

## MINUTES

### HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 NOVEMBER 2014

**Present:**

**Councillors:**

Adshead	Killen
Clark	Mahmood (Vice-Chairman)
Conway	Marshall (Chairman)
Flint	McLean
Hearn	R Sutton

Councillor Harden (Portfolio Holder, Residents & Regulatory Services)

Councillor Griffiths (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

**Co-opted Member:**

Mavis Cook

**Officers:**

Chris Troy	Group Manager, Regulatory Services
Elliott Brooks	Assistant Director – Housing
James Deane	Assistant Director (Finance & Resources)
Sara Railson	Arts Team Leader, Resident Services, Old Town
Julia Hedger	Strategic Housing Group Manager
Julie Still	Group Manager, Resident Services
Heather Overhead	Assistant Team Leader, Strategic Planning and Regeneration
Natasha Braithwaite	Housing Solutions Manager
Kayley Johnston	Member Support Officer (Minutes)

The meeting began at 7:30 pm

**OS/249/14 MINUTES**

The minutes of the Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15 October 2014 were confirmed by the Members present and then signed by the Chairman.

K Johnston to circulate Sportspace presentation once it has been received.

**OS/250/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from Cllr Adeleke and Cllr Bassadone, who as substituted by Cllr Clark.

**OS/251/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There was no declaration of interest.

**OS/252/14 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

**OS/253/14 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL IN**

None

Cllr Marshall asked for permission for item 10 The Old Town Hall, as the first substantive item which members agreed.

**OS/254/14 OLD TOWN HALL**

S Railson introduced the report, explaining that the report was to keep members up to date following the recent completion of works on the Old Town Hall, and to seek member's agreement to pursue and implement the three year marketing strategy to capitalise the utility of the venue and increase visitors' spend.

Cllr Marshall, referring to p58, asked if OTH could cope with pupils of special schools, some of whose children maybe spooked by the darkness of the theatre.

S Railson advised that they work closely with teachers/careers to make sure it is a safe and secure environment. OTH has submitted an application to run the introductory Arts Award "Discover" and, if successful, will be able to move this initiative of working with schools forward.

Cllr Marshall asked who will take the marketing review and what the costs are.

S Railson confirmed that the review was undertaken by the consultant Andrew Burton and the cost came in at just under £2000 but have not costed his recommendations.

Cllr Hearn referred back to the Arts Award, have we contacted schools throughout the borough? S Railson said she has a meeting early December to make a decision on which schools they are going to work with for the project. Cllr Hearn asked if the building work was within budget. J Still said the final cost had not been worked out but it is estimated that will be around £850,000, which is above what was originally budgeted. They should have final figures early in the New Year.

Cllr Griffiths arrived at 19:37

Cllr Harden arrived at 19:41

Cllr Flint referred to p57, and asked if there indications that the Cellar Club will take off. The response was that they have achieved 85% capacity so far, they have some private events using it within the next weeks or so and it looks promising now that it is up and running.

Cllr Mahmood asked if there is a percentage/figure to break even on particular events.

S Railson advised that the total cost of the service is £400,000 and on a show by show basis they are hoping to at least break even. If the OTH had 100% attendance for every show, the income would exceed target. If the venue was to pay for itself we would need to put on 2/3 shows a day which would require the resources to service the shows.

Cllr Mahmood suggested a spurge of marketing/open days. S Railson advised that they are looking at maximising what they have so any marketing would be a good idea but they will need the time and resources to do this.

Cllr Adshead asked if members could have a tour of the Cellar Club.

S Railson advised that members can come as a group or individually, Cllr Marshall advised she will arrange this.

Cllr Mahmood asked if they will be looking at memberships/schemes or discounts to attract more people and 'Friends of the Old Town Hall'.

S Railson advised that this had been discussed previously; they currently have a discounted scheme to attract younger audiences and a scheme to those who are already loyal. Friends of Friends scheme is difficult, asking people to pay up front and due to the capacity it might deter others from coming but they would not discount any idea that could encourage new people to invest in the service and venue.

Action:

Cllr Marshall to enquire about arranging a member's tour of the Cellar.

Outcome:

The report was noted and the Committee recommended that, subject to the budget, a marketing strategy for 1/4/15-31/3/18 should be pursued.

