

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2015

Present:

Councillors:

Banks	Imarni
Bassadone	Mahmood (Chairman)
Conway	McLean (Vice-Chairman)
Hearn	Silwal
Link	Timmis
Fethney	W Wyatt-Lowe

Councillor Marshall Portfolio Holder for Residents and Regulatory Services.

Officers:

Richard Baker	Group Manager (Financial Services)
Chris Troy	Group Manager, Regulatory Services
Elliott Brooks	Assistant Director - Housing
Joe Guiton	Neighbourhood Action Team Leader
David Austin	Assistant Director Neighbourhood Delivery
Kayley Johnston	Member Support Officer (Minutes)
Jim Doyle	Group Manager – Democratic Services

The meeting began at: 7:35pm.

OS/192/15 MINUTES

The minutes of the Housing and Community OSC meeting on 8th July 2015 were agreed by members and signed by the Chair.

Cllr Mahmood informed Members and the Portfolio Holder that he had had a useful meeting with David Austin to understand as Chairman of the committee the policies that come to us and why they comes to us.

Cllr Mahmood also has a similar meeting scheduled with the Housing Team.

Secondly Cllr Mahmood came in last week to discuss the Homelessness Policy with Mark Brookes. The policy was scheduled to go to Cabinet the following Tuesday.

OS/193/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received.

OS/194/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There was no declaration of interest.

OS/195/15 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

**OS/196/15 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE
COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL IN**

None.

OS/197/15 QUARTER 1 FINANCIAL BUDGET REPORT

R Baker presented this report. The purpose of this report is to outline the Councils final forecast as at the end of Quarter 1. The outturn position, section 2 provides an overview of the General Fund Revenue Account, which is all of the Councils day to day services excluding HRA. The position at end of quarter 1 is an overspend. Section 3 provides a breakdown of the budgets in the remit of this Committee, section 4 provides a summary of the Housing Revenue Accounts, so the tenants account, tenants income, repairs and maintenance.

Section 5 provides a summary of the Capital Programme including the new build programmes and other General Fund schemes.

R Baker was happy to take questions from Members.

Cllr Mahmood asked the officer to explain the difference between the various accounts, HRA, Capital etc for the benefit of the new members.

R Baker explained the various accounts and their function.

Cllr Mahmood asked how the Housing Revenue Account budget will be impacted in the future, considering the recent budget announcements.

R Baker explained that in terms with the rent policy and the 1% reductions there will be significant reductions to income for HRA. The impact of these reductions is being modelled and options are being reviewed for the New Build Programme and Investment programme.

Cllr Hearn referred to page 5, 3.2 – Savings on premises, please could this be explained.

E Brooks explained that the new Homelessness Strategy that was launched last year emphasised the work undertaken to reduce homelessness. In the early stages when they know someone is going to be made homeless they intervene early to avoid homelessness situation if possible. He went onto say that they have invested in the private rented sector and worked with private landlords and also work around mediation with families therefore all this is good news.

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe asked, Woolmer Drive is being used for this purpose you say and then you go onto say that this particular place is now full, will this not lead to greater problems?

E Brooks said both Woolmer Drive and Lays Road are currently full; there are peaks and troughs in demand, so they are not always full. They can't predict when they will be full or not but they have noticed trends.

Cllr Imarni referred to page 5, 5.3. How did the overspend come about and how are they not forecasted.

E Brooks explained that when a housing scheme has planning approval not all the details are agreed and things can be change, and this is where the over spend comes in.

Cllr Mahmood added that the overspend on things like the kitchen at The Elms should have been budgeted for, and requested that in future schemes e provision is made for such things so that schemes can be brought in budget.

E Brooks said it's safe to say they don't think they will be building another Hostel like The Elms in the near future and thus so it was a one off scheme as such. The facilities were under estimated for such a large scale project.

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe referred to pages 7, 5.3. What's been done for budget mistakes and errors, how will this be stopped in the future.

R Baker reiterated what E Brooks had said and these costs had come prior to the planning permission being granted. R Baker said it's not a mistake it's that they don't have that level of detail to start with. The scheme and details are refined as they go through the process.

Cllr Imarni asked if the budgets forecasts are requested to be so tight that any risks cannot be included ?

