

## MINUTES

### HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2015

**Present:**

**Councillors:**

Adeleke	Mahmood (Vice-Chairman)
Adshead	Marshall (Chairman)
Mrs Bassadone	McLean
Conway	
Hearn	
N Hollinghurst	
Killen	

Councillor Griffiths (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

Co-Opted Member: M Cook

**Also in attendance:**

William Hughes	Osborne
Alan Perrett	Osborne

**Officers:**

Fiona Williamson	Group Manager (Property and Place)
Julia Hedger	Group Manager Strategic Housing
Simon Smith	Asset Team Leader, Property & Place, Housing & Regeneration
Natasha Brathwaite	Strategic Housing Team Leader (property)
Wimal Alahakon	Commercial Relationship Surveyor
Neil Brown	Contracts Team Leader
Kayley Johnston	Member Support Officer (Minutes)

The meeting began at: 7:30pm.

**OS/024/15                      MINUTES**

Minutes from 10 December 2014 were agreed. The part 2 minutes from 12 November 2014 was also agreed by the committee.

Matters arising from previous minutes, Cllr Marshall was to arrange Cellar Club visits, the committee agreed this should be done after the elections.

The action plan for the Vulnerable Persons Strategy has not yet been received, Cllr Marshall to chase this up. There was a list of agencies sent to Cllrs regarding this, if any agencies were missed off could you please let Andy Vincent know at your earliest convenience.

Cllr Hearn referred to the minute relating to the homelessness review process, in particular the note that, for the time being, Section 202 reviews would be carried out by a Senior Officer, in consultation with the Chairman of the Appeals Panel. She understood that the Chairman of the Appeals Panel had not been included in these reviews.

J Hedger said that, following the meeting, Steve Baker had discussions with Mark Brooks and referred to the Cabinet report taken the following week which stated that members could not be involved in the process. Cllr Hearn stated that the officers should have let the Chairman of the Appeals Panel know.

**OS/025/15                    APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from Cllr M Flint, Cllr R Sutton, Elliott Brooks and John Howard of the TLC.

**OS/026/15                    DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There was no declaration of interest.

*Cllr Adeleke joined the committee at 19.33.*

**OS/027/15                    PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

**OS/028/15                    CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE  
COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL IN**

None.

*Cllr Griffiths joined the committee at 19.37*

**OS/029/15                    MOBILITY SCOOTER REPORT**

Simon Smith said this revised Mobility Scooter policy is being put before this committee for comments. The policy had been revised in the light of experience with the earlier policy which had been considered by the committee on 11 September 2013. The revised policy is designed to make every effort to have safe and secure storage at every location.

Cllr Mahmood asked if there a grievance procedure if someone is not happy. S Smith said they would do the same as the adaptations policy, namely there is an escalation process if officers refuse grounds such as under occupancy etc. Cllr Mahmood asked that this be included in the Mobility Scooter policy.

Cllr Conway said new storage bases have been put in at Rice Close and have been subject to flooding.

S Smith said there have been no issues in Rice Close until putting in stores for five more scooters. Condensation has proved to be a significant problem with these new stores and, to overcome this, a cover will be constructed on the inside of the roofs.

Cllr Adshead referred to page 7, 1:1 referring to a number of fires being caused by mobility scooters and asked for details as he was not aware of these.

S Smith explained that, if you Google it, you will find at least fifteen incidences and potentially more around the country. The risk is small but has happened and DBC are following the advice of the Fire Service. There had however been no fires in Dacorum.

Cllr Adshead queried the charging. S Smith explained that, if the OT believes a mobility scooter (and therefore a store) is unnecessary, the tenant can pay for the construction.

Cllr Adeleke asked how DBC will ensure that tenants' scooters are serviced. S Smith said that the housing officers will patrol this and will maintain records. At any time they can ask for records of servicing. They will ask the tenant to service the scooter and if they fail to do this, then it will be unsafe for it to stay and will need to be removed. He believed the officers would be able to incorporate this in their workload.

Cllr Mahmood suggested a checklist added to the back of the policy so officers can check it. S Smith agreed this was a good idea and has been noted.

Cllr Hollinghurst said this policy is logical and sensible and has a good layout however, policies need to be explained sensitively.

Cllr Marshall asked when the programme to install communal stores will be issued S Smith said financing has been included in next year's budget; the programme will be produced in the first quarter of the financial year.

Cllr Marshall referred to the policy statement that it would be unsafe for scooters to be left in corridors for sheltered schemes. She recommended that this be altered to say "any communal areas of any DBC property". S Smith agreed.

Cllr Adshead wanted to know the cost of installing stores.

S Smith said individual stores cost around £2,500, excluding grounds work or electrics. Larger stand-alone stores are up to £7,000 plus grounds work and electrics.

