

Minutes of the meeting of the **SCRUTINY (COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION) COMMITTEE** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday, 16 November 2016 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor L A Keen

Councillors: T A Bond
P M Brivio
N Dixon
R J Frost
P J Hawkins
M J Ovenden
G Rapley

Also Present: Councillor P M Beresford

Officers: Chief Executive - East Kent Housing
Planning Delivery Manager
Team Leader – Democratic Support

47 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P I Carter and S Hill.

48 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members appointed.

49 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

50 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 14 September 2016 and 12 October 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

51 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.

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

There were no items for consideration.

53 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.

54 NOTICE OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS

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

Members requested that items 20 (Statutory Brownfield Register) and 21 (Review of Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy) be included within the Work Programme.

- RESOLVED: (a) That the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions be noted.
- (b) That items 20 (Statutory Brownfield Register) and 21 (Review of Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy) be included within the Work Programme.

55 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

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

Members were requested to provide key questions for Southern Water in advance of their attendance at the meeting to be held on 14 December 2016.

An update was requested on the date of the site visit to the Dover Town Investment Zone.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted.

56 EAST KENT HOUSING

The Chief Executive (East Kent Housing) was present at the meeting to answer questions from the Committee. The Chairman welcomed her and asked her to introduce herself to Members.

The Chairman advised that 3 tenant representatives (Brenda Lyons, Roy Barlow and Samm Morris) were present and with the consent of the Committee it was agreed that they would be permitted to speak on the item.

Q1. Please can you provide an update on the Estate Improvement Budget?

Members were advised that the Estate Improvement Budget had been used for 20 projects in the Dover District. A total of 4 projects had been completed and the remaining 16 would be completed by the end of 2017. The budget was normally £100,000 per annum but due to projects that had slipped from the previous year the allocated budget was £224,000.

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel would be examining the Estate Improvement Budget to identify areas in which its delivery could be improved.

Q2. Can you update the committee on the implementation of the EK Housing IT system?

East Kent Housing inherited four systems (one from each partner authority) and was implementing a single replacement system. This was originally expected to be in place in January 2017 but was now expected by May 2017. However, as the inherited systems were still functioning there would be no impact on daily work by this delay.

Q3. After hours maintenance response is an issue. Are after hours calls now being handled locally and does the person handling the calls have a good command of the English language?

Members were advised that the Swale Heating call centre was in Sittingbourne and for Mears the initial contact was a national call centre before being referred to Kent.

Members were advised that the numbers were available on the East Kent Housing website and also in paper form on the tenant newsletter.

In respect of a specific case cited by Councillor T A Bond, the Chief Executive (East Kent Housing) requested that the details be provided to her and she would investigate it further.

Q4. Does East Kent Housing inspect every property before it is let? Does it then have an annual inspection of each property every 12 months?

All new tenants received three inspections in the first year. In addition, there was an annual gas inspection and Neighbourhood Managers did a rolling tenant audit that involved visiting every tenant over a five year period (20% of tenants per year).

The annual gas inspection would also flag up other issues that required action.

Q5. When major repairs are carried out does someone from East Kent Housing inspect the work?

It was confirmed that an officer from East Kent Housing inspected repair work.

Members emphasised the need for a system of monitoring tenant satisfaction with repairs that didn't involve the tenant having to provide feedback directly to or in the presence of the person undertaking the repairs.

The Chief Executive (East Kent Housing) acknowledged Members' concerns over the existing methods of judging tenant satisfaction on repairs and advised that the Tenant Scrutiny Panel was investigating the matter. It was agreed that a copy of the final report from the Tenant Scrutiny Panel would be provided to Members.

The Tenants Representatives advised that the Tenants Communications Group had expressed concerns about Mears using a PDA to record tenant satisfaction at the time of the repairs being completed.

Q6. What are the implications of Universal Credit for tenants?

Members were advised that there was £9,000 of arrears related to people on Universal Credit.

East Kent Housing was providing assistance on budgeting to tenants and offered home visits if needed. In addition, tenants could apply to the Department for Work and Pensions for advances to help pay for food and bills.

Q7. What are the implications of possible increases in rent as a result of the Housing and Planning Act 2016?

