

Agenda

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Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Date: **Friday 7 February 2014**

Time: **5.00 pm**

Place: **St Aldate's Room, Town Hall**

For any further information please contact:

Pat Jones, Principal Scrutiny Officer

Telephone: 01865 252191

Email: phjones@oxford.gov.uk

Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Membership

Chair **Councillor Val Smith**

Vice Chair

Councillor Gill Sanders

Councillor Stuart McCready

Councillor Sam Hollick

Linda Hill

Co-optee

The quorum for this Committee is 3, substitutes are permitted.

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AGENDA

Pages

1 APOLOGIES

The quorum for this Panel meeting is three and substitutes are permitted.

2 WORK PROGRAMME AND REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

1 - 4

Officer: Pat Jones Principal Scrutiny Officer will support the Panel with this debate.

Telephone: 01865 252191

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This item presents for discussion by The Panel the forward work programme and the results of recommendations made.

In particular:

- (1) Oxfordshire County Council – Supporting People budget issues - update on the latest position from the Oxfordshire County Council budget setting for Supporting People and the effects of this on homelessness provision in Oxford city.
- (2) Responses from Board Members and Officers on Improving quality in the private rent sector – A City Council Letting Agency, and Satisfaction with Parks – Details of the Survey Results (report attached).

3 STAR TENANTS' SURVEY - VALIDATED RESULTS

Officer: Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing and Property

Tel: 01865 252447

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At its meeting on 5th December 2013, the Panel considered a number of performance indicator results obtained via the STAR Survey. The Panel agreed to revisit the results when the validation process had been completed to consider how the results would be used to improve the officer to tenants in Oxford, along with a demographic breakdown of the results.

The report was not available when the main agenda was printed and will be circulated prior to the meeting.

4 OUTCOME FROM THE REVIEW OF THE MUTUAL EXCHANGE PROCESS

Officer: Pat Jones, Principal Scrutiny Officer will support the Panel with this debate.

Telephone: 01865 252191

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The Panel at its meeting on 18th March 2013, heard about the current process of mutual exchanges and the amount of under occupation of Council properties. It agreed to work with Officers to gain a better understanding of the process and what further work was planned, by interviewing tenants at the beginning and end of the process.

The Panel will hear the findings from these interviews.

5 PERFORMANCE MONITORING - HOUSING MEASURES - QUARTER 3

5 - 8

Officer: Pat Jones, Principal Scrutiny Officer will support the Panel with this debate.

Telephone: 01865 252191

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This item reports outcomes at quarter 3 for the set of performance indicators chosen by the Panel. They are grouped according to the themes chosen by the Panel:

- Welfare reform and the housing crisis.
- Housing supply.
- Estate regeneration.

6 ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY - OXFORD STANDARD

Officer: Pat Jones, Principal Scrutiny Officer will support the Panel with this debate.

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The Panel at its meeting on 3rd September 2013 noted that a stock condition survey was underway which would inform an asset management plan for the stock, and would be a vehicle to decide, agree and plan for an "Oxford Standard" for our properties. The Panel wished to be part of the development of this plan, in partnership with the Tenants Scrutiny Panel.

The Panel will receive a verbal update on the latest position.

7 NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

9 - 12

Notes of the meeting held on 15th January 2014.

DECLARING INTERESTS

General duty

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed "Declarations of Interest" or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your* employment; sponsorship (ie payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Declaring an interest

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest.

If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member "must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself" and that "you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned". What this means is that the matter of interests must be viewed within the context of the Code as a whole and regard should continue to be paid to the perception of the public.

*Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

To: The Scrutiny Housing Panel

Date: 7th February 2014

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

Title of Report: Report back on comments and recommendations made at the Panel meeting held on 15th January 2014

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To report the outcome of comments and recommendations made at the Housing Panel held on 15th January 2014.

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Mark Mills

Executive Lead Members: Councillors Mark Lygo, Scott Seamons and Ed Turner

Recommendation: To comment on the responses and to decide what further action, if any is required.

Introduction

(1) This report updates the Panel on comments received from Board Members and Officers on items considered at the Housing Panel meeting held on 15th January 2014:

- Improving quality in the private rent sector – A City Council Letting Agency
- Satisfaction with Parks – Details of survey results

Improving quality in the private rent sector – A City Council Letting Agency

(2) The Panel considered a report prepared by the Head of Housing and Property which provided further information on the benefits and disadvantages of a City Council Lettings Agency.