Cllr Mahmood asked for Cllr McKay's effort to be put on record for the amendments to this policy.

Secondly, due to the condensation in these shelters, insulation around the electrical boxes is needed as drops of water may cause failure..

S Smith said that is exactly what happened at Rice Close, causing the electrics to blow so they are looking at putting plastic covers over the electrical boxes.

Action:

Outcome:

The report was noted and revised policy supported with amendments.

**OS/030/15 LOCAL LETTINGS PLAN**

N Braithwaite set out the background, explaining that the allocation policy focuses on prioritising those who have a local connection as well as housing need.

This is the first time for many years that DBC are building new properties and the Local Lettings Plan sets out the allocation of these properties at Gadebridge and at Farm Place so that, for example, there is a diversity of tenants and good neighbour relations. As regards St Peters Court in Gadebridge, as this block of flats is particularly energy efficient, tenants will need to undergo training prior to the moving in and an open day is intended to be held in February, to understand how best to use these properties.

Cllr Bassadone said that people in Gadgebridge are delighted that the block is to be called St Peter's Court. She asked if a tenant could move to another property if the tenant could not cope with St Peters Court..

N Braithwaite replied yes.

Cllr Hollinghurst referred to page 14 paragraph 2, stating this is explained well. Regarding page 13 some people are fixed upon the term 'local people'. 'Local people' needs a definition and pointed out that homeless people, to whom DBC owes a statutory obligation to

house, would also need to be accommodated irrespective of the 'local people' connection. He referred to the planned development of social housing in Tring.

J Hedger said the Housing Strategy, Homeless Strategy and allocations policy, which have been before this Committee, were based on these housing principles and that the allocations policy defines 'local people' and 'local connections'. The allocations policy provides that the 'local connections' relate to specific villages and not towns, such as Tring. They do have discussions with applicants regularly about Tring and homes for Tring people.

Cllr Marshall said the Committee is scheduled to consider a review of the Housing Allocations Policy later this year and there could be discussions on the extent of 'local connections'.

J Hedger said the Council normally allocates on the basis of a third to homeless applicants, a third to transfers and a third on the housing list. That balance could be applied to these new properties, albeit with the local lettings provisions in mind.

N Braithwaite added that regarding statutory duty for homeless households, there are a number of households for whom DBC does not have a duty to assist but DBC work with other local agencies to ensure those households are assisted.

Cllr Hearn, bearing in mind the development at Tring, wanted assurance that ward councillors are involved in drawing up local lettings plans. J Hedger agreed.

Cllr Marshall wanted clarity on P16. The local lettings plan before the Committee is stated to be applied to all new build developments in the borough, even though the detail has been given in respect of 2 specific developments. The Committee need to be involved in every letting plan, as variations such as for the developments in Tring or in Berkhamsted may be desirable.

J Hedger suggested that local lettings plans are discussed and considered as part of the planning process, but Cllr Marshall said that would not be appropriate. It is a housing matter, not a planning matter

Cllr Griffiths said she is in conversation with officers concerning an area where tenants have come together and want a local lettings plan but that is not coming to this committee. She said we need to be careful not to confuse letting plans for new build and scenarios.

Cllr Hollinghurst noted we have very strict local lettings plans in villages but what about local areas?

We do not want policies to be as strict as villages but on the other hand need to consider local areas..

J Hedger suggested that perhaps the Borough could be split into three areas and allocations based in areas but clearly that discussion would need to take place later this year.

Cllr Mahmood asked if the training should be offered to existing tenants, N Braithwaite said they have been doing it for approximately a year in conjunction with tenancy sustainment, also the Housing Advice & Options team and a number of officers who are certified trainers have been delivering the training for some time.

All applicants that apply as homeless are required to undertake training. DBC are offering it to applicants that are actively bidding on the register and those applicants will be awarded an additional 5 points if they undertake this training. It is compulsory for all home-seekers to undertake that training prior to being successful in an allocation, and an optional training element to existing tenants.

Cllr Mahmood also referred to page 13 there are a few typos. 1.2 and 1.3.

Cllr Mahmood expressed his concern about diversity; people who want to move to Tring should not be excluded.

N Braithwaite said that they do have local connection areas within the allocations policy, it is priority to those village areas but those applicants that do not have a local connection are still able to bid and DBC encourage them to still bid. There have been situations where people do not have a local connection yet have been successful for a property in that area.

Cllr Marshall referred to page 15 regarding Farm Place, 'properties to be occupied' should be replaced with the words 'properties to be let' be more suitable. Cllr Marshall also referred to the statement that one bed properties are to be occupied by tenants over 25years in at least 75% of allocations. She appreciated that officers have taken into account the comments from TLC, as the policy had originally been drafted with a figure of 100%, but, by stating "at least 75%" can result in 100% because that is at least 75%. Cllr Marshall suggested amending the text so that at least 75% of allocations and at least one 1bed flat is let to under 25year olds. J Hedger agreed.

