

## **GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of an extraordinary meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in the Council Chamber, The Arc, Clowne on Wednesday, 22 January 2020 at 10:00 hours.

### **PRESENT:-**

Members:-

Councillor Jen Wilson in the Chair

Councillors Tricia Clough (Vice-Chair), Derek Adams, Jim Clifton, Tom Kirkham and Tom Munro.

Officers:- Karl Apps (Acting Head of Economic Development), Chris Fridlington (Assistant Director of Development), Thomas Evans (Joint Empty Property Officer), Samantha Bentley (Environmental Health Manager), Joanne Wilson (Scrutiny and Elections Officer) and Alison Bluff (Governance Officer).

Also in attendance at the meeting was Ty Platten, Chief Executive Officer, Action Housing & Support Ltd. and Gemma Lane, Sustainable Tenancies Development Manager.

### **573 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **574 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

There were no urgent items of business.

### **575 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

### **576 MINUTES - 20TH NOVEMBER 2019**

Moved by Councillor Tom Munro and seconded by Councillor Tricia Clough  
**RESOLVED** that the minutes of a meeting of a Growth Scrutiny Committee held on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019 be approved as a true and correct record.

### **577 LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE**

Moved by Councillor Tom Munro and seconded by Councillor David Dixon  
**RESOLVED** that the List of Key Decisions and Items to be considered in private document be noted.

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### **578 PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR HOUSING - REVIEW OF BDC ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

The Joint Housing Strategy & Growth Manager provided an explanation of the Council's role and responsibilities with regard to private rented sector housing in Bolsover District.

The private rented sector across the District was predominantly non-professional, i.e., there were a lot of landlords that owned a small number of properties. A lot of these landlords were 'accidental landlords', for example, an inherited property where a relative had died, or couples where one had moved into the other's property and rented out the existing property. In some cases, if the property was not the sole source of income for the owner, it didn't always get the owners full attention. Likewise, a large number of private landlords lived far away from their properties and this could also be challenging for the Council.

These challenges, however, provided opportunity for the Council to work closely with landlords in a coordinated approach. The Council held landlord forums each year and the Joint Empty Properties Officer, officers from Environmental Health, the Homeless Service, Call B4 You Serve and DASH (Decent and Safer Homes) attended to provide landlords and management agencies with updates on legislative issues, make referrals and to encourage landlords to register with DASH as an accredited landlord. ('Call B4 You Serve', was a free of charge specialist service for landlords who were having difficulties with their tenancies and were considering serving notice on a tenant - officers could act as mediator between the tenant and the landlord to try and keep the tenant in the property).

It was confirmed that the Council did not hold data on how many private and professional landlords there were in the District. However, the Council did hold record of empty properties in the District and many of these were owned by private landlords.

A Member noted that there was a requirement in Scotland for all private landlords to be registered and she felt that the Council should consider introducing something similar for the District. The Joint Housing Strategy & Growth Manager explained that there was no requirement in England for landlords to be registered, though, the 2004 Housing Act did give local authorities the right to impose a licensing system on private landlords in England within their boundaries known as 'selective licensing'. The administration system for this was onerous for councils and did not necessarily provide the outcomes desired. The Environmental Health Manager agreed with this and explained that selective licensing was for areas considered particularly problematic and this was more likely to relate to city council areas.

In response to Members' queries, the Joint Housing Strategy & Growth Manager explained that Environmental Health had powers to take action on private landlords where tenants were not living in satisfactory conditions. The Homeless Service made the Council aware of landlords who were acting inappropriately and could challenge an eviction notice on a private tenant's behalf. The Council worked closely with the Law Centre and could provide a private tenant's case for them. A check could be carried out as deposits/bonds paid by tenants were required by a private landlord to be put into a government-backed tenancy deposit scheme (TDP) of which there were 3 of these organisations in England. In all known cases, officers would try and work with landlords to get them through the accredited landlord scheme, however, there would always be unknown cases and this was one reason why the Council's services were promoted. He

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added that due to cuts in adult social care, more and more pressure was being put on the Council's housing stock, so the more-challenging cases, which were previously picked up by other agencies, were now being picked up by registered providers including the Council.

The Environmental Health Manager felt that there were a lot of good private landlords in the District who had an important role to play. Some landlords had also experienced bad tenants and some landlords were proactive to this which helped the Council enormously.

