

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 2015

Present:

Councillors:

Adeleke	Killen
Mrs Bassadone	
Conway	Marshall (Chairman)
Flint	R Sutton
Hearn	

Councillor Griffiths (Portfolio Holder for Housing) and Councillor Harden (Portfolio Holder for Residents and Regulatory Services)

Officers:

Steve Baker	Assistant Director (Chief Executive's Unit)
Richard Baker	Group Manager (Financial Services)
Chris Gaunt	Solicitor (Legal Governance)
Julie Still	Group Manager – Resident Services
Steve Baker	Assistant Director, (Chief Executive's Unit)
Chris Troy	Group Manager, Regulatory Services
Elliott Brooks	Assistant Director - Housing
Julia Hedger	Group Manager Strategic Housing
Kayley Johnston	Member Support Officer (Minutes)

The meeting began at: 7:30pm.

OS/089/15 MINUTES

The minutes of the Housing and Community OSC meeting on 28 January and 4 February 2015 were agreed by members

OS/090/15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Cllr Adshead, Cllr Mclean, Cllr Mahmood and Co-Opted TLC Members Cook, Howard and Horn.

OS/091/15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There was no declaration of interest.

OS/092/15 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

**OS/093/15 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE
COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL IN**

None.

E Brooks presented the report on the Housing Service Plan and the Risk Register and the service plans for the quarter ending December 2014.

E Brooks referred to the performance indicators around empty homes, highlighting the success of the new Empty Homes Team and Osbornes as it has been a joint effort between DBC housing and Osbornes to get the properties back quickly and let.

E Brooks will get clarification on page 16, (TL21B) and advise the committee by email.

Page 5 explains in more detail work that Osbornes have completed since July 2014, they have really hit the ground with planned work.

Page 6 is around Summer Court which is coming up for completion, the dry weather recently has helped move this along.

Longlands project is a full refurbishment of the block with the construction of 6 new flats at the top. The work has been underway since January and is due for completion around the end of this year.

Cllr Adeleke queried the targets measuring Osbornes' performance.

E Brooks advised they have two types of performance indicators; they have regular day to day performance indicators which are in the report and planned the performance indicators which are around satisfaction of service from the tenants. There are quality control checks, with 70% of new kitchens and bathrooms inspected by officers.

In terms of the contract as a whole there are some strategic objectives within the contract that are not directly linked to asset management and there are the performance indicators that have to be hit before the contractors can bank (add) another year of the contract.

Cllr Killen referred to page 9, PP20 regarding the delay with major adaptations and asked what are the cost consequences and the increased volume of work.

E Brooks explained the original subcontractors of Osbornes were not performing satisfactorily and, on DBC recommendation, Osbornes terminated the contract and brought in new subcontractors. There is no cost implication to the Council.

Cllr Flint asked if there had been any reports about difficulties in getting through to housing repairs and that tenants keep getting the answer phone message.

E Brooks confirmed that there has been a problem lasting about 6 weeks with the call centre. The out of hours service is provided by a national call centre but the service during the day is just for DBC tenants. The problem appeared to be lack of staff in the national call centre. This issue has now been addressed and for the last month staffing levels has been ok and E Brooks himself has tested the lines and he feels the problems are resolved.

Cllr Marshall referred to page 8 (PP10) suggests that the definition is slightly changed to tie in with the comment.

Cllr Marshall asked for an explanation on (SH03B) on the top of page 11.

J Hedger said it links to the empty homes' team to reduce the re let times by letting homes as soon as they are ready rather than wait for a Monday. A legal query had arisen as to whether a mid-week tenancy could be backdated to the previous Monday with the relevant days credit, thus reducing the void time. This has been confirmed as suitable. The Department would like to commence tenancies on a daily basis but that requires IT work.

Cllr Marshall asked, regarding the last two on page 13, (SH20a) why the figures not recorded last year and (SH20b) why has the figures gone up this quarter.

J Hedger replied that, during the whole of last year, there was not an active register as it was brought into operation in November 2013. There is no obvious reason why applications have increased by so much other than applications tend to come in peaks.

Action: None

Outcome: The report was noted.

OS/095/15 QUARTER 3 REGULATORY SERVICES REPORTS

C Troy highlighted a few things on the quarterly report, in particular the slippage in food safety inspections is diminishing and should be able to complete the targets by the end of the financial year, the H&S successful prosecution of Royal Mail, a successful fly tipping prosecution in November 2014 with 3 other fly tipping cases being considered for legal action and the Air Quality Action Plan approved by Cabinet in December. DBC and Public Health organised an Air Quality Event for the whole of the County in October.