Members were advised that while 'pay to stay' could have implications for tenants once the final details were revealed, the capping of rents was a bigger issue for the Council.

The Council had expected rents to increase based on original Government guidance but rents were now set to reduce by 1% which would impact on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) balance. In the first year it was expected to cost the HRA £800,000.

Q8. What impact has the 'Bedroom Tax' had on rent arrears?

There had been little effect on rent arrears as a result of the 'Bedroom Tax'.

Q9. How many cases are there where tenants are under occupying their homes and therefore need/want to move because of financial difficulties?

There were thirteen households in the Dover District that wanted to downsize their accommodation, although only six of these were due to under occupation. Five of the six had been offered alternative accommodation but had declined due to it not being in the preferred location (Deal). A shortage of suitable properties in Deal had been compounded by the impact of decanting tenants from Norman Tailyour House who had been given priority.

Members discussed the importance of providing assistance to cover moving costs in order to encourage tenants to downsize.

Q10. What will be the impact with cap on benefits being reduced to £20,000 being introduced 7 November 2016?

The changes to the cap on benefits would affect 42 tenants in the Dover District. East Kent Housing was working with the affected tenants to see what assistance could be provided.

Q11. Neighbour complaints occur for a variety of reasons. However some go on for a long period of time without resolution. Is there a framework in place to enable resolution and if resolution is not possible what steps do East Kent Housing take to resolve the issue?

It was acknowledged that neighbour complaints were difficult to resolve, particularly when it involved owner occupiers. However, even in respect of tenants the threshold for evictions was high.

In addition, East Kent Housing only had one set of noise monitoring equipment for the Dover District and the purchase of additional units specifically for the Dover District would need to be paid for by the Council. East Kent Housing had conducted an audit of all anti-social behaviour cases in the last three months and had assessed the risk involved.

The Tenants Representatives advised that East Kent Housing had undertaken a lot of work to encourage tenants to be good neighbours and that ultimately it was the responsibility of tenants to behave appropriately.

Other Questions

Members asked to be invited to attend tenant inspections in their wards and it was agreed that details of tenant inspections would be provided directly to Members. A lack of trained tenant inspectors had affected the number of inspections conducted but an improvement in the number of inspections would be seen now that a full complement of trained inspectors

- RESOLVED:
- (a) That the Chief Executive (East Kent Housing) be thanked for attending the meeting and responding to the Committees questions.
 - (b) That a list and cost breakdown of the Estate Improvement Budget projects be provided to the Team Leader – Democratic Support.
 - (c) That a copy of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel's review of tenant satisfaction with repairs be provided to the Committee.
 - (d) That District Councillors be directly provided with the dates for tenant inspection visits.

57 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was proposed by Councillor T A Bond, duly seconded and

RESOLVED: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of Item No 12 within the report on the grounds that the item to be considered involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraph 3 of Part 1 Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act.

58 AYLESHAM VILLAGE EXPANSION - UPDATE AND DEED OF VARIATION

The Planning Delivery Manager presented the report on the Aylesham Village Expansion – Update and Deed of Variation.

Members discussed the report and it was proposed that an element of the capital receipt be ring-fenced for Aylesham facilities.

The Planning Delivery Manager agreed to provide a written answer to questions raised by Councillor L A Keen.

RESOLVED: (a) That it be recommended to the Cabinet that Decision CAB80 be endorsed as follows, subject to the addition of recommendation (b):

- (i) That progress on the Aylesham Development be noted.
 - (ii) That the Heads of Terms for the Deed of Variation be approved, and the Planning Delivery Manager be authorised to approve the final document, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.
 - (iii) That the Planning Delivery Manager be authorised to negotiate the acquisition of the Market Square retail units and third-party land within the development site (to be funded from an element of the anticipated capital receipt), in consultation with the Director of Environment and Corporate Assets and the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources and Performance.
- (b) That an amount of the capital receipt be ring-fenced for Aylesham facilities.
- (c) That the Planning Delivery Manager be requested to provide further details in writing on the stamp duty arrangements for the landowner.
- (d) That the Planning Delivery Manager be requested to provide a written answer to Councillor L A Keen in respect of her questions.

The meeting ended at 8.18 pm.