The above work had lead the Council to talk to registered social housing providers with a view to them taking on empty properties in the District, convert wherever necessary and let them out as social housing to help meet demand. Action Housing was a social housing provider that had responded to this and now worked closely with the Council. This partnership had been recognised at the NT Homes Network were the Council and Action Housing had received an award for innovation and partnership. Furthermore, the Station Hotel at Creswell, which had been redeveloped into apartments by Action Housing in partnership with the Council, had been part of a BBC TV documentary reporting on empty properties in England.

### Action Housing

The Chair introduced Ty Platten, Chief Executive Officer of Action Housing and Support Ltd. and Gemma Lane, Sustainable Tenancies Development Manager to the meeting. Copies of Action Housing's policies and processes were included in the agenda for Member's information.

Ty Platten explained that Action Housing was a charity and had been for 40 years; it was a registered social housing provider dedicated to providing high quality accommodation to people at the lower end of the social economic scale and also for others, under supported tenancy projects, who had previously struggled with their responsibilities or who had faced hardships, to re-establish themselves in a home and to maintain their tenancy, reconnect with their community and hopefully get back into work.

In conjunction with the Council and Homes England, Action Housing identified and renovated empty properties in the District into apartments or houses and let them to tenants as described above. These properties were renovated to a high quality and were designed to eliminate utility poverty.

Currently, Action Housing was working with the Council to establish in Bolsover a 'sustainable tenancy project'. This project was for people who from their own behaviour, (for example, substance misuse or alcohol addiction), or a landlord's behaviour, had fallen through the security net. Action Housing Tenancy Support Officers and Housing Benefits worked with these tenants over a two year period under intensive housing management legislation to help them re-establish themselves, to maintain a home and to reconnect with GPs, job centres etc.

This project had a good success rate for Action Housing in other areas and was underpinned with Action Housing's 'Lifewise' training programme where tenants were taught lifestyle skills like cooking, interaction with hospitals and other services and to get support, also to get good credit and to be proactive members of society again.

A Member queried Action Housing's eviction policy and if their timeframe for an eviction

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was similar to the Council's. Gemma Lane explained that each local authority would have their own policies and procedures for evictions, however, the process would be similar to Action Housing's in that there would be a number of warnings to a tenant before an eviction process was started. Local authorities could only offer assured long term tenancies whereas Action Housing offered assured short hold tenancies and this made it easier to evict someone if issues arose.

Ty Platten added that the idea of Action Housing was to get a tenant to understand their responsibilities so they maintained the property they were in. Action Housing had strict screening processes for their tenants albeit, on occasion, someone would slip through the net and become a problem. Tenancy Support Officers regularly visited Action Housing's tenants and acted very quickly to address these types of situations.

In response to a Member's query, Ty Platten explained that ex-service people had access to Action Housing. He added that various parts of Action Housing were currently being restructured and armed forces veterans would be looked at in the near future.

The Chair thanked Ty Platten and Gemma Lane for their presentation and attending the meeting.

Ty Platten, Gemma Lane, the Environmental Health Manager, the Joint Housing Strategy & Growth Manager, and the Joint Empty Properties Officer left the meeting.

The Scrutiny Officer advised the meeting that information which had arisen out of Action Housing's presentation with regard to anti-social behaviour and some theft would be passed on to the Healthy Safe Clean & Green Communities Scrutiny Committee to be raised as part of their annual review of the Community Safety Partnership.

The Assistant Director – Development proposed to write a comparator report which would include Members' comments and concerns raised at this meeting. He would also carry out investigation into other local authorities to see how they dealt with private landlords especially with regard to 'selective licensing'.

The Scrutiny Officer would compare the Council's tenancy policy to that of Action Housing's and formulate a list of follow on questions to include the following;

- how frequently do Action Housing have their own officers carrying out regular sites visits in the District?
- how do Action Housing gather information when they carry out their site visits - Is it from neighbours and what can and can't they ask?
- tenant responsibilities – what is the requirement on them to be honest if there is a change in their circumstances, for example, if a partner of a tenant moves into a property and also do Action Housing carry out any additional vetting?

Moved by Councillor Tom Munro and seconded by Councillor Jenny Wilson  
**RESOLVED** that the Work Programme 2019/20 be noted.

### 579            **WORK PROGRAMME 2019/2020**

Committee considered their work programme 2019/20.

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The meeting concluded at 11:15 hours.