

CUSTOMER SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Customer Services Scrutiny Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in the Council Chamber, The Arc, Clowne on Monday, 21 March 2022 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Rose Bowler in the Chair

Councillors Rita Turner (Vice-Chair), Allan Bailey, David Dixon and Andrew Joesbury.

Officers: Victoria Dawson (Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement), Theresa Fletcher (Assistant Director of Finance and Resources & Section 151 Officer), Ian Barber (Assistant Director of Property Services & Housing Repairs), Diane Parker (Joint Housing Policy and Intelligence Officer), Hannah Cash (Legal Executive), Jo Wilson (Scrutiny & Elections Officer) and Tom Scott (Governance Officer).

Also in attendance for the meeting was Councillor Clive Moesby (Portfolio Holder – Finance). The Assistant Director of Property Services & Housing Repairs and the Joint Housing Policy & Intelligence Officer left the meeting during Minute No. CS50-21/22. The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement and the Legal Executive left the meeting during Minute No. CS51-21/22. The Portfolio Holder – Finance and the Section 151 Officer left the meeting during Minute No. CS53-21/22.

CS44-21/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor David Downes (Portfolio Holder - Leisure and Tourism), Councillor Stan Fox, Councillor Ray Heffer and Thomas Evans (Empty Property Officer).

CS45-21/22 URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items of business to consider.

CS46-21/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

CS47-21/22 MINUTES

Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor Andrew Joesbury
RESOLVED that the Minutes of a Customer Services Scrutiny Committee held on 21st February 2022 be approved as a correct record.

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CS48-21/22 LIST OF KEY DECISIONS AND ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

Committee considered the List of Key Decisions and items to be considered in private document.

Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor Andrew Joesbury
RESOLVED that the List of Key Decisions and items to be considered in private document be noted.

CS49-21/22 HOUSING STRATEGY - MONITORING UPDATE

The Joint Housing Policy and Intelligence Officer presented a report which gave an update on the Housing Strategy 2021 – 2024's Action Plan. Due to some gaps in the update report further detail was given by Assistant Directors directly within the meeting.

Key Priority 1 – Providing Good Quality Housing

(Aim 1) To date Bolsover Homes had delivered 16 homes with a further 21 to be handed over. Work was also now commencing on site at The Woodlands in Langwith, where new sustainable construction methods would be used. Further development was planned at Market Close, Shirebrook and two further sites were earmarked in Langwith. There were also plans in place for the Woburn Close area in Blackwell. In total all of this should lead to 120 properties.

Councillor Andrew Joesbury asked if building on old garage sites was an idea that had been explored. The Assistant Director of Property Services & Housing Repairs explained that officers had batched them together in Pinxton and South Normanton, but doing the same in Clowne did not stack up financially.

Councillor Andrew Joesbury was concerned that because there was no Council owned land to build on in South Normanton, it would mean no Council Houses being built there. The Assistant Director of Property Services & Housing Repairs assured him that the Council was always looking for land to purchase, and the Dragonfly scheme was partly carried out in South Normanton.

Councillor David Dixon also requested that further discussions take place with Barlborough Parish in relation to garage sites within the locality.

Councillor Clive Moesby declared for transparency that he was the ward Councillor for Blackwell, where housing was planned.

The Housing Policy and Intelligence Officer stated she would investigate how many private households were due to be created in South Normanton and pass the information back to Members. Councillor Andrew Joesbury also requested that she investigate how many of the houses in the Strategy, earmarked for that area, were going to be affordable housing.

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(Aim 2) The Assistant Director of Property Services & Housing Repairs explained that officers had spoken to Keepmoat Homes about sites in Hodthorpe and Pinxton. To date 14 homes had been secured from Keepmoat in Bolsover, 9 from Avant in Creswell and 3 in South Normanton. However, he noted that due to changes in Homes England guidelines this was now proving a more difficult route to securing additional stock.

(Aim 3) The Assistant Director of Property Services & Housing Repairs explained noted that the Bolsover Homes 'Woodlands' development at Langwith would be built to the Platinum level of the Sustainable Homes standard. Properties under B@Home were built to Bronze level. Councillor David Dixon referred to the Code for Sustainable Homes (low carbon housing stock) and asked what had been done to the Council's stock. The Assistant Director of Property Services & Housing Repairs explained that they would collect rain water and have air tests. He added that Ground Source heating pumps were piloted 10 years ago.

