

**POLICY SCRUTINY GROUP  
25TH APRIL 2017**

PRESENT: Councillor Seaton (Chair)  
Councillor Sharp (Vice-chair)  
Councillors Brookes, K. Harris, Jones, Murphy, Page, Paling  
and Smith  
Councillor Harper-Davies attended in relation to item 6

Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing  
Landlord Services Manager  
Democratic Services Manager  
Democratic Services Officer (NA)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Parton

41. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th February 2017 were confirmed and signed as a correct record of the meeting.

42. DISCLOSURES OF PECUNIARY AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

No disclosures of interest were made.

43. DECLARATIONS OF THE PARTY WHIP

No declarations of the existence of the Party Whip were made.

44. QUESTIONS UNDER SCRUTINY COMMITTEE PROCEDURES 11.17

No questions had been submitted.

45. CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

A report of the Head of Landlord Services, enabling the Group to review the draft Customer Engagement Strategy 2017–2020, was submitted (item 6 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Landlord Services Manager and Councillor Harper-Davies, the Lead Member for Housing Landlord Services, attended the meeting to assist with consideration of the item. The following comments were made by the Group:

- (i) Customer engagement was an issue tenants were concerned about. It was unclear how the actions identified in the strategy would develop customer engagement and how the outcomes of the strategy would be measured. In particular how tenants would be more engaged in 2020

than they were in 2017. The Group was assured that the action plan would be monitored for both outcomes and impacts and that as it was a working document additional actions could be considered during the period of the strategy.

- (ii) The Group commented about some of the wording in the document as it felt it did not convey the right meaning. The Group was advised that their comments about some of the wording in the document would be considered.

## **RESOLVED**

1. that the report, and the draft strategy, be noted;
2. that the comments made by the Group be considered in preparing the final version of the strategy.

### Reasons

1. To acknowledge the information received.
2. To acknowledge the views of the Group as part of the consultation on the draft strategy.

## 46. CHOICE BASED LETTINGS ALLOCATION POLICY

A report of the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing, to review the proposed changes to the Choice Based Lettings Allocation Policy, was submitted (item 7 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing assisted with consideration of the item and outlined a number of possible proposed changes to the Group with the following responses:

### *(a) The inclusion of private rented properties in the Choice Based Lettings scheme*

The Group felt that this was a positive step to make available more properties to residents. There was a concern that private rented properties would not meet the same standard as the Council's but were assured that work would be undertaken with landlords to ensure the properties met the required standard for letting. There was a concern that private rented properties did not offer the same type of security for residents but were advised that private rented properties could already be used to discharge homeless cases and with the proposed changes in the Housing White Paper for private rented tenancies to be for a period of 3 years and Council tenancies to be for a fixed term, security in a property would be the same.

*(b) Separate list of residents and properties for those with the need for adapted properties*

The Group agreed to this suggestion, although there was some concern that people would have to take the property due to the adaptations and their choice was being reduced. The Group was advised that applicants would still have the choice to bid for properties but would be made aware of the adapted properties they could bid for in order to make the best use of the Council's housing stock.

*(c) Exclusions from the waiting list: people in the Low band*

The Group was concerned that excluding people who had no real need to move (as they were using the system as a safety net) could result in people returning once their situation had worsened, therefore creating more work. The Group concluded that they would want to keep the Low band and keep the people on the waiting list.

*(d) Exclusions from the waiting list due to housing related debt*

The Group discussed the current policy of applicants needing to adhere to a payment plan for 12 weeks to show they could manage their debts. There was a discussion about whether to extend the time period but it was agreed it should be kept at 12 weeks. The Group was concerned that applicants who had extenuating reasons for building up debt, for example due to the bedroom tax, would be prevented from moving or downsizing. The Group was advised that there were incentives and priority given to applicants wanting to downsize due to the demand for family accommodation.

*(e) Exclusions from the waiting list due to anti-social behaviour*

The Group was asked if they thought there should be a time scale on exclusions for anti-social behaviour or criminal convictions and the time frame in which people can reapply if they had been excluded. The Group questioned the difference between people who had been convicted and had been released from prison and those who had been evicted from their property due to ASB or criminal convictions. There was a suggestion to take advice on any restrictions from the Police or other regulatory bodies. The Group agreed with this suggestion and there was a consensus that applications should be looked at on a case by case basis.