As most people would prefer for financial risks to be included in the original budget and welcome any underspend that occurs. Then surely it's better to underspend than show over spends and the end of the project"

Elliot Brooks replied that the budgets are submitted very early on in the process and that once the contracts are awarded additional costs sometimes arise as the building contractors and surveyors raise issues that are specific to the particular area of land and projects. At that point the original budget request is submit, the team will forecast as accurately as possible based on the information they have available at that time. Elliot Brooks advised that it is at the later stages of planning and development that additional financial risks and requirements are brought to light.

Cllr Imarni commented that having spent time with Elliot's Brooke's team she had noted that they are incredibly competent and therefore somewhere they would have noted the possible risks and would it be possible to reflect these in this report.

There was a query as to whether this report was the correct place to highlight this and Elliot Brooks advised that they have separate reports and documents where risks are raised assessed and monitored weekly

E Brooks to update committee on all of the schemes and where they are at with it.

Cllr Mahmood referred to 4.3 and asked if the savings shown because the cleaners have left and we didn't replace them or did we have a vacancy and decide not to fill it.

E Brooks said it related to 2 cleaners that they put in the budget and structure for the removal of fly tipping within the entrances to communal areas; this didn't happen so that's what this is.

All areas of the council have a 5% vacancy provision requirement its means its expected vacancies throughout, these haven't been met due to vacancies not coming up or recruiting quicker than normal or putting people in place like an internal transfer to do that job.

R Baker explained that the pressure on the vacancy provision is likely to reduce as the year goes on due to staff turnover.

Cllr Mahmood referred to page 14 at the financial report on the new build. He requested an update update on the new build, schemes and costs, at some point in the future.

E Brooks to have a chat with Richard outside of this meeting regarding operation issues and financial.

Actions: As noted above.

Outcome: The report was noted.

OS/198/15 QUARTER 1 HOUSING

E Brooks presented this report, service plan and risk register. He had taken note of the feedback given at the last meeting and reduced the number of PI's significantly. It's not that the previous Performance Indictors don't exists or are not being managed, they are by our Team internally rather than being brought here.

The most critical ones have been selected and brought to Overview and Scrutiny so it's more manageable. You will notice form item 2.1 this explains how the Osbourne contract works and the recent process which they have been through to approve the year 6 of the contract. The report touches on empty homes and an increase of repairs performance of approximately 12 days over the year which is good so that's 12 days extra rent.

There is an update on 2 key projects one is completed and Longlands should be completed by Christmas.

The appendix attached will slightly change next year, we have been asked to use a different template going forward.

E Brooks was happy to take questions from members.

Cllr Imarni said she has spent some time with the Empty Homes Team and some of Osbourne staff and found it to be a very well run and efficient service and staffs seem competent.

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe added to that, regarding the Longlands development, and asked for thanks to be conveyed from the Adeyfield Community Centre for the way in which the contractors have been very assistive of the community centre.

Cllr Mahmood said that in general the Empty Homes management has seen a massive improvement in recent times, in terms of performance they are all green or yellow which is good, Item 1 has no colour and needed explaining.

E Brooks said that the items lists number of complaints received by the service, instead of performance indicator on the percentage of stage 1 complaints responded to within target. The council are on target.

Cllr Mahmood asked if residents were fully aware on how to lodge a complaint as a resident knocked on his door recently to discuss an issue he was having with his council housing. E Brooks said yes all this information is on the website and staffs are trained on reception to take complaints and there are plenty of avenues to complain, he is confident our robust system works because he sees the complaints coming in.

Action: None

Outcome: Report was noted.

OS/199/15 QUARTER 1 RESIDENT SERVICES

J Guiton presented this report in absence of Julie Still. For new Members this report covers Neighbourhood Action, Anti Sociable Behaviours, Community Safety, Children Services, CCTV, Old Town Hall, Youth Democracy Safeguarding Children and Young people.

J Guiton was happy to take questions from Members on the report.

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe referred to page 50 Community Safety Partnership could this be made clearer as we don't know what the ratings are.

J Guiton explained that 1 = good and 9 = not good, and that this is a county score and cannot be changed but he will look at adding a key for Members to refer to as a reminder.

Cllr Mahmood referred to item 6.6 and sought clarity on how resources were targeted to items listed and if the items were listed in any order of priority?

J Guiton said yes they are priorities that come from the police and others, and high priorities are in order. He also added that it doesn't mean to say if the priority isn't there it's not dealt with.

