

## MINUTES

### HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

WEDNESDAY 20 JULY 2016

**Present:**

**Members:** J Howard - TLC Co-Opted Member

**Councillors:** Mahmood (Chairman)  
Banks  
Mrs Bassadone  
Conway  
P Hearn  
Link  
Fethney  
Imarni (Vice-Chairman)  
Silwal  
Timmis  
W Wyatt-Lowe

Councillor Griffiths (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

**Officers:**

Emily-Rae Maxwell	Policy and Participation Team Leader
Fiona Williamson	Group Manager (Property & Place)
Andy Vincent	Group Manager (Tenants & Leaseholders)
Julia Hedger	Group Manager Strategic Housing
Kayley Johnston	Member Support Officer (Minutes)

**Also Attendance:**

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

**32**                    **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Housing and Community OSC meeting on Wednesday 8 June 2016 were agreed by members

It was agreed by the committee that item 10 went first, Tenant Involvement Strategy.

**33**                    **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies received from Cllr Adshead and Cllr Adeleke and Co-Opted TLC Members Cook and Horn.

**34**                    **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There was no declaration of interest.

**35**                    **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

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

None.

**37**                    **HOUSING RENTS & OTHER CHARGES POLICY**

A Vincent presented this report advising the committee of the new updated rents and other charges policy, expressing that we are reflecting the Government Policy. Pay to stay will come into place later this year; an update will be brought to scrutiny in September.

*A Vincent was happy to take questions on the report.*

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe asked if de-pooling was something which other Councils are doing and what proportion of total rent is service charge.

A Vincent said that plenty of other Councils are doing de-pooling. The proportion of rents and service charge depends on what type of property you live in. There isn't a consistent answer to that. They have already written to tenants in regards to this, there have had some reaction and people seem to be happier as the Council are not looking to put the service charge on top of rents, its separated out.

Cllr Mahmood referred to page 12 item 22, and queried if the 1% increase won't work some cases?

A Vincent said that if you're an existing tenant paying £100 your rent will go down by 1%. When a property is empty they increase the rent to the top end, and then reduce it.

Cllr Fethney said that resourcing Pay to Stay must be a massive re source.

A Vincent confirmed that the government are writing regulations for this, and that they are currently working on how to do things.

Action: Add Pay to Stay to the September forward plan.

Outcome: The report was noted.

### **38**                    **COMMUNITY ALARM UPDATE**

*A Vincent presented this report to the committee to inform them of the works to upgrade the alarm call systems within Sheltered Housing and to re-tender the alarm call monitoring service. The report covers the planned works there may be some minor changes in the sequence in which the works are undertaken. This will only be the case if the systems are deteriorating at one location then this will take priority.*

*A Vincent was happy to take questions on the report.*

Cllr Timmis asked what alarms it was, is it the pendants?

A Vincent clarified that it was the main alarm systems and pendent alarms.

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe asked A Vincent to confirm that we are not overlapping with the services provided by Herts County Council.

A Vincent stated that they have a life line service, Herts County Council tendered their alarm call service so this did cause and issue and an overlap, however since the Housing Portfolio Holder has spoken to HCC and now they don't overlap.

Cllr Mahmood referred to appendix 1, and queried what work has already been completed?

A Vincent apologised for the confusion in the table included with the report. The work will commence in the financial year only 3 or 4 schemes have been done due to failing issues. He just wanted to bring this report to Members so they were aware of the planned upgrade sequence.

Action: None

Outcome: Report was noted.

### **39**                    **END OF YEAR CONTRACT REVIEW (OSBORNE & SUN REALM)**

F Williamson presented the report for observation and comments on the performance of the two contracts highlighting a few changes in the contracts. She referred to some key issues 4.2, where access has been difficult to properties and the reasons why and 6.2 the audits on a monthly basis and highlighted the tables in the report that links to profits and targets achieved.

*F Williamson was happy to take questions on the report.*

J Howard referred to 4.1 and asked if this was due to Sun Realm turning up.

F Williamson clarified this is tenant's keeping the first appointment and stated that they also give tenants an incentive; if they are in on the first visit then they are entered into an £100 prize draw.

Cllr Mahmood asked if the half a million is savings is due to efficiency or overpricing of the original contract?

F Williamson said it was due to efficiencies resulting from reduced visits and replacing boilers based upon the repairs information

Cllr Mahmood referred to page 28 would you still service someone's gas meter if they were in debt.