Councillor David Dixon felt that the wording in the Strategy about Carbon Reduction could be improved. The Housing Policy and Intelligence Officer explained that she would use the wording from the Carbon Reduction Plan. It was also noted that as work in this area had developed significantly since the Strategy was produced and that this action may require amendment to better reflect the work taking place.

(Aim 4) Officers noted that funding had been secured for External Wall Insulation linked to improving EPC ratings and that a match-funding approach was used where possible. A lengthy study had just taken place on our commercial properties and a bid for funding was planned for carbon reduction works. Members discussed the previous site visit to Parkfields, Clowne and requested if a re-visit was possible to see the completed Safe & Warm works. It was agreed to arrange this after the meeting.

(Aim 7) The Joint Housing Policy and Intelligence Officer noted that work was progressing on commissioning a strategy/plan for Private Sector stock. Officers were exploring options for funding to support the work which would include consideration of homelessness and health. It was also noted that there was legislation planned to extend the Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector.

Councillor David Dixon referred to the Private Sector condition survey and felt pleased that the Council was trying to keep private properties up to standard.

(Aim 8) The Housing Policy and Intelligence Officer explained that after the meeting, Thomas Evans (Empty Property Officer) would send Members a briefing note on a flat in Whitwell that had been empty for 25 years.

Councillor David Dixon asked if it was known how many private landlords were operating in the District. The Housing Policy and Intelligence Officer explained that there was not a national register, but the Housing Strategy could help identify them because it would include a census.

Key Priority 2 – Enabling Housing Growth

Councillor Andrew Joesbury referred to Aim 1 in Key Priority 2 ('Regeneration') and felt 'Town Centre' should be removed from "The Housing Strategy Strengthen housing links to the Town Centre Regeneration programmes by building the right property types". The Scrutiny & Elections Officer also suggested that this aim could be titled 'Growth' as

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opposed to 'Regeneration'. It was agreed to re-word as there was limited emphasis on housing within the town centre regeneration programmes.

Councillor Andrew Joesbury referred to Aim 2 in Key Priority 2 ('Partnership working to enable housing growth') and felt that 'JV' should be changed to 'Joint Venture'. The Officer agreed to amend.

(Aim 3) As discussed previously, a briefing would be circulated by the Empty Property Officer after the meeting.

(Aim 4) The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement stated that a 'Support Gypsy and Travellers' draft Strategy was out for consultation. This would be brought to a future committee meeting.

Key Priority 3 – Supporting Vulnerable and Disadvantaged People

(Aim 1) A draft of the Derbyshire and Staffordshire Moorlands Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy was out to consultation. Lee Pepper attended on behalf of BDC. The current BDC Strategy expires 2023 then this Strategy will be in place, and there will be something additional at a local Bolsover level.

Councillor David Dixon asked how much of a problem Homelessness and Rough Sleeping was at present. The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement explained that after the worst of the COVID pandemic, many Private Landlords had cut their losses, leading to an increase in Homelessness and Rough Sleeping. Family homelessness was more of an issue over single persons. Officers were working closely with registered providers to get people re-housed and provide bond if necessary.

Councillor Joesbury enquired whether the Council had 'hard to let' properties. The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement explained that once a property had been through two advertising cycles without success then feedback was sought from those viewing to ascertain why it was deemed unsuitable.

(Aim 2) The Joint Housing Policy and Intelligence Officer noted that there was a lack of Young Persons Supported Housing and also a shortage of carers so DCC are struggling to develop additional provision but are hoping to remedy recruitment issues soon. Additional Supported Housing for complex needs was also required. The officer agreed to circulate the Young Persons Housing Strategy to the Scrutiny Officer for circulation.

(Aim 3) While the Housing Needs Manager had not been replaced, a new Manager for the Independent Living/Lifeline service had been recruited to lead on this area of provision. A big piece of work was required here in switching the service from analogue to digital phonelines. There was also a desire to expand provision of the service to ensure its sustainability in the long-term.

(Aim 5) It was acknowledged that the Committee had been heavily involved in this area with development of the Adaptations Policy.

(Aim 6) Councillor David Dixon referred to the 'new gas connections to homes on solid fuel heating systems' in Aim 6 Key Priority 3, and pointed out that giving everyone

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gas now might lead to a problem in the future when the Council removes them from it.

The Assistant Director of Property Services & Housing Repairs explained that they were already seeing gas companies reluctant to take on extra customers and that moving to hydrogen was the longer term strategy.

Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor Andrew Joesbury
RESOLVED to note the Action Plan aims and updates.