Cllr Mahmood referred to item 10, is there anymore verge hardening planned for future years as this was a positive scheme in recent times..

J Guiton said so far we are in the final year of the scheme, with 4-6 projects left.

Cllr Conway referred to item 10, Tring. She went to that event and it was really well done.

Cllr Bassadone also liked to add that the open days at the Adventure Playground were fantastic and a good attendance.

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe referred to CCTV on page 54. Are there any new CCTV in place to cover the new projects like the Water Gardens.

J Guiton said with those sites are already covered with CCTV, there is a new code coming out so they will have to justify why they have CCTV in certain places and the need for it. This won't be a problem in the mentioned area as it's in the Town Centre so these areas will still be covered.

Cllr Mahmood has had requests from Taxi drivers regarding CCTV, if they can have CCTV that covers their area for public safety.

Cllr Mahmood moved onto the Old Town Hall and wants to see it do well. He asked, Is there something we can put in 'News and Views' about the old Town Hall as the attendance has gone down in the recent quarter and yet there is a lot more performance space to let. Is there anything in the pipe line?

J Guiton said yes the numbers have been low purely due to a vacant position and sickness. Council Services are starting to use the Old Town Hall a lot more.

Cllr Mahmood reads a lot of reports around Art Funding for Art Projects maybe this is something to pass on to the Old Town Hall team to pursue?

J Guiton said they have just filled a position and the new employee has come from an Art establishment background and is looking at different funding pots.

Action: None.

Outcome: Report was noted.

OS/200/15 QUARTER 1 REGULATORY SERVICES

CTroy presented this report and highlighted that we are slightly down on food hygiene inspections. This because officers can't always get into the property at the time- this could be because they are closed or being refurbished.

There has been some slippage in noise complaints being closed within 60days this is due to some long running investigations that can't be closed in 60days. There are approximately 30/40 complaints to deal with Bovingdon and it's a long standing investigation.

With regards to food safety enforcement, there was a notice served in Hemel due to lack of food safety measures and poor hygiene and temperature control. There was one premises in the Old Town which voluntarily closed down due to an infestation of mice.

There were 2 prosecutions for fly tipping and 1 caution.

Air Quality Strategy has now been finalised and can be viewed on Herts Direct
<http://www.hertsdirect.org/docs/pdf/a/airqualitystrategicplan.pdf>

As a Primary Authority, we have just signed up with Costco, which along with Tesco and Hilton help DBC to influence national policy.

Corporate H&S – there is an alcohol policy is going to Cabinet next month and we are piloting H&S of risk assessments for Display Screen Equipment. (DSE) . DSE has the potential for causing a number of Occupational Health issues and therefore it is right to prioritise these.

The Enforcement Policy went to Cabinet and has been approved.

Officers have been giving pre advice on H&S and Food Safety to organisers of outdoor events including Chill Fest in Tring.

C Troy was happy to take questions from Members.

Cllr Hearn said it was a well presented comprehensive report.

Cllr Mahmood added to that by saying everything was there and it was really easy to follow.

Cllr Mahmood attended a ‘2 day Construction Design and Management (CDM 2015) Training course recently for his day job. He noted that the regulations covers a wider scope maintenance works rather than just construction work. How Will the Council be picking up this bit of HSE legislation?

C Troy said yes 2 of our officers went on a similar CDM course yesterday to see what the changes are, and officers are empowered to take action under the regulations.

Cllr Hearn referred to the Air Quality in Tring near the second largest comprehensive school in the area and said that they are now building houses the other side so there is a lot of air pollution there, is there any consideration taken into account.

C Troy said it’s not an air quality issue, the levels aren’t high enough.

Cllr Timmis asked if the strategy covers Luton Airport.

C Troy said it is a Herts based strategy but the airport operations would have an impact because of the increase in the number of vehicles going through Hertfordshire. The emissions from the aircraft themselves would not have such an impact. Districts will have an important role in monitoring pollution levels in Herts.

Action: None

Outcome: Noted

OS/201/15 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Agreed

OS/202/15 APPENDIX A – WORK PROGRAMME 2015/2016

Two items that were moved from this agenda, Assigning Tenancies which will be coming to us in October and Annual Review of HRA Business Plan.

The meeting closed at 8:40pm