

Minutes of the meeting of the **SCRUTINY (COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION) COMMITTEE** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday, 14 June 2017 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor L A Keen

Councillors: T A Bond
P I Carter
G Cowan
P J Hawkins
G Rapley
N A G Richards

Officers: Team Leader – Democratic Support
Democratic Support Officer

12 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N Dixon and R J Frost.

13 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members appointed.

14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor N A G Richards declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) in Minute No. 22 by reason of his being a tenant of Town and Country Housing and gave notice of his intention to withdraw from the meeting for the consideration of that item of business.

15 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 15 March 2017 and 19 April 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Team Leader – Democratic Support advised that no members of the public had registered to speak on items on the agenda to which the public speaking protocol applied.

17 DECISIONS OF THE CABINET RELATING TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SCRUTINY (POLICY AND PERFORMANCE) COMMITTEE

The Team Leader – Democratic Support advised Members of the decisions of the last meeting of the Cabinet relating to recommendations previously made by the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the decisions be noted.

18 ISSUES REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY COUNCIL, CABINET, SCRUTINY (POLICY AND PERFORMANCE) COMMITTEE OR ANOTHER COMMITTEE

There were no items of business.

19 ITEMS CALLED-IN FOR SCRUTINY OR PLACED ON THE AGENDA BY A MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE, ANY INDIVIDUAL NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OR PUBLIC PETITION

There were no items of business.

20 NOTICE OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS

The Team Leader – Democratic Support presented the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions to the Committee for its consideration.

RESOLVED: That the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions be noted.

21 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Team Leader – Democratic Support presented the Scrutiny Work Programme to the Committee for its consideration.

Members agreed that in addition to the items previously identified for the Work Programme that the issue of exploring the utilisation of long term commercial empty properties in Dover for residential use be included within the work programme. Councillor N A G Richards cited Camelot Europe as an example of this.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted subject to the inclusion of an additional item on the use of commercial properties for residential purposes.

22 REGISTERED PROVIDERS OF SOCIAL HOUSING

The Chairman welcomed the representatives of Registered Providers of Social Housing (RPs) to the meeting who were present to answer key questions set by members of the Committee. The following RPs were in attendance:

<u>Attendee</u>	<u>Representing</u>
Deborah White	West Kent Housing
Paul Tewkesbury	Housing and Care 21
Jo Ellis	Town and Country Housing Group
Keith Cane	Town and Country Housing Group

Q1. What role is there for Dover District Councillors in raising concerns on behalf of tenants and where can the information on your organisations points of contact be found?

Members were advised that each Registered Provider had its own complaints process set out in leaflets and on their websites.

Town and Country Housing Group

There was a three stage process at Town and Country Housing Group for handling complaints and at every stage they liaised with the tenants. The three stages were (1) a manager review of the complaint; (2) a review by another manager; and (3) a board review.

Complaints were acknowledged within 24 hours and the customer contacted with a view to try to resolve the situation 48 hours. If this was not possible a resolution was sought at the first stage of the process within 10 days. If a complaint progressed to the second stage it would be responded to within a further 10 days and complaints that reached the third stage had a target of 30 days for a board review.

Complaints could be made face-to-face, by email, by letter or by telephone and the details of the complaint would be captured in the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software to provide an audit trail.

There was a role for councillors in supporting tenants through both the Town and Country Housing Group complaints process and in referring complaints to the Housing Ombudsman. When the Housing Ombudsman received a referral it looked for the involvement of a third party, known as a 'designated person'. A designated person was considered to be a local Member of Parliament, local councillor or recognised tenant panel and where a designated person was involved in referring a complaint to the Housing Ombudsman it was dealt with more quickly than the complaints not involving a designated person.

Town and Country Housing Group owned and managed c.700 units in the Dover District. In respect of the five complaints received since 1 April 2016 and all but one had been resolved at the first stage and none had reached the third stage.

West Kent Housing

West Kent Housing operated a 3 stage complaint system as followed: (1) tenant to approach on-site scheme manager; (2) review by a manager; and (3) a board panel review. If a tenant wanted a councillor to assist them in the complaints process they could as long as the tenant advised West Kent Housing in writing.

Under the 'Make it Right' system operated by West Kent Housing the intention was to ensure that the most appropriate person dealt with the complaint and tenants received a response within 10 days, although a longer period for a response could be negotiated if required. However, most complaints were dealt with within the first 2 days. If a complaint required going to the second stage, this would also be responded to within 10 days.

Complaints could be made face-to-face, by email, by letter or by telephone on a Freephone number.

As West Kent Housing's 'Beeches' scheme (c.50 units) in the Dover District was relatively new there had been no complaints received to date.

Housing and Care 21

There was a scheme manager on each site who tenants could contact and there were contact cards available at each site with three key contacts. The complaints process consisted of a single stage followed by referral to the Ombudsman.

Complaints could be made by telephone, e-mail or face-to-face to the on-site scheme manager.

Q2. What, if any, are the arrangements are there for involving tenants in the management of properties?

There were a number of ways that tenants could become involved in the management of properties and receive information on outcomes resulting from tenant involvement.