- (3) The Panel agreed:
- (a) That it was not appropriate for the Council to establish a Local Letting Agency with the purpose of driving up housing standards in the private rented sector in the City;
 - (b) That the Council should further consider alternative approaches to this, that would seek to achieve the same policy objective through different means and to refer this to the Board Member for Housing.
- (4) Following the meeting, Board Members, Councillors Ed Turner and Scott Seamons, whose portfolios this issue bridged accepted the recommendations of the Panel as they wished to improve the situation regarding, physical improvements, the rights of tenants and the financial position of tenants. While they did not see a Council run local letting agency as an appropriate approach to deliver this at this time, they would continue to look at how future policies/initiatives could achieve the same goals.

Satisfaction with Parks – Details of the Survey Results

- (5) The Panel considered a report by the Head of Leisure, Parks and Communities which provided further information on the performance of Parks Services, and performance indicator LP013.
- (6) The Panel agreed:
- (a) To forward the comments made at the meeting to the Board Member for Leisure and the relevant Executive Director and to have any comments reported back to the Panel;
 - (b) To continue to monitor satisfaction of the Parks Service.
- (7) Following the meeting the Head of Leisure, Parks and Communities made the following comments:

Panel Comment 1 - That actual users of the parks should be consulted rather than using the Talk Back Panel, for example football clubs;

Response - Actual users of the parks are also consulted in addition to the Talk Back panel. We have an annual Parks Satisfaction Survey that has been in place since 2000. Park Rangers interview customers to complete the questionnaire or customers can complete it on-line. We are in the process of analysing the 2013 results and setting up the 2014 survey.

Panel Comment 2 -That the Parks Friends/User Groups should be surveyed on their satisfaction of their parks, groups that were established to work with the Council to improve the parks and green spaces in the City;

Response - Our Friends groups have the opportunity to complete the annual satisfaction survey, and sometimes volunteer to interview customers. The Friends are also involved in the annual review of Park Management Plans and help set priorities for improvement.

Panel Comment 3 - That following the increased investment in parks especially in play areas, that this should be monitored to ensure that these facilities are maintained;

Response - In 2012 the annual Parks Satisfaction Survey included a section specifically on play areas to monitor usage and satisfaction, this is monitored using CORVU.

- (8) The Head of Leisure, Parks and Communities also provided further information on the comments in paragraph (7) of this report.
- (a) The parks service has improved significantly over recent years, the satisfaction level of 80% is the second highest of all council services does have many variables. The positive work and some context that details what we are doing to continue to improve the service is detailed below:
- We are delivering a continued programme of improvements, this includes; tennis Courts, Multi-use Games Areas (MUGAS), fitness trails, pavilions and continued improvements to play areas (the 70th play area was completed last Sept).
 - We now have a fifth Green Flag Park at Blackbird Leys Park (*this park has been transformed from poor quality green space into vibrant Green Flag Park*)
 - Shortlisted for the best Parks Team at the Association for Public Service Excellence Awards and shortlisted for the most improved parks team based on our performance data (which compares our benchmark data)
 - 622 people volunteering between April 2011- April 2012 and 17 Friends Groups
 - Green spaces funding achieved - £172,000 for Port Meadow, £60,000 for Wild Oxford and £60,000 WREN funding for Spindleberry Park
 - Staff attendance is forecast to be less than five days per person, which for an area such as parks with lots a manual work is a major achievement.
- (b) Dog fouling is far better managed. We have managed to increase the amount of dog faeces collected from dog bins to 45 tonnes in the last 12 months. This figure has doubled in the last 3 years. This

is due to a combination of our work with friends of, education, and improved enforcement. We are also training more staff to be able to issue FPNs.

- (c) Whilst the service is committed to continually improve performance, there are many factors that impact satisfaction of the city's parks such as increasing expectations, there are a number of parks managed by others (e.g. university, parish council's, voluntary bodies that are included in the score).
- (d) An invite to the Panel Members to attend a tour of some of the parks to further see the improvements and initiatives that are underway.