Cllr Marshall confirmed that the report only applies to St Peters Court, Farm Place and relates only to new builds.

Action:

Outcome: Report was noted and the lettings plan supported on noting that it only applies to the occupation of St Peters Court, Gadebridge and Farm Place, Berkhamsted..

## **OS/031/15 HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY UPDATE**

F Williamson explained she had previously brought to the committee an outline draft of the housing asset management strategy. Since then there has been a few developments internally and also, with the procurement of the new Total Asset Management contract, DBC want to ensure that with the service provider, up to date reliable information is obtained regarding our stock. As a result, the department has become involved with the Chartered Institute of Housing's project to look at asset management within the social housing sector.

F Williamson presented a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation alongside Alan Perrett and William Hughes from Osborne. (Attached is the presentation)



Appendix A Asset Management Present

Cllr Mahmood thanked the offices for a well presented, professional presentation and asked if they have had previous experience around asset management that they will be embedding here and who is the asset manager.

A Perrett explained that the role sits within Osborne's office at Maxted Court in Maylands where a lot of the decision making is made and that person needs to be empowered to direct people in making these decisions. The approach that DBC and Osborne is taking is that they are working as in partnership in asset management. Cllr Mahmood asked if there is an additional cost to DBC for this. F Williamson said the cost was already included in the tender, it is a key role and the postholder will be working very closely with DBC officers.

A Perrett said there are several ways to improving customer service and towards that end, everyone who has TUPE'd over has been put through a customer service course to ensure that there is recognition of, and some education in, customer service that is to be delivered

throughout all functions of the contract. The behaviours of management and the partnership itself towards the way we approach things, has resulted in a huge improvement. It is about getting the message to staff that we are doing something different. It is about putting the right education programmes in; it is about bringing staff on a journey and getting their input to fully achieve buy-in to what DBC and Osbornes as a partnership are seeking to do. With this diagnostic tool, there should be a reduction in the numbers of repairs.

Cllr Adshead referred to the reference 'bedroom tax' in the report and said that colloquialisms such as this should not be used in documents that are in the public domain.

Cllr Marshall, noting that this is a draft policy, asked when the final policy will be completed. F Williamson said the final CIH projects is in July and there are three more workshops with the other 16 organisations to complete. DBC will start the consultation with the tenants and leaseholders during that 6 month period and also do some analysis on existing data to see what the quality of the new data is and to make sure it is on one database. In 6 months' time they will have a draft of the headline areas.

A Perrett added that Osborne are not resting and waiting for the strategy to be completed. The basics of a diagnostic tool process is being put in place and, if staff get a request for a repair that has been done at that property before and the staff think there is something better they can do, rather than just sending out for a repair, they are advised to speak to their supervisor.

Cllr Hollinghurst liked the presentation and the new ways of working. He asked if, with the new way of working, is the contractor going to have different incentives. Are we going to need a change of the contract to take into account the change of incentives or are we already working on the contractual framework already adapted for this new way of working?

F Williamson said the contract contains 5 key strategic objectives, to ensure there is sustainability with the contractor able to deliver under this new model, so within that are incentives for the contractor to perform. The Council still need to undertake governance and contractual monitoring to make sure the contractors are delivering the quality standards on the ground as well as looking at wider asset management.

Within the contract there is a mechanism whereby we work on target costs and we undertake a cost value reconciliation to get the actual costs and any differential is shared between the service provider and the council, so there is an incentive there to improve efficiencies.

DBC expect to see a reduction in repairs and better planning of work programmes. All of these are taken in to consideration as to whether the contractor gets an extension to the contract.

Cllr Mclean asked, if we have KPIs now with which we can compare in 2 years' time to prove these efficiencies, tenant satisfaction and so on.

A Perrett said there is a lot of data, including number of complaints, number of trips to a property, how many times the property has been empty, which can be analysed to assess performance.

Cllr Conway said there was work done in her sheltered housing scheme and she is pleased with what Osborne had done all and how swiftly the work was carried out.

Cllr Mahmood asked if Osborne consider, when faced with a requirement to repair, that it might be cheaper to replace in the longer term? W Hughes replied that if staff think they can find a way of replacing something or doing a better repair, they do not have to keep going back as they are incentivised to do what is best.

Cllr Marshall looks forward to seeing the outcome in a few months' time.

Action:

Outcome: report noted

William Hughes and Alan Perrett left the meeting at 9 p.m.

**OS/032/15                      APPENDIX A – WORK PROGRAMME 2014/2015**

Committee agreed the work programme up until March 2015

**OS/033/15                      EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

Agreed

The meeting closed at 9:35pm