

**MINUTES of the meeting of Housing Services Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee held on 17 July 2013 at 7:00pm**

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**Present:** Councillors Steve Liddiard (Chair), Clare Baldwin, Wendy Curtis (substitute for Councillor Diana Hale) Oliver Gerrish and Andrew Roast

Ms G Riddles – Co-opted Member

**Apologies:** Councillors Rob Gledhill and Diana Hale

**In attendance:** Councillor Val Morris-Cook – Portfolio Holder for Housing  
Ms B Brownlee – Director of Housing  
Ms K Adedeji – Head of Housing (Investment and Development)  
Mr R Parkin – Head of Housing  
Ms E Sheridan – Electoral & Democratic Services Officer

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**The Chair informed those present that the meeting was audio recorded.**

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Hale and R Gledhill.

**2 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 12 June 2013, were approved as a correct record.

**3 ADDITIONAL ITEMS**

The Chair confirmed he had not agreed to the consideration of any additional items.

**4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

**5 CALL-IN TO CABINET DECISION 01104214 – PRIVATE HOUSING  
SECTOR HOUSING FEES**

The Chair informed the Committee that a call-in to Cabinet decision 01104214 had been received from Councillor R Gledhill. As Councillor Gledhill was unable to attend the meeting the Committee agreed to receive the Call-in and the report and consider the recommendations.

In the absence of Councillor Gledhill, the Chair reminded the Committee of the reasons for the original call-in as detailed within the report and explained further that the proposed charges were to cover the costs of an additional staff member to work on licensing HMO's (houses of multiple occupation).

The Head of Housing outlined in detail the charges and the structure of charges, including how the proposed fee was calculated. Members were informed that the calculated fee equated to a Band 7 post. Using the calculation this provided for a fee within the range of £711 - £950. This range had been benchmarked against other local authorities and the proposed fee of £750 covered the cost of the person employed to licence the HMO's. The person would also carry out other duties. [The licence fee completely covers the cost of the work involved in running the licensing scheme.](#)

The Head of Housing informed members that [the idea of sharing this service](#) was explored with Southend last year and was not taken forward [as Southend did not want to share their service](#). The decision was made [then that Thurrock would deliver the service itself through its own officers](#).

Councillor Roast asked and received confirmation from the Head of Housing that the fee of £750 would have no impact on the tax payer.

Councillor W Curtis questioned [how long a licence lasted and whether there was a fee payable on renewal](#). The Head of Housing confirmed that the licence would last for five years [and a renewal licence would cost the same as the original licence i.e. £750](#).

The Portfolio Holder for Housing addressed the committee and informed members of the difficulties in identifying HMO's and the proposed work with other services, for example the refuse team, to identify homes requiring further investigation as potential HMO's by the Housing Team. The way forward is to use the council website to list HMO's and regulate landlords, providing residents with a list of reputable landlords.

The Chair further summarised the reasons given for the call-in as listed in the report and outlined to members the potential recommendations.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing informed the committee that the original cabinet report had not clarified that there was no impact to the tax payer and this would be included in any future reports when necessary.

The Chair proposed that the Call-in to Cabinet decision 01104214-Private Sector Housing Fees be rejected for the following reasons

- a) The [licence](#) charges do reflect the [full cost of administering the scheme so](#)
- b) There is no additional cost to tax payers

Members of the committee unanimously agreed with the recommendation.

**RESOLVED that the Committee**

- a) **Reject the call-in as the charges do reflect the costs and there is no additional cost to the tax payer.**

**6 UPDATE ON COMMUNITY INVESTMENT AND RESIDENT CONSULTATION FOR THE HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

The Head of Housing Investment and Development introduced the report which informed members of the procurement strategy and approach to be taken in tendering for the Housing Department's Responsive Repairs and Maintenance Contract.

Members were informed in detail of the approach to be taken which is to follow the existing priorities for Thurrock including helping young people and NEETs (not in employment, education or training). The local deliverables are outlined in Table 1 of the report. It was noted that one apprentice is already employed and the Housing Department is working closely with Education. The Head of Housing outlined the engagement strategy for working with residents, including the work currently underway and the proposed work with vulnerable residents to support them during work on their properties.

Councillor Curtis welcomed the report and the work undertaken with young people but queried the failure to mention work within the Belhus ward. The Head of Housing, Investment and Development confirmed that the programme covers every single property and Belhus ward will be clearly listed in future.

Councillor Roast welcomed the report and questioned the key deliverables and in particular asked for clarity regarding fun days. The Head of Housing, Investment and Development explained the nature of fun days. The days are sponsored by contractors to provide some respite from the work being undertaken on an estate. Residents will be consulted on the provision of the fun days.

Councillor Roast asked why only 30% work would include local labour. The Head of Housing, Investment and Development outlined that the key is to balance the need to extract good value and so maximise investment with getting the maximum local outputs. She also made clear that 30% is a minimum figure and contractors will be pushed to aim higher.

The Chair commented that the report is good news especially regarding the employment of young people and the work with vulnerable residents and the media should be informed.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by the Chair and agreed by members

**RESOLVED that the Committee**

- a) **Approve the resident consultation and communication plan which includes localised drop in events that ensure all tenants and residents have an opportunity to discuss and receive information about the housing programme**
- b) **Approve the steps that will be taken to ensure that tenants who are vulnerable and/or have support needs are well supported during the period of refurbishment**
- c) **Approve the community investment outcomes for the first year of the capital refurbishment programme and the framework for ensuring more extensive community outcomes are achieved in the remaining four year period.**

## **7 HOUSING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION REPORT**

The Head of Housing introduced the report and apologised that the report author was not able to present the report to members. Members were informed that the report covers two areas: Firstly, the approach taken by the Housing Department to measure customer satisfaction with services through the use of independent surveys and secondly, the work undertaken in response to a request at Housing Overview and Scrutiny on 12 June 2013 to develop some resident friendly performance measures.