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List of background papers: None

Version number: 1

Performance Summary
Housing Panel

Agenda Item 5

Trends compare relative performance with

Green = target met
Amber = within tolerance
Red = outside tolerance

Prd: previous month

Prev Year End: previous March

Dec-2013

Year on Year: the same period from the previous year

Measure		Owner	Result 2012/13	Latest Data		Year End Target 2013/14	Trends			Comments
Ref	Description			Target	Result		Prd	Prev Year End	Year on Year	
Estates Regeneration										
HC017	HC017: Tenant satisfaction with their estates	Stephen Clarke	Not Recorded	75 %	83%	75 %	→			A STAR satisfaction survey of OCC tenants was carried out in May/June 2013.
PC018	PC018: Satisfaction with our neighbourhoods	Hamera Plume	83.8%	87.0%	83.8%	89.0%	→	→	↘	Direct Services and Environmental Development are working closely to identify and target specific areas for a litter/ street cleanliness mini-purge. The City Council is working in close partnership with OxClean to support their annual Spring Clean event.
FN024	FN024: Number of returned Social Housing dwellings through criminal proceedings	Carol Quainton	0 Number	3 Number	0 Number	4 Number	→	→	→	First potential prosecutions for housing fraud are in final stages, before instructing Legal. These cases may not be concluded within the judicial system in this financial year.
HC001	HC001: The % of Council tenants satisfied with landlord services	Stephen Clarke	87.00%	84.00%	88.00%	84.00%	→	↗	↗	A STAR satisfaction survey of OCC tenants was carried out in May/June 2013.
HC020	HC020: Percentage of properties failing to meet Decent Homes standard	Jonathan Gould	Not Recorded	0 %		0 %				
HC022	HC022: Percentage of tenants satisfied that OCC listens to their views and acts on them	Bill Graves	Not Recorded	63 %	64%	63 %	→			A STAR satisfaction survey of OCC tenants was carried out in May/June 2013.
HC024	HC024: Percentage of tenants satisfied with estate services	Bill Graves	Not Recorded	77 %	76%	77 %	→			A STAR satisfaction survey of OCC tenants was carried out in May/June 2013.
LP013	LP013: Increase satisfaction with parks	Ian Brooke	91.0%	90.0%	81.0%	90.0%	→	↘	↘	Results of the winter 2012 talkback show that satisfaction with parks has decreased to 81%. Whilst this is still high, we are back to 2009/10 figures. The poor summer weather could be a factor for the lower score.
CA027	CA027: Percentage of tenants satisfied with housing projects	Stephen Clarke	3%	0 %	0%	75 %	→	↘	→	Survey has not been carried out.
Housing Supply										
HC015	HC015: Capital investment in Council housing	Stephen Clarke	Not Recorded	£13,011,807	6654705.00 £	£19,054,000	↗			Spend is behind profile mainly as a result of over optimistic profiling of the AHP new build programme. The delivery of the additional 113 new units continues to be on track for delivery of the overall programme by March 2015. The remainder of the housing programme remains broadly on schedule.
HC016	HC016: Number of affordable homes for rent delivered	Stephen Clarke	Not Recorded	4 Number	4.00 Number	4 Number	→			4 units completed at Balfour Road in October 2013. No further completions programmed fro 2013/14
CA001	CA001: Delivering a programme of new homes at Barton	Jane Winfield	3 Milestone	3 Milestone	3 Milestone	3 Milestone	→	→	↗	On target. Phase 1 bids being considered and pushing design side. Reserved matters app for infrastructure being worked up . Tree removal being planned

**Performance Summary
Housing Panel**

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Prev Year End: previous March

Dec-2013

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Measure		Owner	Result 2012/13	Latest Data		Year End Target 2013/14	Trends			Comments
Ref	Description			Target	Result		Prd	Prev Year End	Year on Year	
NI154	NI154: Net additional homes provided	Michael Crofton -Briggs	194 Number	162 Number	60 Number	220 Number				Housing completions are still below target, reflecting the national decline in housebuilding. The situation is expected to improve in 2014 as the increased number of sites going through the planning process translates into construction activity on the ground.
NI 155	NI 155 Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)	Stephen Clarke	94 Number	4 Number	4 Number	4 Number				4 units completed October 2013. No further completions programmed for 2013/14

Welfare Reform and Housing Crisis

HC014	HC014: Number of new Rough Sleepers spending a second night on the streets (snapshot count)	Stephen Clarke	Not Recorded	0 Number	9.00 Number	0 Number				There was a rough sleeper count in November 2013 which counted 9 new rough sleepers spending a second night on the street. The total count was 19 (13 of which were new to rough sleeping).
NI156	NI 156: The number of households in Oxford in temporary accommodation	Stephen Clarke	120 Number	120 Number	109.00 Number	120 Number				On target. Significant external challenges, but performance across homeless prevention and housing needs functions remains good.
BV066a	BV066a: Percentage of rent collected	Helen Bishop	96.83%	96.67%	95.70%	97.50%				The performance against target is lower than expected but the profile of collection against the end of year target is still on course to be achieved.

