

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 JULY 2012

Present:

Councillors:

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

Co-Opted Members:

S Parker

Also attended:

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

Officers:

Elliott Brooks	Assistant Director, Housing Landlord
Andy Vincent	Group Manager, Tenants & Leaseholders
Dharini Chandarana	Team Leader, Supported Housing
Julie Still	Group Manager, Resident Services
Katie Warner	Customer Insight Officer
Trudi Coston	Member Support Officer, Democratic Services (Minutes)

The meeting began at 7:30pm

OS/162/12 MINUTES

The Committee noted that there was no report on Community Alarm lines to DBC sheltered schemes, reasons for mains failures and calculations of results, which was requested at the last meeting.

A Vincent informed the Committee he had sent the information requested to Member Support today to be circulated to all members of the Committee.

E Brooks suggested the Community Alarm call response performance formed part of the quarterly monitoring report, which is due in September.

The Committee decided that the Community Alarm response performance figures should not be part of the Quarterly reports albeit that the next report will be at the September meeting. The meeting will also discuss the information A Vincent advised he had sent to members via Member Support today.

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2012 were then agreed by the Members present and signed by the Chairman.

OS/163/12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Flint and Councillor Griffiths (Portfolio Holder for Housing).

Carolyn Leech, Policy & Participation Team Leader also sent her apologies.

OS/164/12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

OS/165/12 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

OS/166/12 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO A CALL-IN

None

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

OS/167/12 DEPRIVATION IN DACORUM

Katie Warner introduced the item and explained it was an update of the report presented at the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in October 2011. She said it was essentially an audit of everything that the Council is doing to tackle deprivation, and she hoped the report had highlighted that the Council is doing a lot of work across the board which indirectly links to and impacts on the measures detailed in Appendix 1. She gave examples of a couple of individuals that been helped by the services provided and how it had impacted massively on their lives.

Key points of discussion:

Councillor Mahmood said he found the report very informative. He said he understood what each department was doing to help and how it was impacting on lives. He said although he could not see an end result, it still gave him a better idea of what the Council hoped to achieve.

Councillor Adeleke said it had been announced by the Government today that an officer had been appointed to support troubled families. He asked if there was a close link between deprivation and troubled families.

K Warner replied there is a very close link. She explained that the three main issues of deprivation were education, employment and income, and that is also the case for troubled families.

Councillor Adeleke asked if the council was aware of the number of troubled families in each area.

J Still said DBC work together with Hertfordshire County Council on a project called 'Thriving Families'. She said DBC also had a Family Intervention Officer, which is funded by Hertfordshire County Council, the Community Safety Partnership and the Housing Department, that works with and supports troubled families through a range of different issues. She said it was a fixed term post until the end of March 2013 but they are hoping it will be extended.

Councillor Harden said there were details of the Family Intervention project on page 6 of the report under Appendix 1.

Councillor Adshead asked when they were likely to receive updated information.

K Warner replied the IMD data comes out every 2-3 years so they hope to receive an update of the information in 2013/14.

Councillor Marshall asked if there was any information relating to DBC's role in the food bank.

K Warner replied she was not aware of that but would look in to it if required.

Councillor Bassadone said the Church she attends has a food bank on a weekly basis and receives a large number of specific items each week.

Councillor Marshall raised concern that individuals may not be provided with an offer of advice and guidance if they approached the Council requesting a food parcel. Committee members said they knew of the role of DENS and the food bank, and also assisted, but agreed with Councillor Mahmood who said the issue should be investigated as it is linked to deprivation.

Councillor Marshall said she would explore DBC's role in the food bank as there appeared to be some confusion.

A Vincent said the homelessness department may have better knowledge and understanding of the issue.

Councillor Marshall asked K Warner and J Still what they would like the Committee to do and take away from the report.

K Warner replied they would like the Committee to note the report and be aware that DBC is working on the challenges ahead with deprivation.

Councillor Marshall asked if they could be provided with an update of the report in approximately 9 months time.

K Warner agreed they could provide an update.

Councillor McLean referred to the 'Next Steps' to page 4 of the report and asked if DBC had a strategic partnership focused on Education and Training, as a lack of the two appeared to be directly linked with deprivation.

J Still replied they have a partnership with Youth Connexions and explained we assist them where possible with different projects and work experience etc. She said it was on an ad-hoc basis and when funding was available. In reply to Councillor McLean's request for data and information on successes etc, J Still said she would see if an officer from Youth Connexions was available to attend a meeting in the future and provide a presentation to the committee.

Councillor Marshall referred to the information in appendix 1 relating to the training project with Apollo, and said MITIE had previously committed to providing education and apprenticeships to individuals within the borough and asked if there was any update.

