

HOUSING PANEL (PANEL OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)

Thursday 9 October 2014

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Sanders, Hollick and Wade.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Bill Graves (Housing Services), Gary Parsons, Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer), Tanya Bandekar and Helen Bishop (Head of Customer Services)

61. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councillor Hollick was elected Chair.

62. APOLOGIES

Linda Hill sent her apologies.

63. WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was noted.

64. PERFORMANCE MONITORING (HOUSING MEASURES)

The following points were noted in relation to housing performance measures:

HC016 – Assurances were received that there were no adverse funding implications as a result of slippage.

CA001 – A fuller response could be provided on the causes of phase 1 slippage on the Barton development.

NI154 – There was no reason to believe that developers were stockpiling land. Delays were due to the availability of materials but delivery was generally picking up.

NI155 – Officers provided clarity about which figures related to affordable rents and which figures included other affordable tenures such as shared ownership.

HC014 – The Panel questioned the homelessness figures.

CS005 – The Panel welcomed efforts to improve the time taken to process new benefit claims and the introduction of a new electronic form. The Panel received assurances that paper forms would remain in place for the time being.

65. DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY

Panel Members were encouraged to contribute to the consultation, which runs from 22 October 2014 until 1 December 2014.

The consultation questions (and the list of specific groups to be consulted with) will be circulated to Panel Members for their input before being finalised.

The Panel agreed to review the Council's Private Rented Sector Strategy when this has been developed.

66. RENT ARREARS ANALYSIS AND PROFILES

The Panel heard that Rent Arrears performance is ahead of target. The collection rate has improved despite more people now managing their own benefits.

A tracing service is being used to obtain the contact details of former tenants but this is not a debt collection agency.

The Panel queried the rise in average arrears for phase 3 direct payment cases. This response was received following the meeting:

The 11 cases in rent arrears is out of a total of 145 tenants that were transferred to direct payments in the third phase.

We have had five tenants that have switched back to receiving their housing benefit as a credit to their rent account due to not being able to sustain payments.

The reason for the overall increase in arrears was that two tenants were unable to pay their monthly payment at the end of the month. The team have contacted the two tenants and both accounts have reduced their rent arrears to previous month's levels as a result.

The Panel heard that the City Council is on track to spend all its Discretionary Housing Payment money, although this was also the case at the same stage last year.

The Panel questioned what level of support tenants receive with the process of arrears escalations. Officers advised that personal contact is proactively made with tenants throughout the process, and agreed to provide case studies in a future Rent Arrears Report.

67. LEASEHOLDER PAYMENT OPTIONS FOR MAJOR WORKS

The Panel were satisfied that the framework set out in the report is sensible and fair, and fully endorse this.

Members noted that there is no provision for leaseholders to pay into a sinking fund to cover the cost of major works. To introduce a sinking fund now for existing leaseholders would involve changing the terms of all leases, while establishing a sinking fund for new leaseholders would create a new level of administration but with few benefits to start with, so there isn't a strong case for doing this.

68. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Panel approved the notes of the meetings held in April 2014.

69. FUTURE MEETING DATES

An additional Housing Panel meeting has been scheduled for 10 December 2014.

The meeting started at 5.00pm and ended at 6.20pm