

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 February 2024 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors James Halden (Chair), Sue Shinnick (Vice-Chair), Steve Liddiard, Maureen Pearce and Joycelyn Redsell

Sue Hodgson

**Apologies:** Councillors Neil Speight

**In attendance:**

Ryan Farmer, Housing Strategy and Quality Manager  
Chris Seman, Intelligence and Performance Manager  
Ewelina Sorbjan, Assistant Director Housing and Development  
Chris Wade, Rehousing Manager  
Lucy Tricker, Scrutiny Officer  
Luke Tucker, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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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.

### **32. Declaration of Interests**

Sue Hodgson, Housing Tenant Representative declared she was a member of the Delivery of Private and Housing Stock Task and Finish Group.

### **33. Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items of business.

### **34. Update on Procurement of Strategic Delivery Partner for Housing Works**

The Head of Housing Solutions presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- Officers gave an update to members, there were a number of interested parties.
- On the 12<sup>th</sup> January a sub briefing session took place to understand the issues tenders had
- As a result, a tender briefing note was drafted to seek to address issues.
- Procurement notice has been extended to a new deadline, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2024.

Members raised the following points and asked the following questions:

- Councillor Redsell asked if they envisioned anyone drop out of the possess.
  - Tenders have been reassured; initial feedback has been good.
- The Chair noted some issues were fundamental and asked if any questions will be raised regarding the model's sustainability.
  - Local Authority has done all it can to show how it allocates its capital spend.
  - New sustainability study would enhance the level of understanding of housing stock.
  - If 100% not achieved would lead to profit loss, Local Authority has stepped back and lacked rules regarding compliance.
- The Chair sort reassurance that if the Local Authority is having flexible conversations that we ensure that the Local Authority is not being too flexible and effecting performance related pay.
  - Working group ensures goal post is clear.
- The Chair asked if there would be updates on progress and changes.
  - Updates are sent to cabinet on monthly basis.
  - The Local Authority can change its plans and has contingency plans.
  - Delivers where not worried about KPI or profit.
- Councillor Liddiard asked if the contract was a fixed fee.
  - Fixed fee
- Councillor Liddiard expressed concerns that the contracts was not common and would be reassured by knowing what other Local Authorities were doing.
  - Basildon has a similar model, but the model type is more normally seen in commercial world.
- Councillor Redsell asked if contractors are used by other authorities and if there is a get out clause.
  - Yes
- Councillor Redsell sort clarity on shareholder influence
  - Would not be a big concession point, there will always be a line that could not be crossed.

**RESOLVED:**

**1.1 Members are requested to note and comment on the contents of this report.**

**35. Homelessness Update 2023**

The Head of Housing Solutions presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- 22% increase in homelessness over the year, national issue
- Increasing demand and less supply

- Rent rates between private and LLA rates is increasing.
- Entering into block leases
- Providing less flexibility, still working with care leavers and adult social care.
- Purchase of 20 properties to help homeless issues.

Members raised the following points and asked the following questions:

- Councillor Redsell asked if care leavers can return to foster cares after further education.
  - Yes, would still be classed as a resident of foster carers address.
- Councillor Redsell asked how many are homeless ward are by ward
  - Not ward by ward as you can apply homeless to the local authority of your choice.
- Councillor Redsell asked how many rough sleepers there are in the borough.
  - 6 verified, numbers have never gone above double figures.
  - Of those 6, 5 have refused help.
  - DLUHC is happy with performance.
- Councillor Shinnick asked if we prioritise residents.
  - No right to do so legally.
  - Social housing needs 6-year residency
- The Chair asked if there are concerns Thurrock would be in same issue with Hastings regarding homelessness.
  - Hoping to buy 20 properties next year.
  - Budgets are reviewed regularly.
  - Forecast overspend £400,000 Local Authority is trying to control budgets.
- The Chair asked if success of property purchases be a double-edged sword and be a victim of its own success.
  - Not worried about growing portfolio
  - Want to break even on homes gained and lost.
- Councillor Pearce sort an explanation of the rent insurance scheme.
  - Backed by Royal Sun Alliance Landlord.
  - Local Authority would pay one-year annual fee insurance for the landlord.
  - Rent arrears would be covered by insurance.

## **RESOLVED:**

**1.1 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted, challenged, and commented on the contents of this update report.**

### **36. Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Kick-off**

The Housing Strategy Manager presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- Statutory duty for Local Authority to have a strategy.
- Previous strategy was adopted in 2020.
- New strategy is under review.

Members raised the following points and asked the following questions:

- Councillor Redsell asked if service personal are still reviewing everything.
  - Yes, they interview to asset cases properly.
- Councillor Redsell how could homelessness figure could be reduced.
  - Housing needs can change quickly, more important is the outcome.
- The Chair sort an explanation of the procedure regarding homelessness and asked if the strategy could provide reassurance to what services are used.
  - New strategy is more about the support that is being offered.
  - Largely housing led, mental health service is involved.
- Councillor Redsell asked how detailed the checks are to confirm homelessness.
  - Local Authority has to satisfy itself.
  - Local Authority uses credit checks, council tax and land register.
  - Hard to check if people own property abroad.
- Councillor Pearce asked if we keep voids for emergencies.
  - No, the Local Authority reacts as it need with the current housing stock.

## **RESOLVED:**

**1.1 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted and commented on the contents of this report and the proposal to develop a new Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy.**

**1.2 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are commented on the engagement principles as set out in section 0.**

## **37. Best Value and Service Benchmarking**

The Technical Services Delivery Manager presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- Best value is achieved were possible.
- 55% of the Mears PLC staff working on the Thurrock contract live in borough.
- 35% of the Mears PLC supply chain are based in Thurrock.
- 189 landlords submitted information.
- Local Authority compares well in comparison to other authorities.

Members raised the following points and asked the following questions:

- Councillor Redsell asked if plainer English could be used in reports and presentations, and asked what does “good” look like.
  - Officers referred members to the report and explained the graph line.
- Councillor Liddiard asked if it was more of a customer service survey. Councillor Liddiard looked for value for money information.
  - Perception survey not a transaction survey
- The Chair wanted assurance there was no match fixing.
  - Local Authority has to comply with technical requirements, questions and the order they are asked cannot change.
- Councillor Shinnick asked if there was any information on disability.
  - Not in this report

**RESOLVED:**

**1.1 The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted, commented on and scrutinised the contents of this report.**

Members and Officers discussed the Action Sheet:

**Action 11** – Completed.

**Action 21** – Request to remove to note.

Councillor Liddiard shared his concerns with Blackshots project and asked if it could be added to the working group.

- There is a steering group, additional members could be added.

A full recording of the meeting can be found from the following link:

[Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday 15 February 2024, 7:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcasts \(public-i.tv\)](#)

**The meeting finished at 8.10 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](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**