

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUITINY

10 JUNE 2015

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Mahmood
(Chairman)
McLean (Vice-
Chairman)
Adshead
Banks
Hazel Bassadone
Conway
Hearn
Imarni
Silwal
Timmis
Wyatt-Lowe

Officers:

Cabinet Support Members

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

1 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2015 were agreed by the members present and signed by the Chair.

2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from Councillor Harden and Co-Opted TLC Members Howard and Horn.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There was no declaration of interest.

4 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

5 **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

None.

6 **QUARTER 4 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN**

James Deane (JD), Corporate Director (Finance & Operations) outlined the Provisional Outturn for 2014/15, prior to the closure of the Council's accounts. JD took the committee through the report and explained the Capital and Revenue elements of the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and the Capital Programme.

Members then raised various issues arising from the report.

Councillor W Wyatt-Lowe drew attention to line 142 dealing with The Elms and asked how the accounts will show a 'retention'. JD said that this would form part of the annual budget reporting which would be identified by officers and reported at the end of year.

Councillor McLean highlighted the remedial works carried out around Highbarns and confirmed that the project is now complete.

E Brookes (EB) was asked if the efficiency saving of £400k across the areas of Responsive Repairs and Void Repairs arising from the new Total Asset Management contract with Osborne would end up in the General Fund and he replied that it would remain in the HRA.

Reasons were sought for the less than expected take up of Home Improvement Loans and Chris Troy (CT) put forward that this may be due to the scheme not being advertised widely enough, an issue currently being addressed.

The meeting returned to the slight overspend on the Elms and were told that this addressed three elements: the Kitchen which required a higher specification; the outside area extension; and lastly furniture and fittings; all of which were not in the original project build but were necessary additions.

Action: None

Outcome: The report was noted.

7 **QUARTER 4 HOUSING**

This item was introduced by Elliot Brookes who drew the attention of committee members to the service plan structure chart detailing who does what and the services for which they are responsible.

He also highlighted positives including the improved end of year figures for Empty Homes Performance and the benefits arising from the Osborne contract.

He then went on to cover the good results achieved by the Tenancy Sustainment Team due to the concentrated effort by one or two officers to get high rewards.

He drew attention to the efforts to increase tenancy involvement including the tenants and leaseholders fun day to be held at Hemel Hempstead school and advertised in the recent edition of Housing News.

He concluded with the New Homes Redevelopment Programme encompassing the Elms and St. Peters Court – both completed on time, to schedule and with tenants in them.

Councillor Imrani asked for examples of what makes a property 'hard to let'. EB listed certain sheltered schemes, e.g. bedsits, willow edge in Kings Langley, properties above garages, all characterised as 'less desirable' in choice based letting terms.

A short discussion then took place on homelessness targets and the gold standard in provision of homelessness support. DBC had worked with three other authorities in herts in a peer review considering the 10 key elements in the gold standard. As a result DBC has been working on improving the areas of 'advice given' (a service provided through phone scripts); and consultation on the homelessness strategy.

Councillor Silwal asked if the Key Amnesty had impacted on sub letting and was informed that this internal initiative has resulted in keys being handed back

Councillor W Wyatt-Lowe raised the issue of how DBC might categorise the recording of complaints from different sets of tenants – e.g. private householders complaints about Council tenants. EB advised that tenant complaints are recorded and we look at themes; identifying issues and behaviour rather than who it is about. We then record any enforcement action taken.

The committee next considered the Performance Indicators.

Councillor Imrani drew attention to the capital programme and her impression that some properties seem to be left off the repairs lists while the rest of the street is repaired. EB explained that the list is compiled not by street but by need. He suggested that residents who feel they have a need to be addressed should alert the council.

Councillor Conway sought clarification on the passive house standard. EB clarified that it relates to the standard of build quality which will result in lower heating and energy bills. St Peter's is a pilot and the performance will be monitored. The tenants have been trained and, used correctly, it should result in lower bills.