**Performance Summary
Housing Panel**

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Dec-2013

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Measure		Owner	Result 2012/13	Latest Data		Year End Target 2013/14	Trends			Comments
Ref	Description			Target	Result		Prd	Prev Year End	Year on Year	
CS002	CS002: Time to process changes in circumstances	Helen Bishop	12 Days	10 Days	11 Days	10 Days				<p>December has been an outstanding month for performance and shows that November's result was not just a one off but an indication of real, sustained improvement which the new processes and improved performance management have made possible.</p> <p>The days to process change in circs have increased very slightly but are still well within acceptable limits. The forecast is that the target of 10 days will be achieved at year end, the first time in a number of years.</p> <p>The team are now coming into the busiest time of the year with rent changes and changes to pensions and other benefits. We thus anticipate that the days to process New Claims may increase whilst reducing significantly for Change in Circumstances - we process those in advance of the date of change.</p> <p>It is felt that the team are in the strongest position for well over 2 ½ years and are proving capable, efficient and dedicated to the highest levels of customer service possible.</p>
CS005	CS005: Time to process new benefits claims	Helen Bishop	26.65 days	14.00 days	19.92 days	14.00 days				See comments for indicator CS 002.
CS010	CS010: Total current tenant arrears	Helen Bishop	£1,137,805.00	Not Set	£1,328,337.00	Not Set				It has been agreed to report current rent arrears as a genuine figure in the future due to the differences in payment cycles. Housing direct payments are paid four weekly in arrears and there were three weekly debits before end of month. The actual current arrears figure is £930,812.34.
CS011	CS011: Total former tenant arrears	Helen Bishop	£225,471.00	Not Set	£346,238.00	Not Set				Former tenant arrears are being reviewed at the moment with a write off of old debts being proposed as well as using the services of a tracing and collection agency for static debt collection.
CS013	CS013: Total arrears of tenants owing more than 7 weeks rent	Helen Bishop	£450,415.00	Not Set	£438,411.00	Not Set				
CS014	CS014: Number of NSPs served on tenants in arrears YTD	Helen Bishop	760 NSPs	Not Set	892 NSPs	Not Set				The number of NSPs served is 204 less than the same period last year. The team in an effort to reduce legal activity are making more phone calls to tenants to prevent any increased in low level debt.
HC003	HC003: Homeless Acceptances	Stephen Clarke	104 Number	90 Number	88 Number	120 Number				

**Performance Summary
Housing Panel**

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Year on Year: the same period from the previous year

Dec-2013

Measure		Owner	Result 2012/13	Latest Data		Year End Target 2013/14	Trends			Comments
Ref	Description			Target	Result		Prd	Prev Year End	Year on Year	
HC004	HC004: Homelessness cases prevented	Stephen Clarke	681 Number	405 Number	693 Number	540 Number				

Agenda Item 7

HOUSING PANEL (PANEL OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)

Wednesday 15 January 2014

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Sanders, McCready and Hollick.

CO-OPTED MEMBERS PRESENT: Linda Hill (Co-optee)

OFFICERS PRESENT: Mathew Metcalfe (Democratic and Electoral Services), Pat Jones (Principal Scrutiny Officer), Helen Bishop (Head of Customer Services), Bill Graves (Housing Services), Nerys Parry (Housing Services) and Dave Scholes (Housing and Communities)

37. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the Chair (Councillor Val Smith) and Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing and Property.

38. WORK PROGRAMME AND REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel received an updated forward work programme and agreed to note its contents.

39. RENT ARREARS ANALYSIS AND PROFILES

The Panel received a report of the Head of Customer Services which provided an update on rents arrears as previously requested by the Panel.

Helen Bishop, Head of Customer Services attended the meeting and introduced the report.

In response to questions, Helen Bishop said that when a tenant went into arrears they were sent a letter, followed by a telephone call and then a visit. If this contact failed, then a notice seeking possession would be sought and finally a Court Order. She added that the Council did not use bailiffs to recover money or goods for rent arrears, but they were used for Council Tax arrears. She further added that as soon as a tenant did not keep to their Court Order agreements, Officers immediately contacted them and went back to the Courts. Rents Officers also met each quarter with Court officials to discuss best practice.

