

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

4 JULY 2018

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Mrs Bassadone
Conway
P Hearn
Imarni (Vice-Chairman)
Mahmood (Chairman)
Pringle

Officers: Layna Warden
Mandy Peters
Katie Kiely
Emily-Rae Maxwell
Kayley Johnston
Tenancy Sustainment Team Leader
Team Leader (Income)
Policy and Participation Team Leader
Member Support Officer (Minutes)

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

211 **MINUTES**

It was agreed that the minutes of the Housing and Community OSC meeting on 13 June 2018 were accurate and to include the wording which Cllr Mahmood circulated to Members for minute number OS/11/2018 Exclusion of the Public to be added to the minutes.

212 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from Cllr Banks

213 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There was no declaration of interest.

214 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

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

None.

216 **PRS UPDATE**

E Maxwell presented the report highlighting a few key points since the private sector service transferred over. She explained that all staff are currently being trained on private sector housing so they now have a better understanding on both. Some of the areas she highlighted included; fitness for human habitation, the housing and planning act which came in on 1st April, the enforcement policy and the development of the private sector housing.

E Maxwell was happy to take questions from Members.

Cllr England referred to the rouge landlord data base, he agreed it was a good idea and was all for the data base and asked if it was for the actual home they are looking at with the intent.

Cllr Griffiths arrives at 19:48

E Maxwell said you have to of been prosecuted to be on the database and only super users will have access to these records.

Cllr England referred to the energy performance ratings, those that are below the E rating how can you say they have been contacted when you have estimated the figures.

E Maxwell said that before it was transferred over it was in hand and they had to write to us. Now Vicky has written to people, if it goes over a certain amount they don't have to do it.

Cllr Bassadone referred to the private sector enforcement policy, is this ever printed out as the information is hard to read.

E Maxwell said it is converted to a PDF and its put online, its also emailed out and anyone can request for it to be printed out.

Cllr Pringle asked if a tenant was in multiple occupancy would vulnerable people such as those that are autistic, would they be recognised for vulnerability.

E Maxwell said absolutely yes we have temp accommodation for those people.

Cllr Mahmood referred to HMO's do we have a data base for those landlords.

E Maxwell said that there is a list of around 44, this is published online and they will be keeping a list.

Cllr Mahmood asked how landlords know it is coming in.

Cllr Imarni arrived at 19:56

E Maxwell said that the policy will be going to Cabinet around the end of July for adoption. There are neighbour surveys and landlord events and newsletters, also social media.

Cllr Mahmood asked if could go in the digest.
He also asked if the fines could be backdated.

E Maxwell said that they can't backdate fines because the policy wasn't in place.
Cllr Mahmood suggested small fees for landlords to register. He asked how they make sure people are registered.

E Maxwell said we need to apply for it, full council will need to agree and legal aren't in the position for such enforcement.

Cllr Mahmood asked what the minimum standard was.

E Maxwell said it could be as small as an energy saving light bulb.

217 SUSTAINABLE TENANCIES STRATEGY

M Peters presented the report for members to be informed about the development of the Sustainable Tenancies Strategy and the key commitments.

Explaining that the Sustainable Tenancies Strategy is a four-year strategy that has provided an opportunity for tenants, staff and members to review the Councils approach to tenancy management. It replaces the current Vulnerable Person Strategy and has been developed in response to the changing needs and challenges faced in social housing. The report outlines the key elements of the strategy and gives members an overview of the approach taken by the tenancy team when managing tenancies within our general needs stock.

M Peters was happy to take questions from Members.

Cllr England asked does the sustainable tenancy team make sure the properties match needs.

M Peters said yes they do and they are vetted and only able to bid for properties that meet their needs.

Cllr England asked what is a definition of success.

M Peters said rent is paid on time and obligations of living in the property are met as per the tenancy agreement.

Cllr Imarni asked how effective is it, and gave an example of a case which she was aware of.

M Peters said that a case like this was beyond the team's remit.

E Maxwell said that the Tenancy Sustainment Team do support it. She explained at what point there is support and when enforcement comes in.

They look at triggers and support, its very time consuming and in some cases its very rewarding.

Out of 79 cases closed, 76 cases have avoided eviction, giving a potential saving of £380,000 for the Council. Every support plan is bespoke, enforcement is only used in these cases as a last resort.

Cllr Bassadone referred to page 39 – 3. Is there a good relationship to move them on?

M Peters said supported housing make those decisions.

