

Minutes of the meeting of the **SCRUTINY (COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION) COMMITTEE** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday, 11 October 2017 at 6.03 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor L A Keen

Councillors: T A Bond
P I Carter
G Cowan
R J Frost
P J Hawkins
M J Ovenden
G Rapley
N A G Richards (Minute No. 68 – 69 only)

Officers: Director of Finance, Housing and Community
Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer

Also Present: Councillor P M Brivio

58 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor N Dixon.

59 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute Members appointed.

60 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

61 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 12 September were deferred to the next meeting.

62 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.

63 DECISIONS OF THE CABINET RELATING TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SCRUTINY (COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION) COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the decision of Cabinet relating to recommendations from the Scrutiny (Community and Regeneration) Committee be noted.

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

There were no items of business for consideration.

65 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 for consideration.

66 NOTICE OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS

The Democratic Services Manager presented the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions to the Committee for its consideration.

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

67 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Services Manager presented the Scrutiny Work Programme to the Committee for its consideration.

Members agreed that the following items be included within the work programme:

- EK Housing
- Stagecoach

Members were reminded that Stagecoach had refused to engage with the committee and that key questions should be submitted to the Democratic Services Manager to submit to Stagecoach. Members requested that Kent County Council and Dover District Council officers attend the meeting also.

RESOLVED: (a) That the Work Programme be noted subject to the inclusion of an item on EK Housing and Stagecoach.

CAMELOT EUROPE PRESENTATION

The Chairman welcomed Mr Reardon, Business Development Manager for Camelot Europe, who had been invited by the Committee to provide details of the services Camelot Europe offered to help utilise long term vacant properties in the Dover district.

Camelot Europe (Camelot) was a property management service that worked with landlords within the public and private sectors to provide security solutions for empty properties. Camelot would ensure the properties were habitable to house a 'Property Guardian' in the property. Property Guardians were primarily key workers who met the criteria set out by Camelot Europe, and would be offered minimum tenancies of 13 weeks or longer, depending on the availability of the property. Works to the property would be undertaken by Camelot such as, installing showers, heating, kitchens prior to the tenant moving in and the revenue raised through rent would cover those costs. It was hoped that utilising vacant commercial properties would improve the overall look of local high streets; prevent vandalism, squatters and provide affordable rents to tenants. Richmond, Wandsworth, and other London councils were currently working with Camelot to utilise empty properties.

Whilst Members liked the concept and would encourage utilising empty properties, there were concerns that the demographic of those in most need of housing in the Dover district would not meet the current criteria to be considered by Camelot as a Property Guardian and therefore would not help to ease the pressure of the housing issues in the district. Mr Reardon accepted there were obstacles, such as having a criminal record, being unemployed that would prevent suitable people becoming Guardians. If required he would have further discussions with Camelot and officers of DDC to look at the criteria. To alleviate further concerns it was suggested that DDC officers should be able to inspect the properties before tenants offered by DDC were able to move in so as to provide assurances that the properties were to a good standard and habitable.

Whilst Members were encouraged by the concept further investigation by officers would be required to look into the suitability of such a scheme for those in most need in the district.

- RESOLVED: (a) To note the presentation by Camelot Europe and welcome any proposal to bring vacant properties back into use.
- (b) That the Scrutiny (Community and Regeneration) Committee recommend to Cabinet that the appropriate officers meet with Camelot Europe to investigate the feasibility of working with them and to review the criteria to ensure that it contains adequate safeguards and is suitable for Dover.

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT POLICY REPORT

The Director of Finance, Housing and Community presented the revised Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy to the Committee which had previously been considered at the meeting of the Cabinet on 2 October 2017. New powers for local authorities had been introduced within the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to tackle rogue landlords. The new powers included:

- Civil penalties of up to £30,000
- Extension of Rent Repayment Order
- Banning order for most prolific offenders
- Database of rogue landlords/property agents
- Tougher fit and proper person test for landlords of licensed properties
- Sharing data on tenancy deposit schemes with local authorities.

The use of the powers would be discretionary and there was an expectation that less than 5 cases per annum would require the use of the powers however, it was a quicker and easier process and cases could increase as a result.

There were concerns from Members that tenants would be penalised by way of revenge evictions should a complaint against the landlord be made. Members were advised that all complaints would be confidential and DDC would initiate the complaint against the landlord.

Members welcomed that revised policy and encouraged officers to publicise the new powers.

RESOLVED: That cabinet decision CAB78 be endorsed and that the revisions to the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy be approved.

(With the consent of the Committee it was agreed that Councillor P M Brivio would be permitted to speak on the item.)

The meeting ended at 7.24 pm.