Sustainability audits have taken place and they are looking at water leaks in Gadebridge Park as they cost DBC about £10,000 p.a. Overall, water leaks cost DBC £15,000 p.a.

Cllr Killen, referring to air quality, queried the impact on pollution from the increased use of Luton Airport.

C Troy advised that there would be no increase in the Borough from the aircraft as they are so high up that the pollution disperses but the vehicle traffic Luton is an issue and a potential for increased pollution arising from traffic coming through Dacorum due to the expansion of the Airport. The solution is a reduction in vehicles, cleaner emissions and an air quality strategy which includes all planning aspects.

Cllr Adeleke referred to the fly tipping, four cases and one prosecution. Can you let the committee know of all the cases reported and over what quarter?
Chris agreed and will let the committee know the number of fly tips and include them on future cases.

Cllr Flint, referred to the Friends of the River Gade and Gadebridge Park, she was at a meeting last night where they discussed having a meeting before a public meeting and asked if their department was connected to it.

Cllr Harden said it falls under Cllr Laws as portfolio holder.

Action: None

Outcome: Report was noted.

OS/096/15 QUARTER 3 RESIDENT SERVICES REPORTS

J Still clarified a couple of red and amber areas. The number of people attending youth clubs is amber and that is because there has been works done to the adventure playground over the Christmas period. The number of residents at neighbourhood action by residents is up but did not meet target, these figures do not include the large events like Harvest Festival or all the events over Christmas.

Cllr Marshall referred to page 50 (ASB03) and asked if the 89 cases is the accumulative figure.

J Still said it is the number of cases that were open at the time.

Cllr Marshall said why is (CYP01a and b) conflicted, one was down due to work in playgrounds and the other was up.

J Still advised that CYP01a relates to the core group of young people and children age 6-13 who attend the adventure playground every day except Sundays. CYP01b relates to 11-16 years old and that is one night a week.

Cllr Adeleke noted the figures imply that crime has gone up.

J Still said up until the end of February crimes have gone up around about 12% since last year, however that is due to measuring crime differently this year compared to the previous year, so there is no direct comparison. True figures can only be given next year so the best way to measure performance is the position within the county and that will give a truer position and can be measured against last year.

Cllr Marshall asked if 1 is best or 10.

J Still confirmed 1 is best.

Action: None.

Outcome: Report was noted.

OS/097/15 QUARTER 3 BUDGET MONITORING 2014/2015

R Baker presented the report. There were no questions asked and Members were happy with the clarity of the report and the report was noted.

Action:

Outcome: Report was noted.

OS/098/15 HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY REVIEW

Since the agenda was printed, J Hedger said TLC's views have been received. The TLC suggestions to be taken forward is better communication with residents, in particular writing a leaflet on the policy, giving clearer information about the deferred register and the local connection criteria and to be more open and transparent about the role of the housing panel within the allocations policy.

J Hedger drew attention to the data analysis on page 76, in particular 44% of applicants were housed within 6 months of registering their application, with a further 17% within a year, and most properties were allocated to applicants with between 15-19 points, for 3 bed maisonettes and flats and 4 bedroom houses. The Council's pressure point is for the 2 bedroom properties, which were being let for considerably higher points.

Cllr Marshall said she is aware that the TLC had a working group looking at the policy and the group's report will be going to the TLC next month, so there could be further tweaking. J Hedger agreed and explained that is why the revised Policy will not go to the Cabinet until May.

Cllr Hearn wants to be convinced that elderly people who cannot access the web or are not computer literate have the same opportunity bidding on a property as someone with a computer.

J Hedger said they have a list of older people that they mail out a hard copy of the available properties on a weekly basis. In addition, officers will ring such people or a family member or support worker dealing with the application to inform them of properties which might be suitable. Sheltered properties are not included in the "continuous bidding cycles" so there is a longer period to lodge a bid.

The department will be monitoring it over the next 6 months as the issue of non-web access has also been highlighted at TLC. J Hedger said the department receive very few complaints. There are approximately 90 people on a weekly basis that they mail out so the numbers are still very small.

There are 2,500 people on the active housing register who are not bidding so the department will be reviewing that to see if those people actually need to be on it or if there is a reason they are not bidding.

Cllr Adeleke referred to p83 (para 4.12) concerning priority to members of the armed forces and asked if it is a national policy.