Cllr Griffith added to that, explaining that Cllr Bassadone may have got confused, this policy is for new tenants and a select group. EPD supported housing will deal with anything else.

Cllr Mahmood said he thought it was for problem tenants too.

M Peters said it's an overarching policy to cover Tenancy and Income also.

Cllr Mahmood said that the policy is very good, he asked how do tenants know who to approach.

M Peters said there is an internal referrals process, cases usually come from Tenancy and Income Officers if situations arise. Concern Cards are also used by our contractors to flat you concerns they may have following a visit. We also accept referrals from social services/ adult services or even from schools and education.

Cllr Mahmood asked how big is the team.

M Peters said 1 Team leader, 2 Lead Officers, 4 Tenancy Sustainment Officers, 1 surveyor and 4 Welfare & Sustainment Officers.

Cllr England asked when you support people do you have tools for good tenancies as examples.

M Peters said yes applicants are invited to a 2-hour Tenancy Sustainment Information session, we talk to them about expectations they may have and the responsibilities of holding a tenancy with The Council. We explain how important the Tenancy Agreement is as it's a legal document that can be relied upon by both the Council and the Tenant.

Cllr England asked what the intake and the outcome.

M Peters said the current caseload is 127 in settled accommodations and 139 in temporary accommodation.

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INCOME MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

K Kiely presented the report to provide the committee with an overview of the draft Income Management Strategy and an update on the Income Team and its performance. The Income Management strategy is specifically focussed on all HRA income sources including rents, service charges, recharges, former tenant debts and leaseholder charges. It sets out how we will manage the collection of these with the aim of maximising income whilst supporting tenants to manage the financial aspects of their tenancies. Securing the income stream is essential in ensuring that we are able to provide high quality services to our tenants.

K Kiely was happy to take questions from members.

Cllr Griffith gave her compliments to the Team for the works they are doing.

Cllr Mahmood asked if their approach was to get money out of them.

K Kiely said there is a balance, if its necessary we do evict but we try to get money in.

Cllr Imarni asked how effective will it be if someone ends up on universal credits.

K Kiely said they can ask for the arrears to be paid for them. There is a spike when they go on universal credit, they work with the tenants after a spike it does reduce, there are only a few claimants on universal credits.

Cllr Imarni asked if it was 4 month arrears.

K Kiely said no they can ask for 12 weeks but they can ask for it earlier.

Cllr Pringle referred to enforcement, Mental health. Is there a filter for vulnerable people such as those with autism?

K Kiely said that there is nothing formal but there are experience officers who are aware of vulnerable people. Officers are aware but not qualified/trained to diagnose.

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UPDATE ON UNIVERSAL CREDITS

F Williamson introduced the report. Explaining that it will be going to F&R OSC later this month. The figures for in the report are to illustrate the projected impact and come with a caveat that the information is based upon the current limited number of recipients within Dacorum and it is proposed that a a further report will be brought back to committee when we have more data following the wider roll out of UC.

F Williamson explained that the report sets out the current situation of Universal Credit (UC) on a national basis and more specifically for Dacorum. It highlights some of the concerns that have been raised from other authorities and the administration of the system by DWP and what this means for residents, for other agencies and partners and for DBC as a stock retaining Local Authority. It finally sets out the approach being taken by the Council to provide support to tenants that will be subject

to UC implementation on our residents, voluntary sector partners and ability to provide a quality service.

F Williamson was happy to take questions from members.

Cllr Mahmood said after universal credits got bad publicity in some areas when it was rolled out, he asked what have we learnt from this?

K Kiely said unfortunately this was an issue with the Department of Work and Pensions. We don't want to scare people when it may not affect them. We have let people know if it will affect them. We hope to make a growth bid to enable us to work with people as they move over to universal credits. We have looked at ways they transfer to universal credits and we have prepared for it. We are confident that the roll out will come in in December to Dacorum, although there have been a number of deferrals to date, which is why the Council did not want to undertake any communications prematurely

Cllr Mahmood asked do we get something from DWP to warn people or inform them.

K Kiely said no we are not often informed try should notify the benefits team but they don't always. They are trying to build better communication with them.

E Maxwell added to that saying it was a wider issue, communication and key messages are primed in a much friendlier way.

K Kiely said as they have so little tenants on it at the moment they have communicated on a 1:1 basis so far.

Cllr Mahmood asked if private landlords are being served notices, is there planning going on.

K Kiely said yes, there is a group ran by Finance see 6.4.9 of the agenda.

The Meeting ended at 8.50 pm