*(f) Exclusions for applicants who have worsened their own circumstances*

The Group was provided with some examples of applicants who had deliberately given money away or sold properties and then sought accommodation from the Council although they previously had the financial means to secure their own accommodation. The Group was advised that there was a mixture of cases: some where there had been a deliberate act to

mislead and others where applicants did not have the capacity to understand their actions. It was therefore agreed that applications should be looked at on a case by case basis before making a decision.

*(g) Exclusions due to applicants not being able to sustain their own tenancy*

The Group was informed that it may be preferable to help applicants move into supported accommodation where suitable, rather than take on a tenancy which they could not maintain in the long term. The Group was satisfied that applicants would be identified who needed supported accommodation and therefore was in agreement with the suggestion.

*(h) Excluding applicants who have not actively bid on properties for the past 12 months*

The Group was in agreement that they wanted those applicants who had not actively bid on properties for the past 12 months to remain on the waiting list, like the applicants in the Low band, but agreed that the focus should be on applicants with an urgent need to move.

*(i) Excluding applicants currently on an introductory or probationary tenancy*

The Group was in agreement about this suggestion.

*(j) Excluding applicants with the financial means to rent their own property on the open market*

The Group was advised of applicants with the finances available to afford to either rent or buy their own property, although they were advised of the Council's allowance for people with a need for sheltered accommodation to be allowed to join the waiting list. The Group agreed that individual cases should be considered before an exclusion was made.

*(k) Increase the financial limits for household income*

The Group was informed of the proposal to change the exclusion level due to household income from £50,000 approximately to £60,000 to reflect the change in the current income levels in the area. The Group was in agreement with this proposed change.

*(l) Increasing the local connection criteria*

The Group was informed of the proposal to increase the length of time applicants had lived in the district to gain local connection to join the waiting list. Currently the length of time was 6 months but the Group was advised that the City and other local councils in the county had increased the length of time to 2 years to allow local residents to be given priority over people who had only recently moved to the area. The Group questioned the change for

armed service veterans and were advised of Government guidance which allowed priority to be given to those applicants. The Group agreed with the proposed change.

*(m) Changes to the current band system*

The proposed changes to the current band system would see the removal of the 2 Medium band needs moving applicants to the High band, which the Group agreed with. The time periods applicants could remain in a certain band and reviewing applicants who did not bid or were not successful in that time were discussed. The Group was concerned that applicants should be given a choice in where they wanted to live and were not forced to take properties. The Group agreed that cases should be reviewed when their time period ended before making a decision.

*(n) Changes to the age restrictions on properties*

The Group discussed the proposed changes to re-designate some of the older person accommodation due to increased need from younger applicants. The Group was concerned about the mix of residents this would create on sites as there had been some problems with families living with older residents. Therefore the Group did not agree with the proposed change. There was also a proposal to keep the bungalow accommodation as designated for applicants over 60 due to the demand for those properties. The Group agreed with this and also voiced its opinion about the need for more bungalows in the area.

*(o) Increasing the amount of move on agreements in place*

The Group agreed with the proposed changes to look at the current move on agreements in place between supported accommodation providers and the Council. The Group also agreed with nomination rights being part of the proposed agreement so that there was a benefit for the Council as well as the accommodation provider.

**RESOLVED**

1. that the report, and the presentation be noted;
2. that the comments made by the Group be taken into consideration in preparing the final version of the policy prior to its submission to the Cabinet.

Reasons

1. To acknowledge the information received.

2. To acknowledge the views of the Group as part of the consultation on the draft policy.

#### 47. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY 2017-2022

A report of the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing, to enable the Group to review the draft Empty Homes Strategy 2017-2022, was submitted (item 8 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing assisted with consideration of the item and provided the following responses to issues raised:

- (i) A total of 45 empty homes had been brought back into use since August 2016. Monitoring of this was undertaken as it was an indicator in the Business Plan, and that information could be included in the strategy.
- (ii) Work would be done to expand upon the content supporting objectives 3 and 4 in the document, which currently lacked detail. It was acknowledged that it was important that the public could report concerns about empty properties. The contact details of the Empty Homes Officer and details of how to report concerns through the Council's website would therefore also be included.
- (iii) The Empty Homes Scrutiny Panel had been provided with information about Empty Dwelling Management Orders.