The satisfaction statistics were detailed in the report and in particular the caretaking was highlighted as very good but the response by estate officers to queries could be improved. The Head of Housing outlined that the statistics highlight where to focus resources and how and where to take action.

In relation to the resident performance indicators, members were informed that these are based on what residents want to see and the department are working with groups to develop appropriate indicators.

The co-opted member queried how the statistics on caretaking were gathered. The officer responded that 500 people were surveyed, and if they had a caretaking service, they were asked the question on caretakers. In response to a question, the co-opted member outlined that having taken part in block inspections, the results of the surveys were not what she expected. The Chair responded that this indicated a need for independent verification of survey results. The co-opted member confirmed that caretaking has improved but other issues still exist. In particular it was highlighted that caretaking service should still be provided even if the caretaker is on holiday.

The Director of Housing confirmed that the co-opted member raised some good points and outlined that the survey will be monthly and the results of the Estate Services Review will be presented to the next Housing Overview and Scrutiny. It is noted that the cleaning service is improved but there remain issues with grounds maintenance.

Councillor Curtis informed the committee that Belhus ward has many flats and a recent change in the caretaking service has led to a great improvement.

Councillor Gerrish welcomed the report and asked if any benchmarking had taken place. The Head of Housing confirmed that comparable data is available from July 2012 for the repair satisfaction surveys but that the other four surveys have only recently commenced.

Councillor Roast questioned the collection of data from the survey. The Head of Housing confirmed that the data is collected from phone calls when a resident has had a job completed. Other surveys take a list of tenants and make calls until 5% response is collected. The Head of Housing confirmed that it is a random sample but will check that it is proportionate across the borough.

The recommendation in the report was proposed by the Chair and agreed by members.

**RESOLVED that the Committee note the contents of the report.**

## **8 HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE (INCLUDING VOIDS) PROCUREMENT**

The Director of Housing began by highlighting that this was an historic moment as it marks the start of designing a new repairs contract that would work for residents in Thurrock.

The Head of Housing, Investment and Development introduced the report and informed members that prior to the commencement of the formal procurement; consultation with a wide range of residents and members was taking place to develop the key objectives for contract performance. Suggested principals were outlined within the report. The consultation with members and residents was detailed for the committee and it was noted that housing staff would also be consulted.

Councillor Gerrish asked that the consultation ensure that the views of residents who require responsive repairs are captured. The Head of Housing, Investment and Development outlined that resident issues should be tracked through the contract. It will track what and when work is completed but importantly also what is not completed. The tender document will ask for contractors to supply evidence of how they minimise non completed jobs.

The reasonable length of the contract was discussed and a five year term was questioned. The Head of Housing, Investment and Development confirmed that five years is considered a reasonable term to achieve the appropriate investment but highlighted the importance of break clauses, review periods and the ability to negotiate shorter contracts.

Councillor Roast questioned the financial health of contractors. The Head of Housing, Investment and Development confirmed this was tested in depth during the pre-qualifying questionnaire. Contractors who do not pass this stage are not invited to tender.

The Director of Housing confirmed that the financial tests were undertaken for Morrisons but highlighted the current economic situation and its impact. Members were asked to consider the question of employing one or two contractors and the ease of break clauses. The importance of shaping the contract to meet the needs of Thurrock was a priority.

Councillor Curtis asked if the tender process would interrupt the five year capital housing plan. The officer confirmed that this would not be interrupted.

The Chair debated the need to ensure that key background and financial checks are completed and highlighted the concern of members that previous contractor performance was not up to standard. The Head of Housing, Investment and Development outlined that procurement has many risks and the key to mitigating risks is to ask evidence based questions and follow up references. The other option to mitigate the risk is to agree the recommendation to explore engaging more than one contractor.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by the Chair and agreed by members.

#### **RESOLVED that the Committee**

- a) Approve the council's objectives and key performance improvements as outlined within the report**
- b) Approve that responsive repairs (including voids) and maintenance contract is procured for a period of five years with the option to extend in yearly increments for a further five years, based on achievement of both value and key performance indicators**
- c) Agree the recommendation that the responsive repair and maintenance contract includes responsive repairs, void maintenance and planned and cyclical maintenance services as appropriate to improve the balance between planned and responsive maintenance, to achieve a reduction in maintenance costs per property per annum and the average number of responsive repairs per property per annum**
- d) Approve further exploration of the potential to include call centre management and call diagnostic function for responsive maintenance within the scope of the contract**
- e) Agree the recommendation that given the current economic environment and the recent demise of repair contractors, the option to let two responsive repair and maintenance contracts based on geographical regions of the borough, is further explored to increase the resilience of the contractual arrangements and protect the council against potential performance and contractual failures.**

## **9 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Director of Housing outlined the work programme and the items for the October Housing Overview and Scrutiny meeting. The Clerk informed the committee that there were no items currently scheduled for April. It was agreed to receive a report on

- a) Update of the five year capital programme, including a year two update
- b) Voids update.

**Resolved that the work programme and the discussion is noted.**

**The meeting finished at 8.18pm.**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIRMAN**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Elaine Sheridan, telephone (01375 652580),  
or alternatively e-mail [esheridan@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:esheridan@thurrock.gov.uk)**