

Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel
11 August 2016

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CABINET HOUSING AND PLANNING PANEL held on Thursday 11 August 2016 at 7.30pm at the Council Chamber, Campus East, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors S Boulton (Chairman)
M Perkins (Vice-Chairman)

D Bell, D Bennett, H Bromley, M Cowan, G Hayes,
M Holloway, P Shah and M Spinks

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Interim Managing Director, WHCHT (C Woodhead)
Head of Housing and Community Services (S Chambers)
Head of Housing Management (D Baker)
Housing Client and Policy Manager (J Jethwa)
Principal Development Management Officer (C Carter)
Governance Services Officer (M Lowe)

29. MINUTES:

The Minutes of the meetings held on 14 July 2016 and 20 July 2016 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

30. WELWYN HATFIELD COMMUNITY HOUSING TRUST MONITORING Q1 2016-17:

Report of the Director (Finance and Operations) and accompanying presentation detailed the performance of Welwyn Hatfield Community Housing Trust's (the Trust) Voids Management Services and the work with the Tenant's Panel.

The report also includes a summary of the performance in the key areas of the Trust's activity up to the end of the first quarter 2016/17.

During the presentation and discussion the following points were made:-

VOID MANAGEMENT

- Members acknowledged that the Trust had performed extremely well and noted that the Trust was in the top quartile nationally rather than the first in the country.
- Members received reassurance that the Trust continually strived to improve its performance, with particular emphasis on how to improve performance without the loss of quality and would continue to do so.

Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel
11 August 2016

- The number of voids was reducing over time and the number of re-lets had also fallen; it was now five percent of stock turnover. Research would be undertaken to establish the reason for the reduction.
- The Trust recouped the cost of major works to a property on a re-let by recharging the outgoing tenant, who were responsible.
- The average length of tenancy was between 17 and 18 years; which due to the different demographics was expected to change to between 15 and 25 years. Another factor affecting the average length of tenancy was the changes to the rules around being a 'tenant for life'. From 2013 all tenancies would be reviewed after five years – other than sheltered housing tenants.
- It acknowledged that the 20 days it took to turn around a property was very good and it was more difficult to carry out some types of work whilst the property was occupied. It was agreed that cost and time taken to turnaround a property were not significant.
- Consideration had been given to the taking of deposits from future tenants as some Council's and housing associations do. However, it had been decided not to do so. The reason being was many of the Trust's customers were often those in the most vulnerable financial position and would not be able to afford a deposit should they be asked for one.
- It was noted that there was a diminishing portfolio of stock and the Affordable Housing Programme stated that the level be kept at 9,000 properties and that proportionally the number of houses may fall.
- Members were of the view that the use of the term 'social housing' was preferable to 'affordable housing' as it was a confusing term as 'affordable' was not necessarily affordable to the majority of the population.

TENANTS' PANEL

- It was noted that a considerable amount of work had been done recently with the Tenants' Panel, the scrutiny body of the Trust.
- The first piece of work considered by the Tenants' Panel had been the scrutiny of the Welfare Garden Scheme, which would be considered by the Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel in due course.
- Members welcomed the work of the Tenants' Panel, which had, until recently, appeared to have lost its way. It was emphasised that the Tenants' Panel was a Council body and not a body of the Trust.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTING – QUARTER ONE

Members considered the details of the Performance Management Reporting – Quarter One as set out in Appendix C. During discussion the following points were made and clarified:-

- The Trust would use the information gathered to enable the Trust's management to gain a better understanding into its customer profiles; the services provided and/or issues identified and to build on the findings.
- Members were provided with an explanation of the benefits of the PULSE survey which had replaced the STAR survey.

Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel
11 August 2016

- The information and intelligence gathered by the PULSE survey was very different to that obtained by the STAR survey and it would be a missed opportunity if that intelligence was ignored.
- The information from STAR had less value as it was anonymous. PULSE enabled the Trust to contact respondents to obtain a better understanding of their responses and to take the necessary action. It enabled the Trust to prioritise attention to the customer's needs.
- Feedback from respondents had been very positive.
- It would enable the Trust to build and understand its customers and their needs.
- PULSE was also able to provide an indication of other factors and of customers' general satisfaction or dissatisfaction on other issues. There was a general dissatisfaction regarding the number of repairs; neighbourhood; overcrowding and whether the customer regretted the move. The Trust was able to ascertain the issues and to put them into perspective.
- The following response was made to the comment that the Trust appeared to be uncomfortable to confront those tenants in breach of their leases regarding certain issues around the Borough :-
 - Despite the perception of the public the Trust took enforcement very seriously. However the Trust had to strike a balance with what was achievable in the Courts and take a pragmatic approach due to the resources and tools available to the Trust. The Trust took a prudent approach rather than shying away from enforcement.
 - The Trust would continue to work towards changing these perceptions.
 - The Trust needed to explore its culture of enforcement and to identify a proportionate tool to use effectively and efficiently to obtain its goals.
 - It was notoriously difficult to enforce leases or tenancy agreements and demanded a considerable amount of resources to do so effectively.
 - There were ten housing officers working on the Trust's properties, which equated to 900 properties per patch compared with the private sector where the industry norm was around 200 properties, which was considered to be a large patch.
- Some households were never visited during the time of a tenancy this is often due to the resilience of some people who are able to live around a problem.
- The Trust continued to increase the number of multi-skilled operatives and it was good practice for those operatives to carry out unreported repairs when attending for a reported repair if they were able to do so on that visit. This would reduce the cost of two visits to the property.
- Previously a scheme had been trialled to carry out 'MOTs' on properties however the budget for this had run out as it had proved to be very expensive.
- From this quarter the Housing Trust had started to attend the performance clinics where by the Interim Managing Director met with the Chief Executive and Leader to explain any underperformance in any areas.

Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel
11 August 2016

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the work and findings of the Tenants' Panel on the scrutiny of the Welfare Garden Scheme be presented a future meeting of the Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel.
- (2) That the Welwyn Hatfield Community Housing Trust Monitoring report be noted.

31. UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAMME (AHP):

The report of the Director (Finance and Operations) provided an update on the Council's Affordable Housing Programme (AHP).

Members noted that updates would be provided to the Committee twice a year. Detailed financial information would be included in the redesigned AHP Overview template, which would include all information pertaining to the programme.

Members expressed disappointment regarding the Open Market Purchase Registered Providers target in that only two had been purchased. This target was subject to market condition. Property prices which impacted on the purchase together with site limitations. The impact would be significant and would affect business plans. There were however opportunities to do more in connection with grant funding over the next one or two years.

With regard to Registered Providers it was not possible to assume what the percentage cost to use would be. Details of the whole cost would be reported in the Financial Monitoring report.

The policy target for lifetime homes was 20% for wheelchair friendly properties, which was a proportion not all properties. The reported figure which had been achieved was very positive. It was difficult to achieve a balance and such properties may be more difficult to re-let. However providers needed to be more flexible and allocated properties to other families in need and match the property to the family needs. The majority of the homes bought back from the open market were properties sold under the right to buy scheme.

In response to a question raised by a Member regarding the future of the garage site behind the Peartree shop area, the Head of Housing and Community Services undertook to raise the question and to provide a written response to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Council's Affordable Housing Programme (AHP) report be noted.

Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel
11 August 2016

- (2) That updates on the Council's Affordable Housing Programme (AHP) would be provided to the Committee twice a year and would include detailed financial information together with all information pertaining to the programme.
- (3) That the Head of Housing and Community Services raise the question and to provide a written response to the Committee regarding the future of the garage site behind the Peartree shop area.

32. SECTION 106 REPORT:

The report of the Director (Governance) provided an explanation of the Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy process set out in this report and the monies currently held by the Borough Council.

During discussion Members offered the following comments on how they would like the Council to secure and spend Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy contributions in the future:-

- S6/1064/99/OP – Hatfield Aerodrome, Comet Way had £3,089,198.22 remaining in the account and Members requested that Hertfordshire County Council be requested to provide details of what, if anything, the money has been spent on and an accurate account for the remaining monies. This money could be used across the Borough for smaller projects such as replacement fences.
- Members asked for details on how to make an application for the S106 monies; how to progress an application for funding and how to physically get the work completed.
- Members noted that a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Officer had been appointed and the CIL contributions were being reviewed currently. The Council was being encouraged to adopt a CIL approach which would allow Members to pool the contributions made to the Council to spend on projects. However a list of projects would be required and bids would be made to access the money.
- Members asked that future reports be presented in the traffic light format with red, amber and green indicating and highlighting the position of monies not yet spent.
- With reference to the notes of the meeting held with colleagues in the NHS as to how and when they respond to planning applications and sought planning obligations payments Members asked that an update on the meeting with the NHS held on 3 May 2016 be provided at a future meeting of the Panel.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet Housing and Planning Panel
11 August 2016

That in relation to S6/1064/99/OP – Hatfield Aerodrome, Comet Way Hertfordshire County Council be requested to provide details of what, if anything the £3,089,198.22 money had been spent on and an accurate account for the remaining monies.

That details on how to make an application for the S106 monies; how to progress an application for funding and how to physically get the work completed be made available to Members.

That an update on the meeting with the NHS held on 3 May 2016 to discuss the current update of the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan be provided at a future meeting of the Panel.

33. HERTFORDSHIRE INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING PARTNERSHIP (HIPP) ANNUAL REVIEW 2015/2016:

The report of the Director (Governance) set out in the Annual Review the achievements of the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership (HIPP) over the course of 2015-2016.

RESOLVED:

That the achievement of the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership (HIPP) Annual Review 2015/2016 be noted.

Meeting ended at 9.05 pm
ML