

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

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Thursday 8 October 2015

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Sanders, Hollick, Wade, Smith (Chair), Benjamin and Henwood.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer), Adrian Chowns (Team Leader HMO Enforcement Team), Martin Shaw and Ian Wright (Environmental Development)

10. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Geno Humphrey, Councillor Rowley, Councillor Price and Stephen Clarke (Martin Shaw stood in for Stephen Clarke).

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

12. HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION (HMO) LICENSING

The HMO Enforcement Team Leader introduced the report and summarised the findings of the consultation. He advised that the proposed changes to the additional licensing scheme for HMOs included the introduction of 5 year licenses for accredited landlords, and changes in fees that would reduce costs for compliant landlords and increase costs for non-compliant landlords. The scheme had been making a difference to the standards of HMOs in the city but there was more to do to improve conditions in this sector.

The Panel asked a number of other questions, including about; the impacts and fairness of the scheme on families that wanted to take in more than two lodgers and on weekday lodgers who worked in the city, the problem of bidding was created by agents, whether longer licenses could lead to a drop in standards, what happens if landlords breach their license, whether the finances of the scheme were sustainable, whether there was a public register of HMOs, the validity of various points raised by the Residential Landlords Association, and the types of landlords operating in the city.

The Panel questioned whether there was an opportunity to build additional security for tenants into the scheme, such as longer tenures and rent level

guarantees. The Panel suggested that longer tenancies could encourage tenants to take more care of HMO properties and could help to address other issues often associated with HMOs, such as unkempt gardens. The Panel heard that it was unlikely that these controls could be built into the licensing scheme for legal reasons. It was suggested that there may be an opportunity to influence the market by including these as discretionary criteria within the Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

The Panel noted that each household was entitled to two free bulky waste collections per year but that many tenants of HMOs were unable to access these because the free collections were used by landlords, and were often required to pay for bulky waste collections. The Panel suggested that the City Council looks at ways of addressing this issue, possibly through changing waste collection policy in relation to HMOs or by encouraging landlords to pay for tenants' bulky waste collections.

The Panel also AGREED that the following comments should be referred to the City Executive Board on 15 October:

1. That the Housing Panel restated its support for the additional licensing scheme for HMOs;
2. That the Housing Panel welcomed the success of the consultation and that officers should be commended for the high level and quality of engagement achieved.

The Panel AGREED that the following recommendations should be made to the City Executive Board on 15 October 2015:

1. That the City Council should encourage landlords and agents offer longer term tenancies and rent level guarantees, and explore the option of including these as discretionary criteria within the Landlord Accreditation Scheme.
2. That the City Council should consider whether there is anything that can be done to address the inequity whereby many tenants living in HMOs are unable to access free bulky waste collections.

13. ARRANGEMENTS TO FACILITATE THE FITTING OF SOLAR PANELS

The Property Services Manager introduced the report which requests project approval to fit solar panels on some of the Council's housing stock. The Panel heard that feed in tariffs would reduce dramatically in the New Year but that the Low Carbon Hub was exploring ideas to make the best of the situation and find a viable model for proceeding with this scheme. The arrangements would need to be clear that any risk would be borne by the Hub. The Panel heard that the proposals would not benefit the Council directly but would assist some Council tenants through reduced fuel bills and would contribute to the wider low carbon agenda.

The Panel noted regret that a previous scheme had been cancelled several years ago and that the current report set out a better approach to the fitting of solar panels on Council-owned housing stock. The Panel asked questions about

timescales, tenants' consent, the financial model of the Hub and the Council's own financial investments in solar panels.

In response to a question, the Panel heard that some properties had been lined up and could potentially be fitted before the level of the feed in tariff was reduced.

The Panel AGREED that the following recommendation should be made to the City Executive Board on 15 October 2015:

1. That the City Council should make every effort to enter into a viable agreement with the Low Carbon Hub as soon as possible in order to maximise the available benefits of fitting solar panels on Council-owned housing stock.

14. HOUSING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel noted that some decisions that were due to be taken by the City Executive Board in November had slipped and AGREED to cancel the additional meeting that had been scheduled for 5 November 2015.

15. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Panel approved the notes of the meeting held on 3 September 2015.

16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Panel noted that as the 5 November meeting had been cancelled, the next meeting would be held on 10 December 2015.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.25 pm

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