**OS/255/14 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT – RESIDENT SERVICES**

J Still advised that the numbers of attendances at neighbourhood action meetings had reduced but the figures did not take into consideration the 'love your neighbourhood project', the data for which is not recorded anywhere. There has been long-term sickness within the very small team of Neighbourhood Services and the team had also been working on the delivery of the 'Tour of Britain'.

Cllr Adshead asked that it be noted that even though the attendance is not as good as they like, work on neighbourhood action is getting better and the team deserve more credit for their efforts.

In answer to Cllr Marshall's queries on p5 para 6.2 and 6.3, J Still confirmed that 6.2 is working with street homeless and carry out operations to move drunken people from the Water Gardens and the Market Square. The team is working closely with DENS to house these people and to help them maintain a more sober life.

As regards Paragraph 6.3 the wall in the Water Gardens is listed and the Council has had complaints of people walking on it. J Still will enquire what target hardening of the wall is and circulate members.

Cllr Marshall referred to p7 para 11.3 and asked if this meant that people who use had used the play grounds in the past are now volunteering?

J Still confirmed that is correct, people who used to regularly attend the playground that are now aged 16-17 are volunteering on a regular basis.

In answer to Cllr Marshall's query relating to OTH01 on P9, S Railson said that the planned big outdoor performance "adversely affected by the weather" was on one of the very few wet summer days.

Cllr Mahmood had concerns on the alarming rise on crime figures. J Still advised that the figures now include crime like spitting and harassment. J Still to send a breakdown of what crimes are included. Figures are higher this year at 111 and last September they were at 65. Cllr McClean, alarmed by the high crime stats, said we need to focus on this. Cllr Harden pointed out that 5.2 the figure this year are a jump as the crime figures have re-calibrated and therefore simple comparisons with previous years' figures is not appropriate.

Action:

Julie to email the solution of the listed wall in the Water Gardens.

Julie to send a breakdown of violent crimes.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

**OS/256/14 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT – REGULATORY SERVICES**

C Troy referred to the report and said there had been a slippage in food hygiene inspections of premises rated A-C due to a number of reasons, including the recent high profile prosecution which took up three officers time, vacancies, long term sick and maternity leave. However, they are now catching up on inspections and expect to achieve targets over the year. At the time of deciding to extend the inspections from just high risk premises to all A-C premises, there were not the staffing issues.

Officers are now inspecting in the evenings and are hoping to meet their targets over the year.

Bovingdon airfield has been served notices due to noise and these are under appeal. They have also given notice on a public house in Hemel, but it looks like the publicans are going to compile with the notice.

There had been several complaints about farm yard odour, which was reported in the press as human waste spread on the fields but it was actually manure rotting. The department has been involved in radio interviews concerning this.

The Air Quality Action Plan is now out for consultation, there are three air quality management areas where pollution is higher and the levels of pollution are being monitored. The Plan is coming to the end of the consultation period and we have had 60/70 responses and will take some comments forward. Most of air quality is out of our control as Herts Country Council covers the Highways and most pollution is due to traffic. They will be working with Highways on ways to reduce the air pollution, such as taking out road bumps.

The food safety audit from the Food Standards Agency was generally happy with our procedures.

New corporate H&S arrangements are in place and the report referred to the issues covered.

They are just signing up One Stop (part of Tesco) for DBC to be the primary authority which is another income generator.

An external audit took place on the Civic Centre took place on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2014 on the Council's Emergency Planning procedures, 3 minor non-compliances were highlighted.

Cllr Marshall referred to earlier meetings when C Troy had advised that they would be broadening the scope of the H&S inspections.

Chris said that advice on where to broaden these inspections come from the H&S Executive. This year there has not been that many areas in which they have been asked to focus on.

H&S Executive state that local authorities are only required to inspect high risk premises and you have to have a valid reason to inspect it.

Cllr McClean referred to the air quality strategy, are they expected to meet all standards and if we do not meet them, will we be fined?

C Troy said nationally the country has not met the limits and the UK is likely to get prosecuted but will find it difficult to pass on these costs to local authorities.

Councils are working with Public Health to create targets and the Council hopes to get funding for monitoring pollution. DBC is not likely to be fined.

Cllr Hearn referred to P11 regarding food inspections, do we fill our vacancies as quickly as we should?