The Group commended the overall content, design and layout of the strategy and in particular the action plan, which included outcomes that could be easily measured.

#### **RESOLVED**

1. that the report, and the draft strategy, be noted;
2. that the comments made by the Group be taken into consideration in preparing the final version of the strategy prior to its submission to the Cabinet;
3. **that it be recommended to the Scrutiny Management Board** that monitoring the action plan associated with the Empty Homes Strategy be added to the work programme of the Performance Scrutiny Panel after the final version of the strategy had been agreed by the Cabinet.

#### Reasons

1. To acknowledge the information received.
2. To acknowledge the views of the Group as part of the consultation on the draft strategy.

3. To enable monitoring of the action plan to take place.

48. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY

A report of the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing, setting out the proposed changes to the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy, was submitted (item 9 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing assisted with consideration of the item and provided the following responses to issues raised:

- (i) The Group was advised of the most significant changes to the policy, particularly to Discretionary Grants (as detailed in the report);
- (ii) The Group was advised that some of the changes were in response to the review of Partnership Grants as part of the Empty Homes Strategy and how to maximise the benefits of those grants;
- (iii) There would also be changes to make the policy clearer and easier to understand.

**RESOLVED** that the report, and proposed changes to the policy, be noted.

Reason

To acknowledge the information received.

49. PROGRESS WITH PANEL WORK

A report of the Head of Strategic Support, providing an update on the current position with scrutiny panels, was submitted (item 10 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager assisted with consideration of the item.

**RESOLVED** that the current position with scrutiny panels be noted.

Reason

To ensure that the Group was aware of the current position with scrutiny panels.

50. COUNCIL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

A report of the Head of Strategic Support, setting out the Council's forward programme of policies and strategies in order for the Group to identify potential items for future scrutiny, was submitted (item 11 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager assisted with consideration of the item.

## **RESOLVED**

1. that the report be noted;
2. **that it be recommended to the Scrutiny Management Board** that the following items be added to the Group's work programme:
  - Loughborough Town Centre Masterplan – to be scheduled for 11th July 2017
  - Regeneration Strategy – to be scheduled for 11th July 2017
  - Landlord Services ASB Policy – to be scheduled for either 26th September or 21st November 2017 as determined by the Chair and Vice-chair of the Group
  - the policy aspects of the HRA Business Plan (in particular the use of garage sites, the provision of bungalows, options for sheltered housing schemes and new-build housing) – to be scheduled for either 26th September or 21st November 2017 as determined by the Chair and Vice-chair of the Group;
3. that scrutiny of the Communications Strategy be included with the review of the Council's policies and procedures in relation to conducting surveys and consultation that was already scheduled for the Group's meeting on 11th July 2017.

### Reasons

1. To acknowledge the information received.
2. To enable the Group to scrutinise the strategies and policies in a timely manner.
3. To complement the existing work programme item and produce a more comprehensive outcome.

## 51. WORK PROGRAMME

A report of the Head of Strategic Support, enabling the Group to consider its Work Programme and propose to the Scrutiny Management Board any additions, deletions and amendments as appropriate, was submitted (item 12 on the agenda filed with these minutes).

The Democratic Services Manager assisted with consideration of the item.

## RESOLVED

1. that the decisions taken by the Scrutiny Management Board and the Chair and Vice-chair in respect of the Group's Work Programme be noted;
2. **that it be recommended to the Scrutiny Management Board** that scrutiny of the mid-cycle review of the Housing Strategy be included in the Group's Work Programme and scheduled for the Group's meeting on 26th September 2017;
3. that the current position with the Group's Work Programme be noted.

## Reasons

1. To acknowledge the decisions that had been made.
2. To enable the Group to provide scrutiny input into the review.
3. To make the Group aware of the current position with its Work Programme.

## NOTE:

These minutes are subject to confirmation as a correct record at the next ordinary meeting of the Group.