

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL
HELD ON MONDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2015
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 5.30 - 7.15 PM**

Members Present: S Murray (Chairman), Ms G Shiell (Vice-Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby, Mrs J Lea, C Roberts, Mrs J H Whitehouse and W Marshall (Tenants and Leaseholders Federation)

Other members present: D Stallan

Apologies for Absence: Mrs S Jones, B Rolfe and Mrs T Thomas

Officers Present A Hall (Director of Communities), S Devine (Private Sector Housing Manager) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

35. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

It was noted that there were no substitute Members present at the meeting.

36. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(a) Pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct, Councillor S Murray declared a personal non pecuniary interest in the following item of the agenda by virtue of his mother being a user of Careline. The Councillor indicated that he would remain in the meeting for the duration of the meeting and voting thereon:

(i) Item 7 Proposed Council Rent Increase and Increased Scheme Management and Careline Charges – 2015/16.

37. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

The Terms of Reference and Work Programme were noted.

38. NOTES OF THE LAST PANEL MEETINGS

The Panel received two sets of notes from their meetings held on 16 and 21 October 2014 for approval.

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Panel meetings held on 16 and 21 October 2014 be agreed, subject to amendments submitted as a supplementary item concerning the 21 October Panel meeting.

39. LANDLORD ACCREDITATION SCHEME

The Panel received a presentation regarding the Landlord Accreditation Scheme from the Private Housing Manager (Technical).

The Essex Landlord Accreditation Scheme (ELAS) was intended to raise standards in private sector rented accommodation. The Panel was advised that most private sector landlords have a very limited property portfolio, perhaps one or two properties, and the number of private landlords was currently unknown. The scheme encouraged private landlords to come forward, make themselves known and enhance their professionalism.

ELAS was a consortium of 8 Essex District Councils, including Epping Forest District Council, administered through Blue Watch a wholly owned trading company of the Chief Fire Officer's Association (CFOA) Blue Watch Ltd for 5 years. Membership was £95.00 per annum and once a landlord was registered their properties could be advertised free on the ELAS website, they could receive discounted property insurance, they would have access to free impartial advice and information and for landlords that have licenceable houses in multiple occupation (HMO), some councils including Epping would reduce the HMO licence fee by the annual subscription fee to ELAS of £95.00.

Despite the scheme being launched in September 2014 it had made slow progress with only two landlords having joined across Essex. It was hoped that with further publicity and exposure there would be an increase in membership. If the scheme was not successful, another option for consideration was the possible introduction of a licensing scheme for properties in the private rented sector. However the Panel were advised that certain criteria needed to be met in order for a licensing scheme to gain approval and if approved, it would absorb a great deal of resources. It was estimated that there were 8,000 private properties to let in the district.

Members thanked the Private Housing Manager for her presentation.

RESOLVED:

That the Presentation regarding Landlord Accreditation Scheme be noted.

40. PROPOSED COUNCIL RENT INCREASE AND INCREASED SCHEME MANAGEMENT AND CARELINE CHARGES - 2015/16

The Panel received a report regarding the Proposed Council Rent Increase 2015/16 and Charges to Older Tenants in Sheltered and Area Schemes from the Director of Communities.

At its meeting on 19 January 2015 the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee considered the HRA Budget 2015/16 and associated recommendations on the Council rent increase and charges to older tenants in sheltered and area schemes. The Committee agreed to make a number of recommendations to the Cabinet on these issues which were agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 2 February.

It was advised that the Cabinet had recommended to the Full Council an average overall increase in Council rent of 2.2% for 2015/16. In respect of the Council's Careline Service and the Scheme Management Service for sheltered housing and area schemes, the following decisions of the Cabinet were noted by the Panel:

- (a) The loss of £133,000 per annum Housing Related Support funding from Essex County Council;

- (b) The charges for the Council's Careline Service would be increased by £0.27 per week with effect from 6 April 2015;
- (c) That 10% of the time undertaken in duties by Scheme Managers previously attributed to Housing Related Support would be re-classified as Intensive Housing Management and charged as a Service Charge accordingly;
- (d) The charges for the Council's Scheme Management Service would be increased by 5% from 6 April 2015; and
- (e) The increased charges for the Careline and Scheme Management Services provided to Council tenants in receipt of housing benefit would not be met through any increase in compensating Housing Related Support Credit. The Housing Related Support Credit currently received by such tenants would be reduced by 8% with effect from 6 April 2015.

The intention of these policies would be:

- (i) For Careline Service to break-even; and
- (ii) The loss in HRS funding for the Scheme Management Service would be fully recovered from April 2016.

It was noted that as a result of spreading the required increases in charges over two years, the HRA would be subsidising the Careline Service and Scheme Management Service by around £58,000 during 2015/16. It was also noted that Essex County Council had given clear indications that it would be seeking to reduce the Essex-wide HRS funding during 2015/16, which was likely to result in the need for the Council to increase these charges further from April 2016.

RESOLVED:

That the summary of the proposed HRA Budget 2015/16 and associated recommendations on the Council rent increase and charges to older tenants in sheltered and area schemes for 2015/16 be noted.

41. HOUSING IMPROVEMENTS AND SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS FUND - 2015/16

The Panel received a report regarding the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund 2015/16 from the Director of Communities.

It was noted that for the past three years, the Cabinet had asked the Housing Scrutiny Panel to consider and recommend a proposed list of housing improvements and service enhancements to the Cabinet utilising the additional funding received by the HRA which the Panel had last examined in March 2014.

The purpose of the report was therefore:

- (a) To provide anticipated out turns of expenditure for 2014/15 regarding both individual projects and the programme as a whole; and
- (b) To recommend the use of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund for 2015/16.

