

Minutes of the meeting of the **SCRUTINY (COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION) COMMITTEE** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday, 5 December 2018 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor L A Keen

Councillors: T A Bond
P M Brivio
P I Carter
G Cowan
N Dixon
P J Hawkins
P D Jull
M J Ovenden

Officers: Private Sector Housing Manager
Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer

57 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S C Manion.

58 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitutes appointed.

59 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor N Dixon declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Item no. 11 as he was a Private Landlord and would withdraw from the meeting for consideration of the item.

60 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 4 July 2018, 12 September 2018, 3 October 2018 and 7 November 2018 were deferred.

61 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Democratic Services Manager advised that no members of the public had registered to speak on items on the agenda to which the public speaking protocol applied.

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

There were no items of business to consider.

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

There were no items for consideration.

64 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 for consideration.

65 NOTICE OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS

The Democratic Services Manager presented the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions to the Committee for its consideration. Members identified the inclusion of the following items from the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions within the work programme:

- Item No. 32 (To approve arrangements for the implementation and delivery of infrastructure for a Bus Rapid Transit System connecting Whitfield to Dover town centre)
- Item No. 38 (Purchase of affordable housing in Aylesham)
- Item No. 43 (Redevelopment and regeneration of the site of the former Co-Op store in Stembrook and surrounding area)

RESOLVED: That the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions be noted, subject to the inclusion of items 32, 38 and 43 within the Work Programme.

66 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

Members requested that S106 funding and the Statement of Community Involvement be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted subject to the inclusion of items identified in Minute No 65.

67 PRIVATE LANDLORDS

Members welcomed the Private Sector Housing Manager (Dover District Council) and Renee Young from the National Landlords Association (NLA) who had been invited to discuss the role of private landlords in the Dover district and how Members could support and assist private tenants.

The Private Sector Housing Manager advised that The Housing Act 2004 (the 'Act') introduced mandatory licensing for certain houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) with the aim to deal with poor management of this type of property. The definition of a HMO for licensing purposes had changed and it was the landlord's responsibility to register a HMO. The Act allowed local authorities to identify properties in poor physical condition lacking basic amenities and the powers to ensure landlords were carrying out risk assessments of their properties against specified criteria to make them safe and healthy for tenants.

The Government had initially promoted the changes to the Act, including the criteria for a licence, and additional funding was given to local authorities for further

communication and press releases. To update landlords of any relevant changes the council held forums twice a year. Members were also advised that the National Landlords Association provided training packages and was working on writing advice to landlords as to what constituted a HMO.

Following implementation of the Act there had been an increase of licensed premises, with a total of 52 licensed premises in the district. In 2017 the council adopted a Housing Enforcement Policy permitting the issuance of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) with fines up to £30,000 to landlords not complying with the Act. The revenue collected would go toward further enforcement work within the authority. Enforcement action by way of two emergency prohibition orders, three improvement notices and four PCNs had been issued by the council within the last year. In comparison the majority of local authorities outside of cities had not served any improvement notices. The council's Private Sector Housing team were responsible for the enforcement of the licences and approximately 150 complaints were received annually about properties, all of which were investigated and the majority upheld. In addition, 15 inspections were carried out following reports from the council's Housing Options team.

Members were informed that a compulsory registration scheme for all landlords had been trialed in Wales but it was not yet known how successful it had been. The NLA had worked with other authorities developing schemes for their areas, such as Selective Licensing and Additional Licensing Schemes which could tackle specific problems. However, there was concern expressed that in respect of voluntary schemes the good landlords would register whilst bad ones would not. There was also concern expressed that the costs of any licensing scheme were such that they would force good landlords out of the market.

Support from the council could be provided to tenants by way of the Rent Deposit Scheme and Rent in Advance. The council could also make discretionary housing payments. Members were aware that some landlords did not want to accept tenants in receipt of housing benefit and Members were keen for the council to engage with landlords to provide support and reassurance when taking on tenants in receipt of benefits. All landlords were encouraged to join a landlords' association and there were two redress schemes available for them to register with which provided support to the landlord and tenant if a complaint could not be reconciled between the two.

It was moved by Councillor P J Hawkins, duly seconded by Councillor P M Brivio, that it be recommended to Cabinet that a letter be written to the Minister of State for Housing asking that a compulsory registration scheme be created for private landlords.

RESOLVED: (a) That Cabinet be requested to write to the Minister of State for Housing asking that a compulsory registration scheme be created for private landlords.

(b) That officers be thanked for attending.

(Councillor N Dixon declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest by reason of his being a Private Landlord and withdrew from the meeting for consideration of the item.)

The meeting ended at 7.18 pm.