

Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 March 2016 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Cathy Kent (Chair), Chris Baker (Vice-Chair), Jan Baker, Tunde Ojetola and Steve Liddiard (Substitute) (substitute for Clare Baldwin)

Lynn Mansfield, Housing Tenant Representative

Apologies: Councillors Clare Baldwin and Sue MacPherson

In attendance:

Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health
Richard Parkin, Head of Environment
Dermot Moloney, Strategic Lead Housing
Alastair Wood, Technical Services Delivery Manager, Housing – Technical Services
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

The Chair apologised to Members of the change in Committee date but recognised that Officers from Housing would be attending the Local Government Chronicle Awards in London where they had been shortlisted for 2 awards, Efficiency and Driving Efficiency through Technology.

The Chair wished Officers good luck and acknowledged that the right people and teams had been shortlisted.

This was echoed by all Members.

39. Minutes

The Minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 17 February 2016 were approved as a correct record.

The Chair acknowledged that Councillor Hamilton had a follow up question to his original question asked at the 17 February 2016 Committee regarding tax implications on void properties for council and private landlords. This will be emailed to Officers and a response will be sent to all Members when available.

40. Urgent Items

There were no items of urgent business.

41. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

42. Managing Damp & Mould - Update on Housing Investment, Development Actions

Richard Parkin introduced the report and confirmed that it had been returned to the Committee at the request of Members. The Officer stated that damp and mould continued to be a problem in Council properties but stated that this was a country wide issue and that measures were being taken to tackle this issue. Damp and mould will remain a key focus and work will continue to look for ways to improve this within Council properties and with the education of residents on how to deal and reduce any damp, mould and condensation in their properties.

The Officer briefly presented the report to Members highlighting the following areas:

- Damp and mould in the Council Housing Stock contributed to approximately 4 per cent of the repair service demands.
- The approach of the repairs programme was to address problems rather than covering up.
- In the Transforming Homes Programme, 2 million pounds have been set aside to address damp and mould with an overspend this was due to the nature of the work undertaken.
- Addressing issues with the fabric of the property and work had been undertaken to address such issues in Tilbury.
- 214 out of the 253 damp and mould surveys received back from residents required some level of remedial works to be undertaken.
- Upgrading existing single glazed windows with new double glazed.
- Resident Communication Programme issued to all residents in October 2014, which advised residents on how to deal with damp, mould and condensation.
- 342 properties have formed part of the thermal efficiency programme.
- In September 2015, Thurrock Council hosted a “Damp and Mould Conference”, which was attended by over 40 representatives from different local authorities and social landlords.
- Infrared Heating was being trialled in a property in one of the Grays High rise blocks to provide the Authority of a worked example in the Thurrock Borough.

Councillor Liddiard thanked the Officer and asked if the figure of 4 per cent on the damp and mould repairs had gone down over the last 2 to 3 years. The Officer confirmed that exact figures were not to hand but stated that trends had indicated received had gone down a degree. Exact figures will be supplied to Officers.

Councillor Liddiard asked if all Council properties had been installed with double glazing, the Officer confirmed that there were still a number of flats in South Ockendon who still had single glazed windows.

Councillor Liddiard stated that to break resident's habits of drying clothes indoors, would the installation of washing lines help these residents more. The Officer confirmed that in his opinion this would not stop residents drying clothes inside properties.

Councillor Ojetola asked Officers what assistance was available to residents for dealing with damp and mould issues. The Officer confirmed that information was supplied to all residents on how best to deal and reduce damp and mould and to assist residents through the repair service. Advice was given by members of the technical team, which would depend on the level of mould as to when to wash-down and what detergent should be used.

Councillor Ojetola stated at what point were tenants asked to wash-down. The Officer confirmed that this would depend on the size and the location of the mould and residents would be advised by contractors. The process of dealing with residents with mould issues would be supplied by Officers and reported back to Members.

Councillor Ojetola asked for clarification from Officers on the overspend on the Housing Transformation Project. The Officers confirmed that when the programme was put together, 2 million pounds of the total amount was directly set aside for damp and mould works. Other works such as drainage, that also addressed the issue of damp and mould, had been undertaken but would not have been included in the 2 million pound aside.

