points of discussion:

Councillor Marshall queried if the Hemel Gym refurbishment would still go ahead, despite the forecast slippage on the capital programme. J Deane replied the plans for refurbishment would proceed in 2013/14.

Councillor Marshall referred to page 59 of the report and asked why there had been an approximate £1million under-spend in planned capital expenditure within the HRA in 2011/12, which had resulted in a higher than anticipated opening balance on the Major Repairs Reserve in 2012/13. E Brooks replied there were various reasons for the slippage, which he agreed he would advise via email to the committee.

Councillor Adeleke referred to appendix C, and sought clarification on the budget for ICT professional fees (Consultancy). Councillor Harden advised that a budget had been set aside for the ICT review and improvements, and assistance from Consultants if required.

R Kosmalski queried if options for use of the £8.732m forecast surplus on the HRA would be subject to consultation with the TLC and local residents. E Brooks said a meeting had taken place last week to discuss the business plan. He explained they are looking at options on how to utilise the money and are open to suggestions, but advised that nothing had been decided at this stage.

Councillor Griffiths said it would be the responsibility of the Cabinet to decide if and how they wish to make use of the money or whether it is carried over on to next year's budget.

R Kosmalski asked if the Cabinet decide to spend this money, would tenants be consulted on how they would like to see it utilised. E Brooks confirmed a report would be provided to Cabinet with details of recommendations.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

OS/198/12 STAR PROGRESS & RESPONSIVE REPAIRS SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRES

Elliott Brooks introduced the item and advised that the report contained the information which was requested by members at previous meetings. He welcomed any questions from the committee.

Key points of discussion:

Councillor Marshall asked if the questions set out on page 92 of the report were asked by DBC and by MITIE. E Brooks confirmed they were and advised that the surveys are divided in half (approximately 100 each) between DBC and MITIE on a monthly basis.

E Brooks explained that a suggestion had been made for tenant inspectors to undertake the questionnaires for a period of time and would be split three ways between the tenant inspectors, DBC and MITIE. Councillor Marshall queried if the Tenant Inspectors would have the capacity to undertake this task. E Brooks advised that the tenant inspectors had made the suggestion and therefore must have the capacity. The Committee debated the differences in the satisfaction levels between the STAR survey and the MITIE/DBC survey. It was decided to note the position but take no further action at this stage.

Councillor Mahmood queried how the questionnaires were completed. E Brooks said they were done by telephone. Councillor Mahmood suggested leaving cards at the properties so that residents can complete the survey at their own convenience. E Brooks advised that leaving cards had been tried and tested but unfortunately, due to the low number returned, the scheme did not continue.

Councillor Marshall said she found the STAR improvement plan very useful. She suggested update reports be reported to the committee every six months. The Committee and E Brooks agreed.

Outcome:

The item 'STAR Progress' to become regular update reports every six months for the foreseeable future, commencing in March 2013. The report was noted.

OS/199/12 DEVELOPMENT OF A CROSS TENURE HOUSING ENERGY STRATEGY

Rita McGinley, with Vicky Nash, introduced the item and explained that the report was an update for members on the recent changes in Government policy in relation to energy efficiency. In addition to that, it was also an opportunity for members to comment on the draft Cabinet report, which was included in the agenda. She advised there are three options to be considered by Cabinet, however officers' recommendations at this stage are that option 2 be explored further.

Key points of discussion:

Councillor Marshall asked if option 2 would create staff implications for DBC. V Nash explained that they should not require any additional staff, as the Green Deal provider would operate a call centre, however DBC may receive calls from individuals with general enquiries. R McGinley advised that V Nash deals with Home Energy Conservation within the private sector and she did not envisage employing any more staff. E Brooks said they did not intend to increase staffing levels within the housing department as they have a Home Energy Officer, Ricky Lang that deals with DBC's housing stock.

Councillor Bassadone asked if any Green Deal provider could approach residents within the Borough. V Nash replied there are various Green Deal providers so Dacorum would need to make it clear with which provider they are in partnership to avoid any confusion. She said they would look to avoid the canvassing approach and opt for information in Dacorum Digest and direct mail shots to residents. Councillor Griffiths said they needed to ensure that our chosen provider abides by the code of practice and by the contract. V Nash agreed and said the procurement stage was very important.

Councillor Harden asked if other Green Deal providers could canvass within the borough, and if they could restrict it. V Nash said she was unsure if and how it could be controlled. She said we all had a role to play in advising residents and ensuring they are aware of the provider we use.

Councillor Organ said he supported option 2, providing the partnership does not delay the measures for long period of time as some residents may never see the benefits.

Councillor McLean felt they should be cautious about the chosen provider and ensure it had a good track record with proof of savings otherwise it could affect the reputation of the Council. Councillor Mahmood also shared Councillor McLean's view, and said the Council are trusted by our residents and he would not want to see that affected.

R Kosmalski raised the point that some tenants maybe persuaded to pay for energy enhancements – e.g. new boiler – which would be provided by the DBC in any event free of charge through the normal housing planned maintenance programme. The officers agreed and said that, as DBC has to give permission for enhancement or changes to DBC properties, it would be able to protect tenants from signing up for something which DBC is going to do anyway.

R McGinley suggested they could hold a road-show event, which officers and members could be involved in once they had shortlisted partners.

Outcome

The report was noted and the committee agreed that option 2 be recommended to Cabinet in October.

OS/200/12 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee discussed the work programme and made the following amendments:

October 2012

Add Community Alarm Call Response Performance update report – E Brooks
Youth Connexions also to be added, as originally planned

March 2013

Add STAR Progress report – E Brooks.

Items to be scheduled:

Neighbourhood Action Group information – D Austin
Maybe move the Old Town Hall from October to December.

The meeting ended at 9:33 pm.