

HOUSING PANEL (PANEL OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)

Thursday 5 December 2013

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Smith (Chair), 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), Tom Porter (Housing and Communities) and Dave Scholes (Housing and Communities)

30. WORK PROGRAMME AND REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel received an updated forward work programme. Pat Jones took the Panel through the programme and the following items were noted to be considered at the Panels meeting in January 2014:

- Temporary accommodation management arrangements
- No second night out detailed performance information
- Improving quality in the private rented sector – A City Council Letting Agency
- Satisfaction with Parks – Details of survey results

Estate regeneration

The Panel wished to see evidence of what capacity building within the Blackbird Leys community was underway, so that when the more formal engagement begun in spring 2014, people were ready to fully participate. The Panel also wished to understand what the engagement planned for 2014, would look like and that as well as engaging with the usual groups such as the Parish Council, other established groups for example the Football Club and the Bingo Group were also approached.

Asset Management Strategy – An Oxford Standard

The Panel noted comments concerning decent homes and was informed that the results of the Stock Condition Survey which was underway was awaited and these would inform the strategy.

31. HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN - REFRESH

The Panel received a report of the Head of Housing and Property which provided details of a refresh of the Action Plan for the second term of the Housing Strategy. This report was also to be considered by the City Executive Board at its meeting on 11th December 2013.

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

During the discussion the following comments/points were made:

Objective 2 – Prevent Homelessness

- How did the risk of an increase in homelessness levels due to welfare reforms etc. fit with the key action of re-modelling hostel accommodation to incorporate assessment centre, new referral and move on pathways?

Objective 3 – Addressing the housing needs of vulnerable people and communities

- The Persons Person Housing Guide was to be printed and detailed the property and the various options that were available. The Guide would be available in hard copy and on-line. A copy would also be sent to Panel Members.
- Acknowledgement of the pressures on temporary accommodation and hostel places. At the end of November 2013, there were 116 people in temporary/hotel accommodation, and that a possible 20-30 households, could become homeless in the short term. There was a large risk associated with the none-statutory homeless due to possible cuts in the County Council budgets and this was to be discussed further at the Health Improvement Board in January 2014.
- Properties in the AHP Programme will be a mixture of affordable and social rent. The split will be approximately 70% social and 30% affordable.

Objective 4 – Improve housing conditions

- It was acknowledged that solid wall properties such as those on the Donnington estate were hard to insulate and that a pilot was to be conducted on a number of properties to see the effect of the insulation and the cost per property. A budget of £250k was available for this.
- The Stock Condition Survey as part of the Asset Management Strategy would be broad and include work on specific property types, regeneration and an Oxford Standard.
- That the implementation of a new Landlord and Lettings Agencies Accreditation Scheme be publicised as widely as possible to achieve the greatest impact and that the number of Landlords in the scheme be maximised.

The Panel agreed:

- (1) To send the following recommendation to the City Executive Board:

That the implementation of a new Landlord and Lettings Agencies Accreditation Scheme be publicised as widely as possible to achieve the

greatest impact and that the number of Landlords in the scheme be maximised.

- (2) That Councillor Sam Hollick would represent the Panel at the City Executive Board meeting on 11th December 2013 and present the recommendation.

32. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY FOR ALLOCATIONS

The Panel received a report from the Allocations Manager, Tom Porter, which provided a summary of the communication plan for the new Allocations Scheme.

Tom Porter attended the meeting and introduced the report.

In response to questions Tom Porter confirmed that the scheme would go live on 12th December 2013 and that letters would be sent out week commencing 9th December 2013. He added that information on the property type and size of the property would be available via the Councils website.

During the discussion it was suggested:

- Officers could give a talk about the Allocations Scheme at each of the Children's Centres.
- Members would benefit from having a better understanding of the Housing Register, possibly in the form of a Members Briefing.

Councillor Smith felt that as long as people registered themselves on the Housing Register, it provided a record of housing need, no matter how slight. In response Dave Scholes said that the Register showed more about demand than housing need.

33. STAR SURVEY BENCHMARKS AND METHODOLOGY

The Panel received a note which detailed a number of performance indicators results obtained via the STAR Survey.

Gary Parsons, Housing Strategy and Performance Manager, introduced the information. He said that the results gave a "flavour" of where the Council was currently at as the survey results for 2013 still required validating as some authorities still had to supply the data.

During the discussion the following comments/points were made:

- Satisfaction questionnaires did not necessarily give a true reflection of satisfaction. The only way to achieve an accurate view was to approach tenants' direct.
- The results could be better produced with more explanatory text and show the number of tenants in each Ward.

The Panel agreed:

- (1) To revisit the STAR Survey results at its meeting in February or March 2014 depending on when the 2013 validation is complete;
- (2) That when the validated results come back to the Panel, details of how they will be used to improve the offer etc. to tenants in Oxford is also provided;
- (3) That the Panel be supplied with a demographic breakdown of the results.

34. PROGRAMME DETAILS PRODUCING RESULTS FOR PERFORMANCE INDICATORS HC016, NI154 AND NI155

The Panel received a note which provided information on the number of performance indicators which related to increasing housing supply. A further update to the previously circulated information on affordable housing supply and tenures and bed sizes was also circulated at the meeting.

Gary Parsons, Housing Strategy and Performance Manager introduced the item and took the Panel through the results.

During the discussion the Panel was informed that the target, which was set by the Council, was being reviewed. There was a high degree of certainty that targets for 2014/14 and 2015/16 would be met, however from 2017/18 onwards, these were indicative as the number of sites identified for housing in private ownership increased. The amount of land in Council ownership that could be developed was decreasing.

The Panel asked for a breakdown on the sites that had been identified, location, size, number of units etc.

35. CURRENT RENT ARREARS PROFILES

The Panel received a report of the Head of Customer Services, which provided an update on the performance of the Rents Team.

The Panel decided to defer consideration of the report to its January 2014 meeting as the Board Member, Councillor Susan Brown was unable to attend, and to allow Panel further time to consider the reports contents.

36. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Panel approved the note of its meeting held on 4th November 2013.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.50 pm