

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

23 JANUARY 2019

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Adeleke
Armytage
Conway
England
P Hearn
Imarni (Vice-Chairman)
Mahmood (Chairman)
Pringle

Portfolio Holders – Councillor Griffiths (Housing)

Officers:

Lynne Hunt	Private Rented Sector Lead Officer
Fiona Williamson	Assistant Director (Housing)
Natasha Beresford	Strategic Housing Group Manager
Kayley Johnston	Member Support Officer (Minutes)

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

9 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Housing and Community OSC meeting on 4th December 2018 were agreed by Members and signed by the Chair.

10 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from Banks, Bassadone, Fethney, Mills, McLean and W Wyatt-Lowe

11 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There was no declaration of interest.

12 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

13 **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE**

COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN

None

14 HMO LICENSING FEES

The Chairman asked F Williamson to give a verbal update on the Osborne and Sun Realm contract from the report that was presented at November's OSC.

F Williamson explained that it was agreed at the Strategic Core Group meeting held on 11 Jan 2019 to defer the decision on the year 4 contract extension due to the fact that the expectations in respect of two of the key strategic indicators had not been fully met. F Williamson explained that by the nature of strategic indicators they are open to a degree of interpretation, but it had been agreed that there had been some issues with the IT interfaces in respect of the quality of information provided. The performance in the current year, year 5, has demonstrated a number of improvements in these areas.

Cllr Adeleke asked if they had provided reasons for the two failed indicators. He also referred to the reviewing of the contract and asked if they have interim discussions on it or if it's just reviewed after the 4 years.

F Williamson said it's not that they have failed, it's due to the fact that some of the recommendations from the cost consultants that undertake the audits had not been fully implemented and therefore it made it more onerous to separate project costs by block. Also there was some information that had not been fully interfaced into the Council's systems and therefore the Council wanted to make sure this had been received in the correct format before a decision on the extension is made.

F Williamson advised that the contract mechanism entails an annual review of performance and on the successful completion of each individual year, Osborne can earn another year. To date three additional years have been awarded.

N Beresford introduced the report explaining that it's to set out a proposed revision of licence fees payable by landlords of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in order to meet the statutory requirements of fee setting. The aim of the report is for members to provide feedback on the fees schedule for the licensing of HMOs and associated activities, as set out in the report and Appendices.

Cllr Pringle asked if the initial assessment fails how it is down to the council to manage it.

N Beresford said that if people fail to comply with the HMO then we look at the safety of the residents and take on any works that need to be done to bring the property up to standards. We will then re charge the property owner, serve improvement notices, or even give civil penalties. Any income gained can only be re invested in the private sector housing.

Cllr Armytage referred to page 13, could you please explain.

N Beresford said they liaise corporately and they drill down on funds to undertake a stock condition survey.

We need to identify what we need from the private sector housing and the key pieces of work for this year, to inform a strategic approach.

Cllr Hearn referred to page 10, recommendations for the Team Leader, when would it be suitable for it to be filled.

N Beresford said as soon as possible, on 4th Feb the figures will be included in the budget report if this is agreed it will then go to Full Council for Councillor approval.

Cllr Hearn asked if the group could support this as the post is needed for them to successfully do their jobs.

Cllr Griffiths added to that stating that she did mention about a post in the last budget report and this was the post she was referring too.

Cllr Conway asked if it was a monitored process or if they wait for a complaint.

N Beresford said that previously that was the case we would not know unless people complained, as they had no records. The process in the last 12 months is to review it at year 2 and then again at year4.

Cllr Pringle asked if the information was or could be shared with other Councils to see if people were abusing the systems or if they were repeat offenders.

N Beresford said yes there is and we do have a system in place that's shares and benchmarks data at Hertfordshire Quality Group. Rogue Landlord database is a national database to identify rogue landlords, unfortunately, the system is fairly new and under used and there isn't much on the data base but this does inform other councils of rogue landlords.

Cllr England referred to HMOs how do you assess their capacity for enforcing the huge step-up to potentially 916 HMOs and if there is anything Cllrs and residents can do to assist the team with identifying cases, given that BRE assessment is 50% more than expected?

N Beresford said with regards to capacity, we have already submitted a growth item for an independent Team Leader for the service, which is pending further discussion at budget scrutiny next week. Additionally there has been approval to recruit a temporary specialist within the service to assist with the current growth within the team and ongoing development of the service. We continue to monitor resource demand within the team, to enable us to determine if the current staffing resource is fit for purpose to deliver the statutory functions, we will be discussing our findings further with senior management over the next few months. I would encourage members where they receive enquiries from members of the public about their homes, or if they have a concern regarding a property within their ward to notify the team and contact our dedicated mailbox: Private Sector Mailbox pshousing@dacorum.gov.uk

Cllr Mahmood asked if it was correct that it was licensable for 5 or more in 1 household and how do we monitor it.

L Hunt said yes so for 4 people there is no fee but its monitored. N Beresford said we support landlords to get accreditation and engage with high street agents and target new areas. There is a lot more work going on this year and there are also 120 homes in Dacorum that have been empty in the last 2 years that also need targeting and brought up to standards so we are also working with those agents and homeowners.

Cllr Mahmood asked if there is room for a landlords forum every 6 months.

N Beresford said yes we do currently have landlords forum meetings in conjunction with St Albans.

Cllr Adeleke left at 8:20pm

Cllr Mahmood asked if the fees set out in the report could be renewed.

N Beresford said yes they can, she also believes it's an under estimate and that they needed to put something in place as soon as possible that was lawful. There is further scope in the future; this is just the bare basics of what are required to be included.

Cllr Mahmood said that he felt the first two figures were fine but the last one could be raised. N Beresford confirmed that the figures third figure is charged in addition to the initial figure and second figure (if the licence was approved), furthermore there is scope to include civil penalties charges for any offences.

Cllr Imarni asked if landlords were aware of the penalties.

N Beresford said yes landlords are aware we keep the website up to date and put mail in local shops and on social media etc they have already notified people and when they work with more agencies and more people they will be able to get the word out.

The report was noted.

15 WORK PROGRAMME

None

The Meeting ended at 8.30 pm