

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING PANEL (PANEL OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)

Thursday 4 June 2015

www.oxford.gov.uk



PANEL MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillors Benjamin, Henwood, Hill, Hollick, Sanders, Smith, Wade and Henwood

OFFICERS PRESENT: Stephen Clarke, Ian Wright, Adrian Chownes, Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer)

8. ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE 2015/16 MUNICIPAL YEAR

Two members were nominated to chair the Panel – Councillor Hollick and Councillor Smith – but the Panel was unable to elect a chair because the votes were tied.

The decision to elect a chair for the municipal year was therefore referred to the next meeting of the Council's Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Hollick was selected to chair this meeting in a random selection process.

9. APOLOGIES

None.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

11. HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Head of Housing and Property introduced the housing asset management strategy and said that it is already running in many respects.

The Panel asked a number of questions including about; housing need in the city, the impacts of government policy, taking a co-ordinated approach with peers, speeding up void times, the stock condition survey, renewable energy on Council properties and the consultation response rate.

A member noted that there are numerous unused garages in Blackbird Leys. These could be knocked down and the sites developed as affordable housing or off street car parking for residents. The Panel heard that this is within the

concept of making better use of the City Council's assets and that a review of these assets is needed as part of the Estate Improvement Plans (section 5.2). It has been several years since such a review took place and a member noted that at the time, several sites were treated as a virtual site. The Panel suggest that the City Council goes back through this cycle again and that the Strategy makes specific mention of garages.

The Panel agreed to:

- Support the Housing Asset Management Strategy
- Recommend that making better use of garage assets should be explicitly included in the strategy
- To pre-scrutinise the upcoming Energy Strategy
- To seek further information about tenant involvement

12. HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMO) LICENSING SCHEME

The Environmental Health Service Manager and HMO Enforcement Team Leader introduced the report. The Chair noted that scrutiny members would like to have been involved earlier on in the process.

The Panel asked a number of questions including about; rates of compliance with conditions, information sharing with tenants, restrictions on new HMOs, legal limits on uses of income from HMOs, weekday tenants, children living in HMOs, and whether the City Council has any powers to limit rent increases and ensure longer tenures.

The Panel questioned whether there is more scope to incentivise good landlord practices and dis-incentivise bad landlord practices. The Panel heard that the City Council could look at lower charges for landlords who comply with the scheme and introducing a 'polluter pays' principle where landlords whose properties require more checks could contribute more to the cost of this. However, there is a fine balance and the scheme needs to remain self-funding. Fee structure options will be presented to Members in October.

The Panel also questioned whether the City Council has scope to introduce tougher penalties for non-compliance, for example when landlords seek to renew their HMO licence having failed to comply with the conditions of their previous licence. The Panel heard that the City Council is one of the toughest local authorities nationally in terms of enforcement but has scope to be tougher on non-compliance. The balance of activity is likely to shift somewhat from focusing on unlicensed HMOs towards ensuring greater compliance.

The Panel agreed:

- To support the HMO scheme and option 3 – renewing the HMO licensing scheme in its entirety for a further 5 years, noting that consideration should be given to appropriate incentives and disincentives for landlords, and to the balance between taking a more pro-active approach to

compliance whilst continuing efforts to extend the licensing scheme to cover more HMOs.

- To recommend that enforcement within the private rented sector is a corporate priority and that it is necessary to take a different approach to enforcement in different sectors.
- To review the proposed October report setting out the results of the statutory consultation and the proposed future of the licensing scheme, before it goes to the City Executive Board.
- To ask officers to look into a suggestion that HMO tenants should be entitled to free bulky item collections.
- To follow up on a question about controls over HMOs in the new Barton development with planning officers.
- That comparative data between investment levels in HMO stock compared to other sectors would be useful.

13. WORK PROGRAMME AND OPERATING ARRANGEMENTS

The Panel noted its work programme and agreed to add the following topics for further consideration:

- Tenant involvement
- Estate Improvement Plans

The Panel agreed to meet in private in early July to plan its work for the year ahead.

The Panel thanks Linda Hill for her time on the Panel and agreed to advertise the co-optee position to tenants and hold informal interviews with applicants over the summer.

14. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Noted.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.48 pm