Panel members asked about the impact of the welfare reforms. In response Helen Bishop said that it was still too early to assess the impact and that a further report to the Panel in six months would give enough time to establish any impact.

The Panel agreed:

- (a) To thank Helen Bishop for attending the meeting;

- (b) To ask for six monthly reports on rents arrears and the impact of welfare reforms to be submitted to the Panel with the first one in May/June.

40. NO SECOND NIGHT OUT - DETAILED PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

The Panel received a report of the Head of Housing and Property which provided additional details on rough sleeping numbers in Oxford, especially in relation to No Second Night Out.

Nerys Parry, Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager attended the meeting and introduced the report. She acknowledged that the numbers of rough sleepers were rising, but these were not dramatic and the authority was responding to this. There was a target of no more than five rough sleeping, but this was a local target as no national one existed.

In response to questions concerning mental health issues, Nerys Parry said that good links existed with the mental health providers in the city, however they too were experiencing pressures on their resources and beds. Regarding people with no local connection, she said that the Council had a robust local reconnection policy and officers worked to reconnect people. However there was an Exemptions Panel which considered special cases where reconnection may not be possible.

Regarding hostel accommodation, Nerys Parry said that there was an adequate pathway in Oxfordshire and she was not looking at expanding this pathway at present. She felt that the problem was in move-on and moving people from hostel accommodation into the private rented sector, however 70% did move into more settled accommodation.

Nerys Parry said regarding funding that any reduction in the capacity of the pathway would increase the numbers of rough sleepers and that the pressures from the welfare reforms were still to be assessed.

The Panel agreed:

- (a) To thank Nerys Parry for attending the meeting;
- (b) To receive an update of the impact of any budget reduction by the Oxfordshire County Council on the Supporting People budget.

41. IMPROVING QUALITY IN THE PRIVATE RENT SECTOR - A CITY COUNCIL LETTING AGENCY

The Panel received a report from the Executive Director, City Regeneration following a request from the Panel for further information on the benefits and risks associated with the possibility of establishing a City Council letting agency.

Dave Scholes, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager attended the meeting and introduced the item.

Councillor Hollick felt that it would be useful for the different arms of the Council to work together on improving the quality, covering three areas:

- Physical improvement, e.g. better insulation etc.
- The rights of tenants, e.g. references from tenants about landlords
- Financial, e.g. security of leases

In response Dave Scholes said that the present environment was very landlord dominated. Landlords wanted the maximum flexibility and ability to make money. The Council did try where possible to secure longer tenancies, two years for example, but there were many challenges with this.

The Panel agreed:

- (a) That it was not appropriate for the Council to establish a Local Letting Agency with the purpose of driving up housing standards in the private rented sector in the City;
- (b) That the Council should further consider alternative approaches to this, that would seek to achieve the same policy objective through different means and to refer this to the Board Member for Housing.

42. SATISFACTION WITH PARKS - DETAILS OF SURVEY RESULTS

The Panel received a report of the Head of Leisure, Parks and Communities following a request from the Panel for further information on the performance of Parks Services and performance indicator LP013.

The Panel, following a downward trend in performance wished to see further information on a satisfaction survey including the methodology used, the numbers and locations of respondents and the questions asked and the reasons for any dissatisfaction.

In response to questions raised prior to the meeting concerning dog fouling, the Head of Leisure and Parks asked that the Panel be informed that there were bins for dog mess and that normal litter bins could also be used. Officers regularly patrolled the parks to catch offenders and in some cases these officers were plain clothed. He would be speaking with the Council's Media Team on how best to advertise that offenders could and would be issued with fixed penalty notices.

The Panel discussed the report and felt:

- That actual users of the parks should be consulted rather than using the Talk Back Panel, for example football clubs;
- That the Parks Friends/User Groups should be surveyed on their satisfaction of their parks, groups that were established to work with the Council to improve the parks and green spaces in the City;
- That following the increased investment in parks especially in play areas, that this should be monitored to ensure that these facilities are maintained;
- That dog fouling continued to be a problem and that every effort should be made to ensure adequate bin provision and that there should be greater

use of publicity to highlight the problem and the penalties available to to the Council to tackle this.

The Panel agreed:

- (a) To forward the comments made at the meeting to the Board Member for Leisure and the relevant Executive Director and to have any comments reported back to the Panel;
- (b) To continue to monitor satisfaction of the Parks Service.

43. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Panel approved the note of its meeting held on 5th December 2013.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.30 pm