

**EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL
HELD ON TUESDAY, 7 AUGUST 2012
IN COMBINED COMMITTEE ROOMS 1 & 2 - CIVIC OFFICES
AT 5.30 - 8.16 PM**

Members Present: S Murray (Chairman), A Mitchell MBE (Vice-Chairman), K Chana, Ms J Hart, Ms H Kane, L Leonard and Ms G Shiel

Other members present: P Spencer, D Stallan, G Waller and C Whitbread

Apologies for Absence: Mrs S Jones and Hyde

Officers Present A Hall (Director of Housing), P Pledger (Assistant Director (Property and Resources)), M Gammack (Housing Repairs Manager) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

20. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

There were no substitute members present.

21. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Member's Code of Conduct.

22. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the last meeting of the Panel held on 28 June 2012 be agreed.

23. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Panel's Terms of Reference and Work Programme were noted.

24. REPAIRS MANAGEMENT CONTRACT PRESENTATION - 1 YEAR ON

The Panel received a presentation from the Assistant Director of Housing (Property) and Mr M Gammack, Housing Repairs Manager, representing Mears regarding the Repairs Management Contract.

In May 2011, following an EU procurement exercise, the Council let an innovative "In-Sourcing" contract with Mears, as the External Repairs Management Company, whereby Mears manage the Council's own in-house Housing Repairs Service with the intention of delivering a step-change in performance and service for tenants.

The presentation concerned the improvement of management and services being delivered to tenants, delivery of 5 Key Deliverables, improvements in KPIs and Value for Money achievements over the first year of operation.

RESOLVED:

That the Repairs Management Contract Presentation – 1 Year On, be noted.

25. HOUSING SERVICE STANDARDS - PERFORMANCE REPORT 2011/12 AND REVIEW

The Panel received a report from the Director of Housing regarding Housing Service Standards – Performance 2011/12 Review.

In 2007, following consultation with the Panel and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the Housing Portfolio Holder agreed a range of Housing Service Standards and an updated Housing Charter. Subsequently a leaflet was issued to all the Council's tenants, setting out the agreed Housing Service Standards. It was also agreed that the Housing Directorate's performance against the Housing Service Standards should be considered annually.

It was emphasised that it was not possible to measure performance against every Service Standard as there was either nothing to measure or it was considered that the time and resources required for recording and monitoring was not warranted.

The Director of Housing had reviewed the Housing Service Standards with regard to performance in 2011/12, a number of changes were proposed including some new Service Standards. A number of the proposed changes resulted from the introduction of the Repairs Management Contract with Mears and the improvements that Mears and officers had already made to the Housing Repairs Service, particularly due to the introduction of Mears' own Repairs IT System.

The Panel endorsed the proposed changes and additions to the Housing Portfolio Holder for approval. It was also recommended that relevant leaflets should be updated at the appropriate time. It was suggested that performance against the service Standards was reviewed again in July/August 2013.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That performance against the Housing Service Standards in 2011/12 (where measured) be noted;
- (2) That subject to the views of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the proposed changes and additions to the Housing Service Standards be endorsed to the Housing Portfolio Holder, and that relevant leaflets be updated at an appropriate time; and
- (3) That the Housing Service Standards and performance against the Service Standards in 2012/13 be reviewed again in July/August 2013.

26. HOUSING STRATEGY 2009-12

The Panel received a report from the Director of Housing regarding the Housing Strategy 2009 – 2012 (12 Month Progress report on Key Action Plan 2011 – 2012, and New Key Action Plan 2012 – 2013).

The Panel noted that around 3-4 years earlier, it had approved for consultation a "Consultation Draft" Housing Strategy and a major Consultation exercise was undertaken with the Council's partners, key stakeholders and the public over a 3 month period. The exercise included a one day Housing Strategy Conference, to which all the consultees were invited. At its meeting in September 2009, the Council's Cabinet adopted the Housing Strategy 2009 – 2012.

The Strategy assessed the District's current and future housing needs, with regard to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, as well as taking account of national priorities. The strategy also included a Key Action Plan, which set out the proposed actions that would be taken by the Council to contribute towards the achievement of the housing objectives over the 3 years of the Housing Strategy. When adopting the Strategy, the Cabinet agreed that Key Action Plans should be produced and updated on an annual basis for approval by the Cabinet, and progress monitored on a 6 monthly basis by the Panel. Last year, the Cabinet adopted the third Key Action Plan for the Housing Strategy.