C Troy said that they did not realise they were going to have staffing issues at the time of setting the targets and over time/extra working hours could have been put in place quicker, but at the time they thought they could manage. However, due to other high demands and cases, it has proved difficult. C Troy mentioned that the human placenta case was followed by several FOI requests which cost a lot of staff time and that had an impact.

Action:

None

Outcome:

The report was noted.

**OS/257/14 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT - HOUSING**

E Brooks explained that this quarterly report had been taken to the Tenants and Leaseholders Committee and is based on the 2014-2016 Housing Plan. The new service plan accords with the corporate template but E Brooks had to tweak slightly for it to work with housing. Any feedback would greatly be appreciated.

E Brooks added that this is the first full quarter since Osbornes have been responsible for the repairs though.

the refurbishment at Summer Court and the project at Longlands (ref page 17) is outside Osbornes contract

Cllr Adshead referred to the solar panels being installed at Summer Court and would the residents there benefit? E Brooks advised that the panels are for the electricity for the common parts and the payment received for the surplus power generated will be used in the HRA. It was not practical to tie the solar power to individual tenants due to the nature of the development. However, the residents of Summer Court would directly benefit from the heat pump.

Cllr Mahmood enquired how Osbornes were getting on?

E Brooks said that there was upheaval to start with as Osbornes were taking on the work which was previously carried out by 5 separate companies and there were TUPE transfers as a result. However, the transition has been rather smooth and, when there have been issues, these have been quickly rectified.

DBC housing and Osbornes regularly meet and have built relationships with different teams; tenants are benefiting and so far so good. The upheaval has been minimised for the tenants. Cllr Conway expressed good feedback regarding Osbornes and gave credit where it was due.

Cllr Killen referred to p22 and p20 and queried the targets and average times E Brooks said they are different performance indicators.

One is the time from start to finish, empty home and the second is around an adaptation on properties.

Cllr Killen is impressed with the turnaround time to relet adapted properties and noted this is due to being manually managed, and not done through the choice based letting scheme.

Regarding PP20 on P21, E Brooks to confirm the correct figures in brackets.

Cllr Hearn referred to p24, SH11a, where she expressed how immensely irritated she was by the comment concerning the decision made some time ago by the Appeals Panel, particularly as nobody had raised this concern with the Panel prior to writing this comment in the Quarterly Performance Report. Cllr Hearn made it clear that the Appeals Panel make their decisions very carefully after considering all the material put before them and that the Panel take their responsibilities very seriously. She was appalled to read this comment in the report.

J Hedger apologised that this issue had not been raised with the Appeals Panel previously. She said that the housing department have discussed the housing law in this particular case

with the new Solicitor who is advising the Panel. Cllr Hearn recommended that they speak to the Chairman of the Appeals Panel, Cllr Bassadone, as the Panel is guided by the solicitor's advice.

Cllr Mahmood then referred to p31 concerning emerging issues on staff retention, what are we doing to make sure that staff are happy and staying with us?.

E Brooks said this is a concern of the management team in housing; they are competing with housing associations, private developers and contractors who all have similar roles. DBC cannot give staff incentives but can invest in them by way of supporting staff in their requests for training to gain a professional qualification. There is a requirement that if a staff member is supported in gaining a qualification, the employee has to stay with DBC for a certain period of time afterwards or repay a proportion of the training fees. It is about making staff feel that that working in housing at DBC is a career rather than just a job.

Cllr Mahmood raised the issue of staff not being at the end of the phone when you ring up, explaining that, whilst flexible working is great, he is unsure how this will impact upon service delivery.

E Brooks explained that, in the new PSQ, the housing department will only have 60/70% desks capacity for their staff. Remote working is being managed to meet the needs of the service. The Chief Executive is currently looking at guidelines on remote working to ensure consistency across all departments. The basic getting hold of someone should not be a problem as phones are diverted to mobiles.

Cllr Marshall confirmed that Finance and Resources OSC often raise this issue. She added that the Finance & Resources OSC also gets occasional reports on the staff survey and the staff stress survey.

Cllr Marshall referred to p33 which states that the Vulnerable Person's Strategy is now in place. She said that she had been informed by A Vincent that it had gone through due process. However it had been published with incomplete action plans. A Vincent had promised to email the completed action plans to the committee within the next three weeks. In addition, A Vincent advised that he would email the draft list of agencies which could support vulnerable people to the Committee in the next 2/3 weeks for the committee to add to the list.

