

HOUSING PANEL (PANEL OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)

Friday 7 February 2014

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Sanders, McCready and Hollick.

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: Mathew Metcalfe (Democratic and Electoral Services) and Pat Jones (Principal Scrutiny Officer) and Gary Parsons (Housing and Property)

44. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from the Chair (Councillor Val Smith).

45. WORK PROGRAMME AND REPORT BACK ON RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel received an updated forward work programme and a report detailing responses to comments and recommendations made at its previous meeting on 15th January 2014.

The Panel agreed:

- (b) To note the response from Councillors Ed Turner and Scott Seamons, who accepted the Panel's recommendation concerning an Oxford City Council Lettings Agency.
- (a) Regarding the Parks Satisfaction Survey to:
 - (1) Note the responses received from the Head of Leisure, Parks and Communities;
 - (2) To welcome site visits to parks in the City;
 - (3) Request that the Head of Leisure, Parks and communities provide the Panel with the results of the 2013 Parks Satisfaction Survey
 - (4) Note that the Panel Members wished to consider further why despite the additional funding and improvement to the Parks, the satisfaction levels had not increased;
 - (5) Invite Councillor Mark Lygo as the Board Member for Parks to a future meeting of the Panel to discuss the issue of Parks satisfaction further.

46. STAR TENANTS' SURVEY - VALIDATED RESULTS

The Panel received a report of the Head of Housing and Property Services (previously circulated, now appended) which provided information on the outcomes of the STAR survey 2013 and details of how this information would be used to improve the offer to tenants in Oxford.

Gary Parsons, Housing Strategy and Performance Manager attended the meeting and introduced the report. He highlighted that the main area of dissatisfaction was across the younger age groups.

Councillor Gill Sanders felt that the overall response rate was very low and highlighted as an example one area with 951 tenancies had a response rate of only 81. She felt that the true picture of tenant satisfaction was not being seen. She added that more work was needed to make contact with tenants which tended to happen when there were Estate Managers, but now it seemed that the Council was more detached from the tenants.

Linda Hill felt that incentives to encourage tenants to complete surveys should be considered and maybe focussing on a particular area of the City rather than the City as a whole.

Councillor Stuart McCready supported the idea of Estate Managers, but asked by was the survey so unattractive to tenants that they did not complete it.

Councillor Scott Seamons said that made the tenants felt that the questions were not relevant and not engaging and so more thought should be given to ones that related more to the tenants and their everyday experiences.

Councillor Sam Hollick felt that increased tenant participation and a greater Officer presence on the ground would go some way to increasing satisfaction. He added that maybe the age of those that responded should be cross-referenced with the results of the stock condition survey.

Looking at the suggestions on what can be done with the survey results, the Panel liked the idea visiting another organisation that had received a higher satisfaction level.

The Panel agreed:

- (a) To welcome and be part of the planned neighbourhood walkabouts in Oxford;
- (b) To welcome a visit to another organisation with a higher tenant satisfaction result and to ask Officers to look into this in liaison with the Chair.

47. OUTCOME FROM THE REVIEW OF THE MUTUAL EXCHANGE PROCESS

Pat Jones said that the Panel while looking at the occupancy rate of the housing stock, had also discussed the allocation and transfer process and from this came a more detailed look into the mutual exchange process.

Pat Jones had worked with Linda Hill and together they had:

- Spoken with tenants at the start of the process, in the process and had come through the process
- Attended “speed dating” events
- Spoken with Officers who managed the process

From the above they had found:

- Very few tenants knew of the Home Swapper Scheme used by the Council, and when they did this was only after they had registered for a mutual exchange.
- Tenants found the information inadequate and not kept up to date and the administration seemed very cumbersome.
- Most tenants found an exchange themselves through for example social media.
- Tenants found the communication of milestones on their journey through the process was not very good.
- In the year 2012/13 there had been 93 exchanges and in the current year 2013/14 there had been 115 exchanges so far.
- Compensation for downsizing is only available through the transfer list.

Pat Jones said that a fuller report with recommendations would be submitted to the Panel at a future meeting.

The Panel agreed to thank Linda Hill and Pat Jones for their work and would await the report with recommendations.

48. PERFORMANCE MONITORING - HOUSING MEASURES - QUARTER 3

The Panel received details (previously circulated, now appended) of the set of performance indicators chosen by the Panel covering:

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

Pat Jones drew the Panel’s attention to CS002 (Customer Services – Time to process changes in circumstance) and said that the upward trend gave a reassurance that the process was improving.

The Panel agreed to note the latest performance indicators.

49. ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY - OXFORD STANDARD

Pat Jones informed the Panel of the current situation with the Stock Condition Survey which was due to be completed in March and form part of the Asset Management Strategy. She said that the Panel may want to:

- See the outcomes of the Stock Condition Survey
- Consider what the results say
- How these results form part of the overall Asset Management Strategy

Pat Jones suggested that the Panel might wish to work with the Tenants Scrutiny Panel on the possibility of an Oxford Standard. The Panel would still those be able to pre-scrutinise the Asset Management Strategy. She added that she had been in discussion with John McKinner who was working with the Tenants Panel.

The Panel agreed:

- (a) To note the update from Pat Jones
- (b) To welcome the opportunity to work with the Tenants Panel on the outcomes of the Stock Condition Survey and the possible establishing of an Oxford Standard.

50. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Panel approved the notes of its meeting held on 15th January 2014.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.35 pm