Although there was no legal or policy requirement, it was originally anticipated that the Housing Strategy would be updated during 2012, covering the following three years. However, following a recommendation from the Panel, in May 2012, the former Housing Portfolio Holder agreed that the production of the next Housing Strategy should be deferred for one year, and produced in 2013/14. This was because it was identified and acknowledged that there were a number of important issues that would be concluded by the Council over the following year, which would have a significant impact on the Housing Strategy. These issues included:

- (a) A refresh of the Council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA);
- (b) The production of the Council's Strategic Housing Land Assessment (SHLA), which would evaluate all of the proposed development sites in the District put forward by landowners and developers, through the "Call for Sites" Exercise;
- (c) The production of the Council's Draft Local Plan, which would set out the Council's proposed plans on the number and proposed location of new homes in the District; and
- (d) The Council's decisions on housing issues relating to the Localism Act, including a possible Local Eligibility Criteria for the Council's Housing Register and the possibility of the introduction of fixed term flexible tenancies by the Council, instead of "lifetime" secure tenancies.

The Panel also recommended that an updated Housing Strategy Key Action Plan for 2012/13 should be considered by the Panel, for recommendation to the Cabinet, and that progress with the updated Action Plan should be monitored on a six monthly basis by the Panel.

The Panel therefore reviewed the 12 Month Progress Report on the Housing Strategy's Key Action Plan 2011/12, and considered a Draft Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2012/13 for recommendation to the Cabinet.

RECOMMENDED:

- (1) That the 12 Month Progress Report on the Housing Strategy's Key Action Plan 2011/12 be noted; and

- (2) That the Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2012/13 be recommended to the Cabinet for adoption.

27. TENANT SATISFACTION SURVEY 2012

The Panel received a report from the Director of Housing regarding the Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2012.

Under the Government's previous Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) and National Indicator (NI) regime, it was a requirement for all registered providers of housing to undertake a Tenant Satisfaction Survey every two years and then submit a headline data to the Government through the BVPIs and NIs. All registered providers used a standard STATUS Survey Form, ensuring that they all asked the same questions to aid benchmarking.

Although there was no longer a requirement to undertake such surveys, or to be benchmarked with other landlords, members and officers considered it very important to understand the views of the Council's tenants.

The Housing Directorate had been a member of Housemark, a national housing benchmarking club, for many years. Housemark had devised a new standard tenant Satisfaction Survey Form, called STAR, for its members to use, in order to continue measuring tenant satisfaction and benchmark with other registered providers if they wished.

Accordingly, the Housing Directorate had once again commissioned Feedback Services, a well experienced, independent satisfaction survey service for social landlords, part-owned by the not-for-profit National Housing Federation, to undertake a Tenant Satisfaction Survey on behalf of the Council. The Council had last undertaken a Tenant Satisfaction Survey in 2008, but due to changes by the Government, the survey could only include general needs tenants, and excluded all sheltered housing tenants. This affected the figures and had caused some interpretation problems.

The questionnaire comprised 24 questions on four pages. Two individual mailings had taken place, the first sent on 12 March 2012. All questionnaires were returned to Feedback Services, after two weeks Feedback Services sent any tenant who had not responded, a second, full survey pack. The survey was held open one extra week as completed questionnaires were still being returned and finally closed on 20 April 2012. Incentives were used to boost the response rate. The overall response was very high at 49%, with 1,093 questionnaires returned from the 2,215 sent out, representing around 17% of all tenants. Overall, the tenant satisfaction was as follows:

- (a) The vast majority of the District Council tenants were satisfied with the services provided by the Council, and the overall rating was amongst the highest in the survey – 88%.
- (b) A higher percentage of sheltered tenants were highly satisfied with the Council's services (93%), compared with general needs tenants.
- (c) The overall rating for services (88%) from all tenants was 3% higher than the rating awarded in 2006 (85%).

(d) The overall rating for landlord services was 3% higher than the average found in Feedback Services' database.

However, Feedback Services had advised that it was important to note that neither of the two comparative datasets were representative of the housing sector, and should not be taken as an indication of any national average.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the headline findings of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey Report 2012 be noted; and

(2) That a report be presented to the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel later in the municipal year, providing a more representative comparison of results with other registered providers of housing.

28. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Panel Chairman said that he would brief the forthcoming Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Panel's recent work.

29. FUTURE MEETINGS

The Panel were advised that an extra-ordinary meeting of the Panel would be needed for discussing the Council's proposed Tenancy Policy. The meeting scheduled for 23 October 2012 would be left open for consideration of the Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme but an extra-ordinary meeting may also be required for consideration of this issue as well.

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