

HOUSING PANEL (PANEL OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)

Wednesday 10 December 2014

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Sanders, Hollick, Wade, Hill and Smith.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer), Alison Dalton and Martin Shaw

70. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

71. HOUSING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME

The work programme was noted.

The Panel was advised that there is capacity to add additional items to the 24 March meeting.

72. ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY - COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK

The Housing Panel considered the Asset Management Strategy – Council Housing Stock at its public meeting on 10 December 2014. The Committee would like to thank Martin Shaw and Allison Dalton for assisting this wide-ranging discussion.

The Housing Panel support the Strategy and the direction of travel it provides.

The Panel reviewed what the strategy says about void property repairs and felt that the wording on page 13 could be stronger than 'encourage tenants to leave their home in a good state of repair'. Members sought assurances that the City Council does all it can within the resources available to ensure that houses are in good condition when left vacant. The Panel recognises that the City Council would not want to hold deposits, and that recharges can be difficult to recover after the event, so the focus should be on working with tenants prior to properties becoming vacant.

The panel discussed heating and ventilation and noted that where new heating systems are installed, it is vital that residents are shown how to use them correctly. It was also noted that agencies such as Age UK advise older residents to keep their windows closed. The Panel sought assurances that the City Council works closely with such partners to ensure consistency of such communications.

Members questioned how widespread the problem of mould is across the Council's housing stock. Members commented that it has been known for mould to be painted over and sought assurances that this was not common practice.

The Panel recognise the need to make better use of the Council's existing housing stock and questioned whether information about the National Home Swap scheme is made available to tenants who are under-occupying.

Officers agreed to look into issues with night light systems that have installed in communal areas.

The Housing Panel will monitor delivery against the aims set out in the strategy. The panel will also consider the Council's Energy Strategy, Private Sector Housing Policy and its approach to under-occupancy in due course.

73. OLDER PERSONS HOUSING REVIEW

The Housing Panel considered a briefing on the Older Persons Housing Review at its public meeting on 10 December 2015. The Panel would like to thank Allison Dalton for supporting this item.

The Panel recognised that surveying older residents to understand their housing requirements should be done with a high degree of sensitivity. Face to face surveys would therefore be more preferable than online or written surveys.

The Panel supports the idea of involving Oxford Brookes University in conducting the face to face surveys. Tenant volunteers should also be utilised as they can provide a valuable and familiar link to older tenants.

The Housing Panel came to the view that City Council should be seeking to maximise the possible future benefits of conducting a review into housing for older people by expanding the scope of the project to include older people living in privately-owned or rented accommodation.

The Panel commented that the timescale for the project seemed short, even with the existing scope. The Panel is in favour of a longer and deeper review and feel that appropriate resources should be allocated to delivering this.

The Panel recognised that many older residents will not want to move in any circumstances. While seeking to survey as many older residents as possible, the panel felt that there is potentially a lot of value in understanding the requirements of those who are approaching older age. This can better inform longer term planning.

The Panel also commented that where single older tenants are under-occupying and would consider moving, there is a lack of suitable accommodation available for them to move in to. The panel noted that the new units being developed at Barton are predominantly 2 and 3 bedroom accommodation.

The Panel agreed that elected members should have the opportunity to be involved in overseeing this project and recommend the establishment of a member steering group.

The Panel agreed to monitor progress after 3 months and to consider the findings of the review.

74. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Panel noted the notes of its meeting on 9 October 2014.

75. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Panel noted that an additional meeting has been scheduled for 24 March 2015.

The meeting started at 4.15 pm and ended at 6.20 pm