

**OVERVIEW SCRUTINY GROUP
8TH MAY 2017**

PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor Smidowicz)
The Vice-chair (Councillor Bebbington)
Councillors Bradshaw, Capleton, Gerrard, Parsons and
Sutherland

Chief Executive
Strategic Director of Housing, Planning, Regeneration and
Regulatory Services
Head of Strategic Support
Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing
Head of Planning and Regeneration
Principal Planning Officer
Democratic Services Officer (NA)

101. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Group held on 10th April 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

102. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

No disclosures were made.

103. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations were made.

104. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURES 11.16

No questions had been submitted.

105. AWARD OF INSURANCE CONTRACT

A report of the Head of Strategic Support to seek authority to award the Council's insurance contracts when the current contract expires on the 31st May 2017 was considered (item 6A on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Strategic Support assisted with consideration of the item and gave the following responses to the issues raised:

- (i) The Group was assured that the savings incurred would cover the costs of hiring a broker to offer advice on the contracts.
- (ii) The Council was covered to make retrospective claims if needed under the insurance cover.

- (iv) The Group was advised that the savings for years two and three going forward were projected to be similar as the savings for year one and would also be based on any claims made in year one.
- (v) The proposed insurance contract would cover the Council's housing stock, under the material damage, property criteria. Tenants were encouraged to obtain their own contents insurance for their belongings in the property.
- (vi) There was the ability for the Council to settle insurance claims itself providing the claims were within the excess limit set.
- (vii) The Group commented that they were pleased with the approach taken on the 50% price and 50% quality and noted that the cheapest bid had not been chosen as a matter of course, which was due to it not meeting the criteria.
- (viii) The criteria for selecting the insurance contract in 2016/17 were different as no two years are the same in terms of requirements so it would be difficult to compare 2016/17 with this year.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be informed that the Group supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Head of Strategic Support.

Reason

Having considered the report and asked questions of the Head of Strategic Support on the matter, the Group concluded that it would be appropriate to approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

106. HOUSING SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT

A report of the Head of Planning and Regeneration to seek the adoption of the Housing Supplementary Planning Document was considered (item 6B on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Planning and Regeneration and the Principal Planning Officer assisted with the consideration of the item and gave the following responses to the issues raised:

- (i) The definition of affordable housing was set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and related to rented homes with a registered provider acting as the landlord and referred to the type of home rather than in relation to the price of the property. The current definition may change though subject to advice/ information from the government.
- (ii) The space and sizes of properties was discussed as the Group thought guidelines should be included in the document but were informed it was a policy issue which was outside the scope of the SPD which must be limited to existing policy only.
- (iii) The Group discussed the 20% threshold level for HMO's which was introduced in the current Supplementary Planning Document (2007) as they felt it was too high. Their concern was that this percentage level appeared to be un-evidenced and questioned why it couldn't be a lower figure, for example 15% or

10%. They were advised that the threshold had been agreed following consultation on the current SPD and 20% had been identified as a reasonable level of HMO saturation in a neighbourhood. The Group questioned the evidence but were assured that the 20% level had been defended in planning appeals during the last ten years.

(iv) The Group discussed the increase in the number of students living in Loughborough since the introduction of the 20% threshold and the current SPD in 2007 and whether student accommodation subsequently provided on the university campus had reduced the number of HMO's. The Group was advised that any proposed on campus accommodation was likely to reduce the level of HMO's as students were encouraged to remain onsite.

(v) The car parking surveys used for the SPD to evidence HMO planning applications were completed during evenings, weekends and term time to capture "peak times" for parking. The Group felt this had not taken into account problems that occurred during the day time with student parking and also the problems created for traffic control. The Group was advised that parking issues tended to arise during peak times and the SPD sought to capture evidence to assist with decisions being made, taking into account concerns raised by the local residents. The Group felt that on street parking was a barrier to public transport and could cause problems for emergency vehicles trying to access properties. They were advised that the Highway Authority would provide guidance on parking in relation to each planning application.

(vi) There were concerns about some developer's proposals that were not required to provide affordable housing and because of their small scale a lack of cohesion in areas where different developers were building. The Group was advised that with one developer it was possible to create a more cohesive development but with more developers involved that became more difficult.