E Brooks said he was aware that they were involved in a number of initiatives. He said Apollo appear to promote and publicise their work more than MITIE. He said he was not sure of the details relating to MITIE's apprenticeships but agreed he would investigate and feed back to the committee.

Councillor Hearn asked if the adventure playgrounds were run by Youth Connexions.

J Still said the adventure playgrounds are run by the Council. She said the adventure playgrounds had lottery funding which ended in May but they managed to secure additional funding from the Housing department and the Community Safety Partnership to pay for the youth workers to attend for one night a week. She added they are very well attended.

Councillor Harden said the Sports Centre Trust were attending the meeting on 31 October to present the annual report and suggested the Committee think about questions they may wish to ask relating to Youth Connexions, data and the involvement and success of XC.

Councillor Marshall asked what the link was between the two.

Councillor Harden said Youth Connexions provide the majority of their services on the middle floor of the XC building.

Outcome:

The report was noted. A follow-up report is to be provided in approximately 9 months but Youth Connexions be invited to the Committee's meeting of the 31 October.

OS/168/12 FUTURE OF SUPPORTED HOUSING

Dharini Chandarana introduced the report and highlighted that in October 2011 the Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny committee agreed and established a working group to look at the future of supported housing. She said the project kick started in November 2011 and they have since produced some good work. She explained there had been challenges with the funding from Hertfordshire County Council, along with the changes to the Housing Revenue Account. She asked the committee to note the report and the existing work completed by the project group and for this to continue.

Key points of discussion:

In reply to Councillor Mahmood's question, D Chandarana replied the working group is made up of Tenants, Councillors and Officers. She added they had requested voluntary sector organisations to attend.

Councillor Mahmood referred to appendix 2 and asked if the bullet points were being prioritised or if the Vision was still being formulated and would there be any cost implications. A Vincent said this was the first attempt at creating a vision for the future and is still being formulated. He said they would be working on it in more detail over the next few months and will be visiting sheltered housing schemes. The officers would try to clearly cost out their proposal. He said there would be cost implications due to changes of the funding regime and of the housing service and additional resources may be required to do some of the re-modelling of the sheltered schemes to support the Vision.

In reply to questions, A Vincent said they would be working on the Vision over the summer. He said once they had a draft Vision, they would look at the next stages of implementation with the consultation in the summer/early autumn.

E Brooks added that the Hertfordshire County Council funding arrangements should stay the same for the next two years, until March 2015. He explained that the cost and the timeframe would depend on the Vision.

Councillor Bassadone referred to appendix 2 on page 31 of the report and the vision of sheltered scheme residents being able to benefit from a spare bedroom. She felt this could be very difficult to provide.

A Vincent said some points in the initial Vision are more of an aspiration but explained that if residents were adamant it was something they wanted to be investigated then they would like to work towards it.

Councillor Bassadone referred to appendix 3 on page 32 of the report and noted various grammatical errors.

A Vincent apologised and reassured the committee that they are still working on a document that identifies the support service residents will receive and it will be in plain English.

Councillor Hearn referred to page 27 and sought clarification on 'Scope and Scope Exclusions'.

A Vincent replied it is what is included and excluded in the project. He said their focus is on services for older people and not floating support services to younger people.

Councillor Hearn referred to the first bullet point on page 31 and queried when they are going to be looking at the properties that are not fit for purpose and how they are going to solve the issue.

E Brooks replied they were hoping to start working on it soon. He said because of the changes in the Housing Revenue Account they can be more strategic and have a better idea of the resources available for a considerable number of years. He said the HRA Business Plan was agreed by the Cabinet in May does make provision to spend money re-modelling

sheltered housing blocks in 5-10 years. He said they need to decide on the Vision before knowing what assets are required to deliver the Vision.

Councillor Adeleke referred to various points within Appendix 2 and asked if the officers had sought legal clarification on them.

A Vincent replied they had not yet consulted Legal but they would if it was required.

E Brooks added they would be required to consult the legal department if the Vision was to affect any council policies.

Councillor Mahmood said we had an ageing population and people are living longer. He asked what action was being taken to deal with that.

A Vincent replied some of the housing stock is not appropriate for everyone and needed to ensure it was let to people who really require it. He said they needed to ensure the accommodation was fit for elderly people to reside in. He added they also want to enable elderly people to stay in their own homes if they wish to and support them.

D Chandarana added they have been looking at the national figures and have recognised that the needs will be greater.

Councillor Mahmood asked if the family would also receive support.

D Chandarana replied families are supported by DBC's Supported Housing officers.

Councillor Marshall said many people are residing in properties which are too large for them and asked how we are encouraging those people to downsize. She said the incentive and financial support given to encourage downsizing is very modest.