J Hedger informed the committee that Osbornes will start on Woolmer Drive on 17 November with an estimated completion date of February 2015 so they are looking to occupy it by April next year, the income will be included into the budget of next year.

Cllr Marshall queried the aim in the Service Plan 'to eradicate street homeless' and asked if it was viable as some people choose to sleep on the streets.

J Hedger said it is intended that DBC achieve Gold Standards Status and it is a requirement within the standards to have plans in place to eradicate street homeless but accepts that it is the choice of some people to sleep on the streets. She added that the new hostel will have a crash pad.

N Braithwaite advised that central government has an initiative for Councils to sign up to a no second night policy so the housing department are working with agencies to put this in place and access facilities.

N Braithwaite explained the Gold Standard Status is a Central Government initiative but is not compulsory, Local authorities can choose to apply for a status based on their service. DBC expect to be achieving Bronze Status midway next year.

Cllr Mahmood questioned whether tenants are charged for additional cleaning.

E Brooks said action is taken for hoarding or damaging property, but, with communal areas, they have to identify the culprits and then try and take action. The cleaner would feedback to the housing department if a particular block of flats is somewhere where they have to continuously go back and then DBC can recharge tenants for this additional cleaning.

The frequency of cleaning is published in blocks of flats so tenants know what they should expect.

Cllr Marshall asked which committees will be getting the review of the service provided to leaseholders.

E Brooks confirmed it will be tenants and lease holder committee and the housing management committee.

Action: E Brooks to confirm the PP20 figures on P20. A Vincent to provide action plans and draft list of agencies in relation to the Vulnerable Persons Strategy.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

### **OS/258/14 QUARTER 2 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT**

J Deane picked out a few key important areas of the report. Regarding the table at 2.5, there is an error it should not be 2.9%, but 11.4% as per the table below.

J Deane explained that at present the capital budget was scheduled to end the year on budget, and that this was a positive story as slippage has been a problem for several years.

There was a big change in the Highbarns Land Stabilisation Project (line 102 on p53) resulting in a request in October to Cabinet for a supplementary budget.

Cllr Adshead queried line 129 on p53. J Deane will look into this and come back and confirm the correct figures

Action: P53, line 129 - J Deane to clarify.

Outcome:

The report was noted.

Cllr Marshall asked if we could do the CIL agenda item 12 first, committee agreed.

### **OS/259/14 GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)**

H Overhead presented a PowerPoint presentation and explained that it has been to all scrutiny committees and is going to Cabinet this month.



H&C OSC CIL  
Presentation.ppt

Please see attached the PowerPoint presentation

The presentation explains what CIL is, who is exempt from paying CIL and how it is spent and divided up and who is responsible.

Cllr Marshall confirmed that it has already been to two OSC committees. Finance & Resources OSC had a few questions on projected income for Parish Councils and how best to liaise with ward councils for their proportion of CIL money. Cllr Taylor will be looking at how to liaise with ward councillors.

Cllr Mahmood questioned the setting of the CIL charge. H Overhead said they had done viability testing and employed consultants who are the industry leaders on CIL and they were confident that the level of charge will not deter development.

Cllr Mahmood asked that if the development was in his ward, would his ward get priority on the infrastructure spend.

H Overhead confirmed that this is where the meaningful proportion would come in, 15% would go to the ward councillor and then decisions would be looked at how best to spend the money, the core funds would then go to a central fund and looked at centrally on how best to spend the money.

Cllr Marshall noted parishes have 5 years to spend the money and asked if ward Councillors in non parished areas have a time limit.

H Overhead advised there is no limit in the regulations.

Cllr Adshead enquired whether the part of CIL which is delegated to the ward councillor (or parish/town councils) could be used to supplement verge hardening.

H Overhead said it is very vague at the moment and that officers have developed a guidance note for ward councillors (attached to the report). On p88 there is guidance about freedom of spend and it states it has to be spent on items that support the growth of the area.

Possibly training for members need to be developed on this project.

Cllr Killen, in noting that additional receipts are available for those areas with a neighbourhood action plan, thought it unfair on the small parish councils who could not afford to draw up a neighbourhood plan.