Town and Country Housing Group

- On-line surveys
- Telephone calls after contacts (i.e. following repair work)
- 'Block Champions' to raise issues for local residents
- Pop-up events at local events
- Resident panels
- Tenant scrutiny panel (10 residents plus an independent chair)
- 2 elected tenant representatives on the Board
- Tenants' Matters magazine distributed electronically or by paper version if required

West Kent Housing

- 3 elected tenants representatives on the Board
- Tenant auditors who work with internal audit; mystery shoppers; tenant scrutiny through topic specific panels
- Focus groups to look at policies/issues of specific concern to tenants (i.e. 'Emerald Forum' for older people or groups for tenants with support needs)
- Publish 'You Said, We Did' to feedback the outcome of complaints and engagement by tenants.

Housing and Care 21

- Tenant Board members
- Tenants Forums
- Outcomes are published in the tenants' magazine which was distributed to all residents
- Each individual scheme operated under 'choice and consensus' where the residents could define policies for that specific scheme (i.e. pet policies)

Q3. What is the nature of your tenancy agreements?

In responding to the question Members asked that reference be made to dealing with over-occupancy and the termination of joint tenancies due to a relationship breakdown.

Members were reminded that emergency housing needs were a matter for the local authority not Registered Providers.

Town and Country Housing Group

The permitted number of occupants at letting was determined by the type and size of property and tenants were encouraged to register for mutual exchange if their occupancy needs changed. In respect of the termination of a joint tenancy, only the courts could determine who would keep the tenancy if there was no mutual agreement. There were grounds in respect of abuse where a Registered Provider could apply to court to take back possession of the property.

West Kent Housing

The occupancy number was determined by the property and West Kent Housing encouraged tenants to join the local authority register (as West Kent Housing did not have a waiting list) if their occupancy needs changed. Couples were issued with joint tenancies and in the event of a relationship breakdown the tenancy would be assessed and changed as required.

Housing and Care 21

Housing and Care 21 provided retirement and extra care housing for older people, so the issue of over-occupancy did not tend to arise.

Q4. What are your organisations service standard for responding to issues raised by tenants?

This question had been answered as part of the responses to Question 1.

Q5. What provisions are there for enabling the safe and accessible storage of mobility scooters, especially at properties targeted towards tenants with mobility problems?

Town and Country Housing Group

Specialist schemes had storage facilities for mobility scooters but in other schemes it had to be determined where they could be stored in accordance with safety rules as mobility scooters were combustible.

In respect of charging the mobility scooters, while new schemes had dedicated charging places older schemes did not. Tenants' mobility scooters should not be charged through a scheme's general power supply as the cost of electricity was shared equally amongst all tenants in the scheme.

Housing and Care 21

While newer schemes had dedicated storage areas and charging points the majority of older schemes did not. Housing and Care 21's policy on the storage and charging of mobility scooters had been updated to reflect current safety advice.

Members were encouraged to visit the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service website to see the advice on the fire risk posed by mobility scooters.

Q6. What are the procedures for dealing with anti-social or problematic behaviour from tenants?

All of the registered providers advised that they would work with the police and local partner agencies in the tackling of anti-social behaviour issues and reminded Members that tenants were not the only cause of anti-social behaviour. There were instances where tenants had been the subject of anti-social behaviour caused by people from outside the Registered Providers housing scheme.

Town and Country Housing Group

The Neighbourhood Manager was the first point of contact for tenants with concerns and attempts would be made to see if the problem could be resolved without formal intervention. Town and Country Housing Group also had a specialist anti-social behaviour officer.

In order to secure an eviction it was necessary to provide the court with evidence and a clear line was drawn between nuisance and anti-social behaviour.

Housing and Care 21

Where possible attempts were made to mediate and resolve issues informally in a sensitive manner as communal living required people to get along. If there was a need to go to court for an eviction order then it needed to be clearly evidenced.

West Kent Housing

West Kent Housing tried to be proactive in dealing with potential anti-social behaviour issues and would work with local partner agencies as needed.

Q7. What use, if any, is made of the DDC 'rural exceptions' policy when planning house-building and in terms of your organisations experience how useful is it?

Town and Country Housing Group

Members were advised that they did not have any such schemes in the Dover district but that they would speak to their development team and let Members know at a later date.

West Kent Housing

West Kent Housing had not used the rural exceptions policy at Dover District Council. However, experience elsewhere had demonstrated that it was often difficult to successfully apply.

Housing and Care 21

Housing and Care 21 had not used the rural exceptions policy at Dover District Council.

Q8. How effective are the joint arrangements with DDC Housing for allocating properties to tenants?

All the Registered Providers present indicated that the more information that the local authority could provide the easier it was to effectively allocate tenants to accommodation.

Town and Country Housing Group

New schemes were initially 100% local authority tenant nominations. Town and Country Housing Group had a good working relationship with Dover District Council.

West Kent Housing

West Kent Housing provided extra care accommodation in the district and as a result 100% of its tenants were local authority nominees.

Housing and Care 21

70% of tenants in the district were local authority nominees.

- RESOLVED: (a) That the Registered Providers be thanked for attending and answering the committee's questions.
- (b) That details of the housing ombudsman service and contact details for the Registered Providers present be circulated to the members of the Committee.

(Councillor N A G Richards declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) in Minute No. 22 by reason of his being a tenant of Town and Country Housing and withdrew from the meeting for the consideration of this item of business.)

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm.