

# HOUSING PANEL (PANEL OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)

Tuesday 3 September 2013

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:** Councillors Smith (Chair), Seamons, Hollick and McCready.

Linda Hill Tenant Co-optee

## 20. PANEL SCOPE AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel agreed the following:

- To amend their start time to 5.00pm. If for any reason Cllr. Hollick cannot make this then the meeting will be moved back to 6.00pm.
- Noted the working principles.
- Confirmed their scope and discussed the items yet to appear in the programme (see below).
- Confirmed the dates for forthcoming meetings.

On the issue of inquiry yet to be scope they decided:

- To consider using Blackbird Leys regeneration as a case study when considering estate regeneration (to be discussed further at the next meeting).
- To note that a stock condition survey was underway to inform an asset management plan for the stock. This will be the vehicle to decide, agree and plan for an "Oxford Standard" for our properties. This work is likely to report after Christmas with the Asset Plan due in April 2014. The Panel want to be part of the development of this work if possible in partnership with the Tenants Scrutiny Panel.

## 21. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Stephen Clark updated the Panel on the results of the recent survey:

HC017 – Tenant satisfaction with estates – 83% (target 75%)

HC001 – The % of tenants satisfied with landlord services – 88% (target 84%)

HC022 - % of tenants satisfied that OCC listens to their views – 64% (target 63%)

HC024 - % of tenants satisfied with estates services – 78% (target 77%)

These represented good results.

Benchmarked positions on these results were not available at the Panel. These results will be used to set targets for the 13/14 round.

### **HC014 – New rough sleepers spending a second night out.**

The Panel asked for an explanation of this result:

It was estimated that we may have a community of about 50 rough sleepers all of whom will not be out every night. This count was of the new rough sleepers spending their 2<sup>nd</sup>. Night out. This indicator was to align with the no second night

out policy which was proving to be very successful with Oxford having fewer rough sleepers than similar cities.

In response to a question about the effect on the rough sleeping community of night shelters focusing on the no second night out officers said this hadn't caused problems. Some tweaks in the service had happened around release from prison and hospital but move on services were still robust and working. These services are currently being recommissioned and it seems likely that we will not see any reduction in service levels. The 10% budget reduction is likely to be found through efficiencies.

### **CS002 and CS005 – Time to process new benefit claims and changes in circumstances.**

These indicators remain off target and the Panel asked for information from the Head of Service at the next meeting outlining:

- The more detailed reasons for these indicators being off target.
- What action is in place to bring them back to target and sustaining performance?
- What is our benchmarked position on these indicators on our current performance and what would it be if we performed to target.

## **22. ALLOCATION SCHEME REVIEW**

The Panel discussed the proposals contained within the Allocations Review and agreed with the Head of Service that changes would be made to the final document to provide clarity in the following areas:

- Oxford City Council's principal Housing Objectives – To write in a clearer form what is intended for members of the armed forces.
- Qualification for inclusion on the Housing Register (final paragraph of point 3.3.3 and Qualification for inclusion on the transfer list (final paragraph) – to cross reference where the "certain circumstances" definition can be found in the scheme.

A discussion took place on the 5 year exclusion from the register of those guilty of antisocial behaviour. The view was expressed that 5 years was too long a period and these people may find it hard to demonstrate they have sustained a tenancy for this period. It was agreed that given that the scheme allowed exceptions to be made to this rule were this proved necessary this condition was acceptable.

Consideration was given to how we actively manage the register and whether we should have a band 5 on the basis that these applicants if they remain here are never likely to be housed by the Council.

The Panel heard:

- The arguments for and against having a “band 5” and the likely hood of extra work through appeals being raised by excluding these applicants.
- Having a register of “all comers” was a good indication of housing need.
- That the register was self-reviewing in that those registering were required to renew this every year. Some 3,000 chose to do this.

It was accepted that we do need to communicate effectively and regularly on the scheme and what it means.

**The Panel agreed to make a recommendation to the City Executive Board:**

A Communication Strategy should be in place to explain the scheme as agreed, what it means for applicants with some general information on the likelihood of being housed. This communication should include opportunity for feedback on the scheme itself and the understand ability of it.

A discussion took place on the conditions applied to those who foster and how this affects their housing need. Of particular concern to the Panel were those relatives who take care of children for the long term sometimes without any formal transfer of parental responsibility. It was felt that these were penalised by having to wait 3 years for this position to be reflected in their housing need. The Panel was reassured that should it prove necessary a situation of this sort could be considered by the Exceptional Circumstances Panel. Evidence would be needed but mostly a social worker would be involved and evidence could be taken from them. The wording in the proposed scheme had been changed to reflect this concern.

**23. ALLOCATIONS POLICIES - HOW THE COUNCIL COMMUNICATES**

See notes on the previous item.

**24. LONG TERM AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION**

The Panel were generally supportive of this scheme.

Concern was raised about the use of these properties as temporary accommodation because of the difficulties we currently have in securing permanent move on accommodation. How many of these properties are likely to be blocked because of lack of move on accommodation.

Officers reassured members that our numbers in temporary accommodation have been static for a number of years. We will continue to move people on from temporary accommodation to Council tenancies, the private rented sector and accommodation outside of the City.

The purchase number has been arrived at on the basis of a needs analysis. It's not exact but an estimate based on what we know so far.

The Panel asked to see details of the management arrangements for these properties before they are agreed.

## **25. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN - 2012-2016**

The Panel found this Action Plan to be much improved. It now presented a more understandable, clear and realistic appraisal of actions.

The Panel discussed issues around estate regeneration and the "Oxford Standard" and decided to plan their inquiries in these areas to fit with the timelines outlined in the Action Plan.