A Vincent replied that they do want to offer more choices and incentives to encourage people to move. He said they were going to consultation at the Tenants Conference on 29th September. He said they were also looking at how to approach under occupation and the effect of welfare and benefits and can bring back to a future committee if requested. The Committee asked that this be done.

E Brooks added that A Vincent's team would be doing a presentation for the Tenant and Leaseholder Committee to explain the issues around under-occupation.

Councillor Hearn said there was no incentive to move in the area of Tring as there are very few bungalows. She said they needed to look at improving other types of accommodation.

A Vincent said they were looking at ideas for improvements and making all accommodation fit for purpose.

S Parker said if someone was to downsize from a 4 bedroom to a 2 bedroom property, they would have to pay more rent due to target rents. He said he understood why someone would avoid downsizing if the rent increased.

A Vincent said if someone was downsizing under the Council's under-occupation incentive scheme, they would not be charged the target rent.

Councillor Bassadone asked when the next project group meeting was scheduled for.

D Chandarana said she was waiting for the outcome of the recommendations from this meeting before organising the next meeting. She said she would inform the committee of the next meeting.

Councillor Marshall asked if any other members of the Committee would like to join the future of supported housing project group.

Councillors Adshead, Adeleke, Bassadone, Conway, Hearn, McLean, R Sutton, Mahmood and Marshall confirmed they wished to join. D Chandarana noted this and said she would inform the Committee of the next meeting. The meetings will be in the evening.

Councillor Marshall referred to 5.2 on page 25 on the report regarding charges for services to residents and queried when the changes would take effect.

A Vincent said his view they would hope to introduce the charges in April 2013.

Councillor Marshall asked if they would be proposing that in the budget.
A Vincent confirmed they would.

Outcome:

The report was noted and an update will be provided when available. A review of 'Under Occupation' will be added to the work programme to be scheduled in to a future meeting.

OS/169/12 PROGRESS REPORT ON REVIEW OF TENANT & LEASEHOLDER COMMITTEE & THE WIDER TENANT INVOLVEMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND TENANTS INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

Andy Vincent introduced the report on behalf of Carolyn Leech. He explained that the report was an update of the review presented to the Committee in March this year, and is linked to the draft Tenant Involvement Strategy. He said they are aiming to build on the current involvement structure and encourage more tenants to participate in the housing service so the direction of service is tenant led. He said the Government have recognised the importance of this and have set some standards with the Homes and Communities Agency and we will be monitored on this and are required to report back.

Key points of discussion:

R Kosmalski said she had previously raised concern regarding staffing levels and support for the Maintenance Focus Group. She said they have been struggling for a while and asked if there was any indication when this would be acted upon.

A Vincent said they had been reviewing the staff structure within the tenant participation team to ensure sufficient staff resources. He said the initial stages of the staffing review had taken place but had not been reported back to him yet.

E Brooks said the Maintenance Focus Group is administered by an officer in Property & Place but all other committees and groups are facilitated by the Tenant Participation team. He said Carolyn Leech has done a review of her resources and the roles the team are responsible for. In answer to Councillor Marshall's questions, E Brooks said the review would be the following week. Changes would be made as soon as possible, certainly before the end of December 2012.

S Parker referred to page 46 relating to the objective 'Increase the percentage of involved tenants by 5% between 2012- 2015' and asked if that was included in the staffing review.

E Brooks said the tenant involvement team should be the lead but tenant involvement should be part of every officer's job role in the housing service so they should not require more staff if tenant involvement has increased.

Councillor Marshall referred to page 38 and asked if the Terms of Reference were agreed by the TLC on 9th July.

S Parker said they had been sent to the committee to sign before the next meeting.

R Kosmalski said they were agreed with a few amendments to be made.

Councillor Marshall said it was important for local councillors to be involved in Local Area Panels but it was not noted in the report. She asked if this could be built in to the thought process.

A Vincent confirmed they would be.

Councillor Marshall referred to the action plan and asked why they were not populated.

A Vincent replied that was because it is a draft document and the detail of implementation is still being worked on.

E Brooks said they took this version to the TLC last week and they did receive comments from them which will be fed-back in to the plan. He said parts will need to be altered slightly and re-worded.

Councillor Adshead noted an error on page 40.

A Vincent said it was a typing error and should state 2012-15. He confirmed it would be amended.

Councillor Marshall asked if they could provide an update early next year.

A Vincent/ E Brooks agreed.

Outcome

The report was noted and the matter to be reviewed in 2013.

OS/170/12 WORK PROGRAMME

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

September 2012

- Discussion Re: Community Alarm lines to DBC sheltered schemes, reasons for mains failures and calculations of results.

October 2012

- Youth Connexions

Items to be scheduled:

- Review of Homelessness Strategy
- Update report on Supported Housing
- Update report on Tenant Involvement Strategy
- Review of Under Occupation

The meeting ended at 8:55 pm.