Since housing related income and expenditure was ring fenced to the HRA, any annual HRA surpluses not required therefore needed spending otherwise they resulted in increased HRA balances, which was why the Housing Improvements and Service Improvements Fund had been introduced from 2012/13.

There were 7 new housing improvements and service enhancements being undertaken in 2014/15, in addition to the completion of a further 7 projects extending/carried forward into 2014/15. Generally good progress had been made with the delivery of most of the projects during the year to date.

The Council's HRA business planning consultants identified that the HRA could commit £700,000 per annum for new and committed improvements and service enhancements from April 2015. It was advised that after utilising all of the resources available to the fund in 2014/15, there would still be a further £445,000 and £574,000 available for spending on new projects in the following two years based on current forecasts.

RECOMMENDED:

That subject to the views of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the following recommendations be made to the Cabinet:

- (1) That the latest out-turn forecasts for each of the projects funded by the Housing Improvement and Service Enhancement Fund in 2014/15 be noted;
- (2) That the associated expenditure for any slippages on individual projects in 2014/15 be carried forward for completion in 2015/16;
- (3) That the Housing Scrutiny Panel has already recommended to the Cabinet that the cost of increasing the financial incentives for Council tenants downsizing their accommodation be met from the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund;
- (4) That the Cabinet has already agreed that the Fund should meet the costs relating to the Housing Revenue Account of increasing the size of the new Corporate Fraud Team from April 2015 subject to the required General Fund Continuing Services Budget (CSB) bid being agreed;
- (5) That the proposed list of housing improvements and service enhancements for 2015/16 and the associated recommendations for each project, as set out in Appendix 2 of the agenda report, be recommended for approval;
- (6) That the amount allocated from the Fund to the Major Capital Projects Reserve be recommended for increase in 2015/16 from £200,000 to £384,000 to fund future housing capital projects (either in 2015/16 or future years);
- (7) That at its meeting in January 2016, the Select Committee responsible for Housing Services be asked to consider and recommend to the Cabinet the proposed use of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund for 2016/17;
- (8) That the Housing Scrutiny Panel's report to the Cabinet be based on the content of Director of Communities' report to the Panel; and

- (9) That the Cabinet be asked to record in the subsequent Cabinet minutes all the Cabinet decisions on the recommendations set out in bold in Appendix 2 of the Panel agenda.

42. NEW HOUSING STRATEGY KEY ACTION PLAN 2015/16

The Panel received a report regarding the New Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2015/16 from the Director of Communities.

At its meeting in September 2009 the Cabinet adopted its current Housing Strategy which assessed the District's housing needs and set out the Council's approach to meeting those needs. The Strategy 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 first year of the Housing Strategy. It was agreed that the plans would be produced and updated on an annual basis for Cabinet approval and they would be monitored on a 6 monthly basis by this Panel.

It was advised that much of the Housing Strategy related to the provisions within the Local Plan and that which a new Plan was currently under consideration by the Council. Therefore, the Housing Portfolio Holder had previously agreed that the Housing Strategy should not be updated until the Local Plan Preferred Options (Draft Local Plan) had been published but that in the meantime, Annual Housing Strategy Key Action Plans should continue to be produced with progress monitored.

RECOMMENDED:

That a recommendation be made to the Housing Portfolio Holder that the proposed Housing Strategy Key Action Plan for 2015/16 be adopted and that progress with the Key Action Plan be monitored on a six monthly basis by the Housing Scrutiny Panel (or its successor body) in the normal way.

43. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2014/15 - QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE

The Panel received a report regarding Key Performance Indicators 2014/15 – Quarter 2 Performance from the Director of Communities.

A range of 36 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2014/15 was adopted by the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee in March 2014. The KPIs were important to the improvement of the Council's services and the achievement of its key objectives. They comprised a combination of some former statutory indicators and locally determined performance measures. The KPIs directed improvement effort towards services and the national priorities and local challenges arising from the social, economic and environmental context of the district that were the focus of the key objectives.

As part of the Overview and Scrutiny Review undertaken in 2013/14, changes had been made to arrangements for the quarterly review of KPI performance. From this municipal year, the existing scrutiny panels were responsible for the review of quarterly performance against specific KPIs within their areas of responsibility. Therefore, the report included only those indicators which fell within the areas of responsibility of the Housing Scrutiny Panel.

The overall position with regard to the achievement of target performance for all of the KPIs at the end of the second quarter (1 July to 30 September 2014) of the year was as follows:

- (a) 25 (69%) indicators achieved the cumulative second quarter target;
- (b) 11 (30%) indicators did not achieve the cumulative second quarter target, although 2 (5%) of these KPIs performed within the agreed tolerance for the indicator; and
- (c) 30 (83%) were currently anticipated to achieve the cumulative year end target.

Ten of the Key Performance Indicators fell within the Housing Scrutiny Panel areas of responsibility. The overall position with regard to the achievement of target performance at the end of the second quarter of the year for these ten indicators was as follows:

- (i) 10 (100%) indicators achieved the cumulative second quarter target; and
- (ii) 10 (100%) were currently anticipated to achieve the cumulative year end target.

The Housing Portfolio Holder thanked officers for their work on re-configuring the KPI reports so they were aligned to specific scrutiny panels. The Chairman requested that future KPI reports should be submitted in colour printing as this was easier to interpret.

RESOLVED:

That the Key Performance Indicators 2014/15 – Quarter 2 Performance report be noted.

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

The Chairman advised that he would update the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Panel's work.

45. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next scheduled meeting of the Panel would be on Tuesday 24 March 2015 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1.