Councillor W Wyatt-Lowe welcomed the efforts involved in improving digital access. He looked forward to the programme being pushed out to the wider community and not just council residents. He questioned how we will measure

any outcomes from this and suggested 'less visits to the civic offices'; more contacts by phone, App or website.

He raised the issue of the young persons housing strategy including special provisions for those leaving care. EB agreed that this will be considered when the strategy comes to this committee for approval.

The members suggested that the current format of the Performance report needs reviewing and a short summary included in the report.

8 QUARTER 4 RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Julie Still, (JS) Group Manager: Resident Services took the committee through the various reports from her remit.

- The Old Town Hall**
The Satisfaction Survey was suspended during the refurbishments but the intention is to restart it in the future.
The New Cellar Bar has been completed and has been well received.
- Community Safety Partnership – is operating well and recorded instances of Anti-social behaviour are reduced.**
- Neighbourhood Action – The Love Your Highfield event was a success and a full analysis of the project will be produced in the summer.**
- Verge Hardening – ongoing**
- Dacorum Youth Forum – prior to the UK General election all senior schools in the borough were visited and 600 first time electors were added to the electoral register**
- CCTV – Presented at a recent sector conference – recognised as a nationwide leader.**
- Safeguarding – Member Training underway**

Councillor Mclean noted that the verge hardening budget has been used: is this to be reviewed? JD advised that the current budget has been utilised and that members may wish to consider a further allocation as part of the budget process later in the year.

Councillor W Wyatt-Lowe requested a little more interpretation to accompany the stats provided by the fire service. He also asked that figures for 'fraud and cyber crime' should be included in the crime statistics

Councillor Mahmood praised the neighbourhood action team efforts that went into organising the Highfield Love your neighbourhood project and looked forward to the scheme being rolled out further.

Councillor McLean requested that officers consider developing a policy for the use of drones?

Councillor Timmis sought clarification on what constituted a deliberate secondary fire and was informed that they include things like fires in skips.

C Troy, (CT) Group Manager, Regulatory Services discussed the report highlighting: that 100% Food Hygiene Inspections over the year have been achieved despite an earlier back log; a successful prosecution against Royal Mail under Health & Safety Enforcement; efficient handling of infectious diseases outbreaks; and two successful prosecutions for fly tipping.

He went on to draw attention to the review of Emergency Planning which has now prioritised this area of work as well as the achievement of a successful audit; DBC involvement in the Herts-wide air quality strategy which will soon be on Hertsdirect website; and the setting up of the new corporate Health & Safety service including the Health & Safety Committee.

Councillor W Wyatt-Lowe asked if DBC has to take action on air quality and fly-tipping which should be the responsibility of HCC. He wondered if DBC might reclaim costs for littering/flytipping on the highway from the county council? CT's response was that it is difficult for DBC alone to address air quality issues as the main source of pollution is from vehicles. It is hoped that the new County Air Quality Strategic Group, which has representation from all district LA's, highways, planners and public health, will positively influence action across all districts. The districts continue to have a key role in monitoring levels of pollution contributing.

Dave Austin said that DBC take a pragmatic view and will take action if it is required on issues such as Fly tipping; A41 litter picking and gulley cleansing, even if HCC have certain responsibilities.

Councillor Timmis stressed that fly-tipping is the number one issue for farmers and for the villages. She went on to say that they are also anxious to see further provision of 'dog waste bins'. CT advised that the team are looking at the worst areas to ensure that there is sufficient dog bin provision and will be looking at additional signage. The team are also planning Environmental Action Days to address issues of dog fouling, littering and flytipping. He stressed, however, that these areas require significant cost and effort to acquire the necessary evidence in order to take successful legal action.

Councillor Mahmood suggested DBC might organise a conference to train landlords and those running houses in multiple occupation. . CT was of the opinion that landlords generally know the rules and we take actions where necessary. HMOs have to have a license and have to be inspected and the DBC policy is to target those that are the worst.