F Williamson said the contractors have an emergency £5 card, that can be used in card meters, the second appointment is made on the basis they ensure they have credit on the meter and if on this visit if they are still not in credit we notify the tenancy sustainment team.

Total Asset Management Contract performance

F Williamson highlighted a number of key areas of performance that there has been an increase in the number of empty homes, due to the use of HRA properties as temporary accommodation. There is currently an action plan in place to review the reasons for any areas that had not achieved target.

There has been an increase in the average days to complete a responsive repair in 15-16

12.3 gives details on completion projects due to commence including tarmacking.

There has been a peak in complaints in February which Fiona explained.

F Williamson explained the Performance is linked to 3% of the profit and that in 15-16 Osbornes had not achieved all of the targets and she is meeting with Osborne tomorrow to conclude figures.

Action: None.

Outcome: Report was noted.

## **40                    HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

F Williamson presented this report explaining that's its more tenant focused and it follows a similar format to E Maxwell's strategy.

The report is to consider the national and local factors that could influence the optimal use of housing stock in terms of value for money, the most economical use of resources and are reflective of the demand. She highlighted that there are some gaps in the appendices that's because these are the working part of the document.

*F Williamson was happy to take questions on the report.*

Cllr Mahmood referred to page 48 who benefit is this for.

F Williamson said that the idea is it provides an understanding for the Tenants and Leaseholders and how we want to continue to manage the asset it gives them an overview of plans

It give the Council officers an understanding of where their prioritise lie in terms of investment. It also sets out the commitments to the Tenants and Leaseholders as to how we want to manage our assets but also need their input to do this.

Action: None

Outcome: The report was noted

## **41                    TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY**

E Maxwell introduced the report. The purpose of this report is to provide the committee with an overview of the drafted tenant involvement strategy. This includes the approach taken by the Policy and Participation team to involve tenants in the development of the strategy. Throughout the report there are a number of questions for committee members to consider.

Feedback will then be used in the final report to Cabinet in September. It was recommended that Councillors review the questions and recommendations included in the report made by the Policy and Participation team.

E Maxwell gave a breakdown of each section of the report and explained it in greater detail.

Before taking questions E Maxwell asked for the opportunity to make two clarifications on Appendix 2 – Community Impact Assessment.

E Maxwell stated that the purpose of the form is to highlight any impact that may occur as a result of our decision to relaunch change the remit of the TLC.

The point “Negative – Current Tenant and Leaseholder Committee members may not be recruited to the new committee” This was raised as there is a risk that if current members do apply and are not then recruited onto the new committee, this could be a loss to the council due to their skills and knowledge.

Secondly the risk of negative feedback from Tenant and Leaseholder Committee members due to the proposed change in structure is a general consideration rather than something we anticipate will happen. She stated throughout the drafting of the new strategy the former TLC had been fantastic with both their support and engagement.

E Maxwell was happy to take questions on the report.

Cllr Mahmood opened the questions with a statement acknowledging the hard work and dedication all involved tenants have had to date.

Cllr Griffith explained that the format of the report and the inclusion of questions to members was something she was keen to trial as this allows a more formal way of involving members to shape key documents.

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe stated he found this approach to reporting interesting and it gave a clear focus for members to give feedback.

Questions were raised on the recruitment of tenants and leaseholders to the new committee and how this would be undertaken. Linking to section 3.4 in the report.

E Maxwell explained that the Policy and Participation team would consult with the wider tenant and leaseholder population to establish what they felt key skills and qualities we should look for in new committee members.

J Howard asked what the mechanism was for sampling.

E Maxwell explained that random sampling would be used however they would be keen to get a representation from all demographics within the tenant population.

J Howard said that by doing random sampling you may miss people who want to be involved, and what percentage do we cover.

E Maxwell stated that it can be opened to Members to see what they think regarding sampling. Previous activities such as focus groups that guide strategies use roughly 15 people where as more significant projects such as the Survey of Tenant and Residents that captures overall satisfaction with the housing service covers 10% of the population. She explained whilst the consultation would be a proportion of the tenant and leaseholder population, advertising would be to everyone therefore all would have the opportunity to apply. She also reiterated that current members would be encouraged to apply.

J Banks asked why we are doing this if we already have something in place.

E Maxwell explained that the old policy had ran out of date and it needed updating and refreshing with a new structure to support the future years.

J Banks asked why the current committee could not be re trained for it.