(vii) The approach to the Housing Cascade policy was discussed as there was concern it could be abused by developers. The Group questioned whether any of the money secured by section 106 agreements could be used to buy properties in the area but was informed that there was already a scheme in place for this, although the take up was thought to be minimal.

(viii) The Group was advised that Viability Appraisals were subject to independent analysis despite applicants being able to request some confidentiality under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

(ix) The use of some wording in relation to the design and layout of affordable housing was criticised as not being appropriate. The Group was advised that it was included in the Core Strategy policy which set out the Council's expectations in relation to design as it was an increasing priority by the government. There was also support from the Plans Committee who were ambassadors of high quality design properties and had refused planning applications previously on the basis of poor quality and design. It was noted that there had been a move by developers to meet the needs of community more which it was felt was also due to the Core Strategy being adopted.

(x) The current Supplementary Housing Document was identified to be considerably out of date in a number of areas, specifically the student housing in Loughborough and new government policy required new guidance to be created. The Group was advised that the SPD would be considered for inclusion with the local plan which was scheduled to be adopted by the end of 2019. It was also unlikely that the document would remain unchanged given the government's priority in housing and the likelihood of more policy changes going forward.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be informed that the Group supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Head of Planning and Regeneration, although serious concern still remained regarding the licensing guidelines for HMO's in the area.

Reason

Having considered the report and asked questions of the Head of Planning and Regeneration and the Principal Planning Officer on the matter, the Group concluded that it would be appropriate to approve the recommendations as set out in the report but to include their serious concerns regarding the licensing of HMO's in the area.

107. LIGHTBULB SERVICE MODEL

A report of the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing presenting the Lightbulb Business Case was considered (item 6C on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing and the Strategic Director of Housing Planning Regeneration and Regulatory Services assisted with the consideration of the item and gave the following responses to the issues raised:

(i) It was confirmed that there would be a team of staff working at the Central Hub, with the focus on building resilience within the team so that individuals could cover different areas if required and ensure continued service for customers.

(ii) The value of the service was identified for the customer as they would receive a more streamlined service. They would be fewer "hand offs", rather one dedicated worker would identify the customer's needs and signpost them to the right services. There would also be a standard level of service across the county.

(iii) The Council currently delivers the Disabled Facilities Grant aspect of the Lightbulb Service which would be administered across the county with the other services available.

(iv) There were concerns by the Group over the financial investment the Council would need to contribute. They were advised that there were no further set up costs but the funding was to cover the running of the service. There was also a concern about the long term investment and the lack of information regarding the liability should the project end.

(v) The service model was commended by the Group as they acknowledged it could provide a better service for the customer but there were subsequent concerns raised about the financial investment and risk to the Council of joining the service.

(vi) The current satisfaction level for the DFG was around 90% so there was a concern that if the Council joined the service they would lose some control over how the service was administered. The Group was advised that there was an option to have a Locality team based in Charnwood and therefore keep the service delivery at Charnwood.

(vii) There was also a concern when the Group was advised that although other Council's had agreed to join the partnership not one had yet implemented the scheme to see whether it worked. Therefore there was no existing evidence for the business case.

(viii) A further concern was raised due to the lack of information in the business case. The Group felt that additional information was ideally needed but was advised it was not available.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be informed that the Group supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing but highlighted concerns as mentioned in the comments, particularly in relation to the financial risk and the risks associated with the lack of IT system to support the service.

Reason

Having considered the report and asked questions of the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing on the matter, the Group concluded that it would be appropriate to approve the recommendations as set out in the report but formally record their concerns about the project for consideration by Cabinet.

108. OVERVIEW SCRUTINY GROUP PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY – CABINET RESPONSE

A report of the Cabinet was considered setting out its responses to the recommendations of the Group on pre-decision scrutiny items (item 7 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

RESOLVED that the Cabinet's responses to the Group's recommendations be noted.

Reason

The Group was satisfied that it added value where appropriate and welcomed the Cabinet's consideration of the Group's views and recommendations as part of its decision making process.

The meeting concluded at 8.35pm with the work programme item not completed.

NOTES:

1. No reference may be made to these minutes at the Council meeting on 22nd May 2017 unless notice to that effect is given to the Democratic Services Manager by five members of the Council by noon on the fifth working day following publication of the minutes.
2. These minutes are subject to confirmation as a correct record at the next meeting of the Group.