It was not known how much of this was spent on the damp and mould element of the housing transformation project. Officers may be able to pull out the element of what was spent on damp and mould for transforming homes and provide this information to members. Officers confirmed that remedial works will continue but might not be able to afford to carry out projects such as the Eco Programs.

The Chair asked Officers who attended the recent Housing Conference where other local authorities attended and ideas were exchanged, whether the benefits of attending were evident as yet. The Officer confirmed that it was probably too early to tell but continued conversations would continue with other providers and maybe attend another conference in the future. Damp and Mould will remain a high priority for the Housing Department.

Councillor Ojetola suggested that Damp and Mould go onto the work programme for 2016/17 with an update from residents who believe that damp and mould issues may have affected their health. The Officer stated that results from previous surveys undertaken by Thurrock proved it was hard to make a link between the two. The Officer confirmed that conversations with Public Health will take place.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the programme be undertaken to address issues of damp and mould, as described in the report, be noted.**
- 2. That the Committee support the move to a more planned, efficient and effective means of asset management.**

43. Update on Housing and Homelessness Prevention Strategies

The Officer presented the report and highlighted the following areas:

- The Housing Strategy had been split into three core priorities – Raising the Bar, In on the Ground and Looking Ahead
- SMART metres had been installed on three traveller's sites in Thurrock so that rent, rent arrears and service charges could be paid in an effective way
- Housing Enforcement had been adopted as a robust approach to anti-social behaviour and developed a prevention, intervention and enforcement (PIE) model
- Housing advice training had been delivered to volunteers
- Housing Options continued to work with the national Gold Standard
- Housing staff currently being trained on safeguarding
- New Development at Bruyns Court has been completed with 25 new units of sheltered accommodation
- Housing Zone status has been awarded with capacity funding secured
- Homelessness forum had been undertaken with partners of all specialism attending
- Dedicated Housing and Welfare Advice Officer had been recruited
- Tenants accreditation scheme has been set up with over 100 residents taking part
- Housing first programme has been set to address housing issues of people with very complex needs
- Right Size Programme to identify under occupation across all tenures
- Private Sector Team who engage with landlords of empty private properties but the Council have no legal rights to empty properties

Councillor Liddiard thanked the Officer for the good report and stated that it was good that the Council were heading in the right direction but felt that a crisis was only just round the corner with changes to Government Policies. The Officer confirmed that there would be greater pressures and that this was recognised over different measures. Discussions on changing the statutory duty for homelessness prevention were taking place. This would have the effect of increasing councils' responsibility to prevent homelessness.

Councillor Liddiard asked Officers if there were a need for more hostels in Thurrock. The Officer confirmed that the forms of temporary accommodation currently used fit the needs of the Council. If the use of hostels were used in the future this would need to be business modelled very carefully as support would also need to be provided.

Councillor C Baker stated that some residents in private accommodation who were unable to afford rents have resulted in Section 21s being issued. The Officer confirmed that section 21s were now the main reason for homelessness in the borough.

The Landlord forum will be re-launched to listen to private landlords and take into account their views on what offer of rents they were expecting.

Councillor Ojetola thanked the Officer for the positive report but acknowledged that the figures for the number of landlords were still quite low and what incentives were out there to get landlords on board. The Officer stated that a large campaign was underway to ensure landlords were aware of the good quality of services available and that the Council may have to think more commercially to engage with landlords.

Councillor Ojetola stated that the Empty Property Tax Exemption should be re-addressed but Officers agreed this would be area for the Finance Team to look at.

RESOLVED

That the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee note and comment on the updates in this report.

44. Work Programme

The Chair asked Members for any items that they would like to be added to the work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year.

RESOLVED

Members agreed that:

- 1. The Item Annual Report 2013/14 be added to the work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year work programme.**
- 2. The Item Mould and Damp be added to the work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year work programme.**
- 3. The Item Fixed Term Tenancies be added to the work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year work programme.**
- 4. The Item Pay to Stay be added to the work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year work programme.**
- 5. The Item Homelessness Strategy be added to the work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year work programme.**

6. **The Item Improving Energy Efficiency be added to the work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year work programme.**
7. **The Item Changes to the Fees and Charges 2016/17 be added to the work programme for the 2016/17 municipal year work programme.**

The meeting finished at 8.12 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**