Cllr Griffith wanted to harness good work similar to the Community Gateway strategy. The TLC have taken on a lot of work recently and it would be good to have a new members involved in the strategy to ensure people attend regularly to take it to the next level and to hold officers to account. She explained the current committee is required to play a variety of roles, due to the new structure having a range of activities for involvement current members would be able to target their skills to whichever activity they feel best suits them.

Cllr W Wyatt-Lowe asked that he give all his comments in one go. His first thought was that 2.3, he found that commitment could be tampered with. TLC has a good factor why do we need to change it? He also questioned whether monthly meetings going to quarterly would be too much of a drop.

E Maxwell and Cllr Griffiths explained that the change in remit and responsibility of the committee would allow for the decrease in meetings. Cllr Griffiths also explained that monthly meetings were a big expectation of people volunteering their time. E Maxwell emphasised that the team would contact committee members between quarterly meetings with updates.

He also referred to page 70 he agrees the Housing Officer should be there to support the committee but not take part. He also raised the point if all new committee members are recruited at the same time we need to make sure we are prepared for their term ending and replacing all members again at the end.

He commented that having a Chair elected by the new committee could be risky as they may require training and suggested we recruit a designated Chair that sits for approximately 9 months so that other members of the committee then gain experience.

Cllr Imarni thanked the TLC for getting involved and stated 'its brilliant that we are consulting a wider tenant population as well as the formalised committee'. She is happy to get involved and is looking forward to the robust process.

Cllr Imarni added that from her previous experience she believes a Chair from another organisation independent from DBC would work best.

Cllr Hearn suggested an independent member, similar to what we have on the Standards Committee, she also asked how they would recruit for that.

A Vincent said we would be advertising committee roles in places such as the Gazette.

Cllr Fethney said in terms of sampling have we got a spray across DBC to cover? And when you say 'type of person' what exactly are you looking for?

E Maxwell stated the 'type' as in what quality's they have and what skills they can bring to the committee. She explained the recruitment process is likely to be similar to that of a school governor where applicant as asked to explain why they are interested in the role and what skills they could bring to it.

A Vincent added that it would be a split between demographic and Geographic and that we will encourage the new committee to deal with strategic issues.

Cllr Timmis asked what was in it for the people involved?

E Maxwell confirmed that they are still exploring incentives and will be shortly completing volunteer management training to ensure all committee members are supported by the Policy and Participation team. She explained that throughout the process they have recognised the main reason for people volunteering is because they want to make a difference. This new strategy will focus on feeding back the impact each involvement activity has in shaping the housing service including the new committee.

Cllr Timmis explained that if people have to travel etc they may not want to give up their time.

Cllr Griffith explained at present all committee members can claim expenses for travel or taxis are offered and charged directly to the Council. This would continue.

One of the reasons why they choose quarterly meetings was because there will be a more focused agenda as its higher level and that's is less meetings for people to attend and people are more likely to commit.

Cllr Mahmood thanks the officers involved for a very good piece of work.

Page 69 the committee agreed that they were happy with the word commitments.

Cllr Mahmood suggested they work through the questions presented in the report.

Point 3.2 included the questions

\*Do members feel the requested mobilisation period is appropriate?

\*Do members feel the housing service will be sufficiently held to account during this timeframe

The Committee agreed the mobilisation period was appropriate to recruit and launch the new strategy including the new committee.

Cllr Griffiths reminded the committee that it is not the role of the TLC to hold officer to account but councillors. J Banks asked that E Maxwell contact the former TLC and suggest if there are any issues over the mobilisation period they contact their local councillor. This was agreed.

Cllr Mahmood referred to point 3.3 page 70 do Members have a specific selection for the committee.

Cllr Griffiths suggested we had one or two leaseholders and if any more were to come though we would encourage them to go on the other committees.

Cllr Bassadone was looking at option 2, with 2 non portfolio holding Councillors she asked if that was too many and if we could swap so 2 leaseholders and 1 non portfolio Holding Councillor.

Cllr Griffith recommended that 1 non portfolio holding member is the overview and scrutiny chair, and agrees that the PH for Housing has a right to attend but not to vote.

The Committee agreed.

Point 3.5 Cllr Imarni said the Chair should be advertised to an independent.

Point 3.6 The Committee agreed.

E Maxwell thanked the committee for their feedback.

Action: None.

Outcome: The report was noted

## **42                    EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

Agreed

## **43                    WORK PROGRAMME OF THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY**



**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2016-2017**

Add Pay to Stay to the September forward plan.

The Meeting ended at 9.40 pm