Cllr Marshall thought the member involvement on the Infrastructure Advisory Group was too weak and suggested that there should be at least one more DBC councillors – possibly the chair of the SPEOSC. The Committee agreed and this point to be made to Cabinet.

Action: Heather to take forward to Cabinet increasing members' involvement in the infrastructure advisory group.

Outcome:

The report was noted

## **OS/260/14 ALLOCATION AND EMPTY HOMES TEAM UPDATE**

J Hedger explained that this report is an update from the empty homes team. As a result of concerns over the length of time reletting homes, a new team was formed in April 2014. They manage the key elements of the empty home process. Significant improvement has been made over the last 6 months and a further report will be produced in 6 months to show what has been achieved. Natasha Braithwaite is now managing the team as a secondment to cover maternity leave.

Referring to staff multi-skilling, Cllr Marshall asked if the surrender of the tenancy and management of the void work is dealt with by a separate person to whoever is dealing with the allocations and lettings so as to reduce any possibility of fraudulent tenancies. J Hedger said that there is a robust process, managers signing off allocations and, if the proposed tenant has any DBC links, then Mark Gaynor is to sign them off. J Hedger advised that suspected fraud cases are looked into and if a letting had taken place based on fraud, then eviction will take place. The opportunity for fraud is very limited.

Cllr Marshall referred to p68 section 4.0 first bullet point concerning shorter bidding times and asked how this would work with people who receive paper list of the CBL. J Hedger said



it is normally the older applicants requiring sheltered housing who receive paper copies and there are no plans to change the advertising for sheltered housing. For those applicants not requiring sheltered housing but who receive paper copies, DBC housing staff work closely with them to support them in bidding.

Some properties are incredibly popular and can have hundreds of bids by Thursday lunch time and the Housing Department did not want those properties to be sitting on the bidding list for another 5 days. If reducing the bidding time does not work, then the Housing Department will go back to the old service.

Cllr Mahmood asked if a person applied for a property on Friday would it be a waste of time if you have closed the list on Thursday. J Hedger replied no as the opportunity to bid is closed down so no one else can apply; there are no forms to bid on line or via text or phone call for that property. It will be made clear to people when bidding closes. Furthermore, the bid limit has now been removed and applicants can bid on as many properties as they want.

Applicants are very vocal so if the system does not work, the Housing Department will soon know.

Cllr Killen referred to p67 section 3.4 and asked if there a consistency in the Lettable Standard and asked what is an acceptable Lettable Standard.

J Hedger advised that the Lettable Standard was drawn up a few years ago, having been previously to this Committee and to the Tenants & Leaseholders Committee. It is the standard that we expect our properties to be at before they are let. The training was put in place to ensure constancy. E Brooks said that the Dacorum Lettable Standard was worked up by the Housing Maintenance Environment Committee (HMEC), and A Vincent (as he dealt with the lettings side of the process). Staffs have attended external training which gives them a clear understanding on how to inspect a property. They have also arranged for staff to attend work shadowing days with Osbornes to identify what maintenance work is undertaken and to build a close relationship.

Cllr Killen asked if there are strict procedures with the recharging of previous tenants and is work done before or after the tenant moves in?

N Braithwaite said that if the property is not left in the correct standard. DBC do charge former tenants for the necessary work. Some work will be done through the empty homes process but, to reduce time and if the new tenant is happy to move in, some work would be carried out when the new tenants are in the property. Agreed that N Braithwaite will circulate the present Lettable Standards to the Committee.

Action: N Braithwaite to send the standards to all committee. To be sent out with minutes

Outcome:

The report was noted

#### **OS/261/14 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

No public were present

#### **OS/262/14 APPENDIX A – WORK PROGRAMME 2014/2015**

28<sup>th</sup> January 2015 'Review of the Operations of the Housing Allocation Policy' – the Committee agreed with J Hedger request to move the item to March 2015 as it will not be ready for January.

'The Mobility Scooter Policy' will slot into January 2015.

\*\*\*\*\*PART 2\*\*\*\*\*

**OS/263/14 OUTCOME OF THE COMPETITIVE TENDER PROCESS FOR THE ELMS HOMELESS HOSTEL MANAGEMENT SERVICE**

Full details are in part 2 minutes.

The meeting closed at 22:08