J Hedger said the Council signed up to the Armed Forces covenant some time ago and during the drafting of the allocations policy the Council took the decision that somebody who has been discharged from the Armed Forces would not need a local connection if the discharge was within the last 5 years. There have been a couple of cases that we have brought for Portfolio Holders attention where an applicant has severe disabilities sustained during active service but who fails on the time criteria and a decision on those facts is decided upon a case by case basis. Often DBC extends the 5-year criteria.

Cllr Bassadone asked how frequently do one bedroom bungalows come up.
J Hedger advised rarely as there are so few.

Cllr R Sutton asked how long a mother and child in a bedsit would need to stay there before they were re housed, what age does the child have to be to be considered overcrowded.

J Hedger said it is not based on years but the size of the property and whether that property would attract overcrowding points. Some of these cases go to the housing panel and the applicants may get extra points for welfare. Overcrowding points on their own would not get them a move.

Cllr Marshall is in favour of the changes and highlighted a few points. There should be somewhere in the policy a statement to the effect that the local lettings plan may be in place for specific locations which override the allocations policy. J Hedger said she would amend the policy to incorporate that.

Cllr Marshall also asked what Code of Guidance on page 84 (6.3.2) is referred to. J Hedger said it is the housing allocations code of guidance 2012 but will quote the title in full.

Regarding P88, Cllr Marshall queried the meaning of low, medium, high properties.

J Hedger said that is a separate document and they will be making that widely available to clients and applicants. J Hedger will circulate to the Committee.

Cllr Marshall referred to page 88 Village Lettings and queried the change to the 3rd point.

J Hedger said they had to amend it slightly due to a case they had a couple of months ago in Kings Langley where the applicant in question worked in the Three Rivers district of Kings Langley. The housing department were questioned by a solicitor over the wording. Cllr Marshall suggested that such instances would be rare and the revised wording was no longer village specific regarding places of employment. It was agreed that the wording needs to be rephrased.

Cllr Marshall queried the flexi care policy to refer to on the top of page 89.

J Hedger said it's a separate policy that is currently being reviewed and will be brought back to OSC soon. J Hedger will circulate the existing policy to the Committee

The Committee expressed satisfaction with the revised policy but with the comments of the members taken into account.

Action: see above Julia to send some documents to members.

Outcome: Revised policy supported but with comments of the members to be taken into account.

OS/099/15 SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Julie Still presented this policy, most of it has been refreshed and updated but there are two new areas of change relating to UK's Counter Terrorism Strategy and the requirement by national and local organisations to target child sexual exploitation.

Front line staff will be trained in those two areas after the end of March and courses are running up until the end of the year.

Between Jan-Dec 2014 DBC referred 81 individuals to Herts Safeguarding Board, including 33 children at risk and/or concerns of safety; there were 14 in poor or dangerous living conditions

Cllr Marshall asked if this was a draft or final.

J Still confirmed it was final and is due to go to Cabinet next week.

Cllr Marshall referred to page 96, the penultimate paragraph in section 2, it is understandable why the referrals cannot be anonymous but the individuals may be required to give evidence for prosecution. If that was read by a prospective witness they may think their identity will be disclosed to the alleged perpetrator and will be too scared and will not say anything. She suggested the paragraph needed to be rephrased or added to.

J Still said the direction for the safeguarding policy comes from Herts Safeguarding Board and they have advised that if we are contacted if we are to make a referral then it should not be on an anonymous basis J Still considered she was unable to amend the wording.

Cllr Adeleke referred to Page 91, DBC is not a child authority, if we have a query, do they go straight to Herts County Council or do they go to DBC?

J Still said that is exactly what the policy and procedures are for - to assist DBC officers and members if they have concerns. DBC have no duty to investigate, the policy is about identifying concerns and referring them appropriately,

J Still said there are designated Officers within each department of DBC and there is also a helpline, there are several ways to feed in this information.

Cllr Marshall referred Cllr Adeleke to the contacts and addresses on page 115 through to 118 of the report..

Cllr Marshall referred to page 110 and asked if the Adventure Playgrounds' IT facilities are protected so that users cannot access inappropriate sites.

J Still confirms yes they are, a lead officer at the playground is CEOP trained as a national guideline. There are codes that meet OFSTED requirements and there are restrictions on use and are monitored.

Cllr Marshall asked how you inappropriately adopt the policy, reference page 98.
Cllr Griffiths said if you were not trained in how you operate then that would be inappropriate adopting the policy because you have not fully taken it on board.

Action: None

Outcome: Report was noted.

OS/100/15 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Agreed

OS/101/15 APPENDIX A – WORK PROGRAMME 2015/2016

Sports Centre Report – Annual update in the Autumn.

The meeting closed at 21:25