(Joint Housing Policy & Intelligence Officer/ Assistant Director of Housing Management & Enforcement/ Assistant Director of Property Services & Housing Repairs)

CS50-21/22 TENANCY AGREEMENT

N.B. The Assistant Director of Property Services & Housing Repairs and the Housing Policy & Intelligence Officer left the meeting at this point.

The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement presented a report to consider and feedback on the new draft tenancy agreement. The agreement was currently out to public consultation, ending on 29 April. Once the consultation ended there would be a brief period to review comments then the new agreement would be approved and circulated to tenants.

Councillor Andrew Joesbury referred to paragraph 3.3 in the current agreement ("You must not keep or use any more bottled gas") and asked if this had been amended. The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement confirmed this has been changed in the draft agreement.

Councillor Andrew Joesbury referred to paragraph 4.3 in the current agreement ("You must not enter on any property that has not been let to you as part of the property") and asked the reasons for this paragraph. The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement explained that the paragraph was there because of boundary disagreements. This section was aimed at redefining access rights.

Councillor Andrew Joesbury referred to Section 10 in the current agreement ('Tenant Behaviour') and asked if enforcing it would be changed in the new draft. The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement explained that the new draft would have more substance on tenant anti-social behaviour, and give officers more options like protection notices or fines.

Councillor Andrew Joesbury referred to Section 4.54 in the current agreement ('Vehicles and Parking') and asked if some of it could be enforced. The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement explained that things had been added to the new draft to allow them to deal with parking, like obstructing access.

Councillor Clive Moesby asked if provisions would be included for tenants who take in Ukrainian refugees. The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement stated she would investigate if doing this would affect their benefits.

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The Chair asked if the tenancy notice period was going to be reduced from four weeks to two weeks. The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement explained that they would be allowed to give two weeks' notice in future where the property could be cleared in time. Notice would still need to be given on a Monday.

The Chair asked what the reasoning had been behind tenancies in the new draft being able to start on any day of the week instead of just Monday. The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement explained that it was something that began during the COVID pandemic, and carrying on with it would offer the Council more flexibility and reduce void periods.

The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement encouraged everyone to fill in the online Tenancy Agreement consultation questionnaire, which was in the 'Consultation' section of the Bolsover District Council website.

Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor David Dixon

RESOLVED to note the draft Agreement and provide comments for consideration as part of the formal consultation.

(Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement)

CS51-21/22 BUSINESS RATES MANDATORY AND DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

N.B. The Assistant Director - Housing Management & Enforcement and the Legal Executive left the meeting at this point.

The Section 151 Officer presented a report for Members to consider and feedback on the revised Business Rates Mandatory and Discretionary Rate Relief Policy attached at Appendix 1.

Councillor Andrew Joesbury referred to South Normanton Parish Council trying to purchase the Zion Methodist Church, and asked if the Parish Council could get reduced business rates for the deal. The Section 151 Officer advised him to contact Revenue services.

Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor Andrew Joesbury

RESOLVED to note the Business Rates Mandatory and Discretionary Rate Relief Policy and provide comments for consideration as part of the development of the Policy in advance of formal Executive approval and implementation.

(Section 151 Officer)

CS52-21/22 COUNCIL TAX DISCRETIONARY RELIEF POLICY

The Section 151 Officer presented a report for Members to consider and feedback on the revised Council Tax Discretionary Relief Policy attached at Appendix 1.

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The Section 151 Officer explained that the reason for the revision was to amend some of the out-of-date information in the policy, to ensure it remained fit for purpose.

Moved by Councillor Andrew Joesbury and seconded by Councillor Rose Bowler

RESOLVED to note the Council Tax Discretionary Relief Policy and provide comments for consideration as part of the development of the Policy in advance of formal Executive approval and implementation.

(Section 151 Officer)

CS53-21/22 WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

N.B. The Portfolio Holder – Finance and the Section 151 Officer left the meeting at this point.

Committee considered their work programme 2021/22.

The Chair referred to the mention in the item 'HOUSING STRATEGY - MONITORING UPDATE' of the Empty Property Officer sending Members a briefing note on a flat in Whitwell that had been empty for 25 years. The Chair asked Members if they would prefer this briefing to be sent to them or presented at a Committee meeting. Member agreed they would prefer it to be sent to them.

The Chair requested that for the Committee's agreement of the 'Review of Council-owned Adapted Accommodation' Scrutiny report, an Extraordinary meeting should be scheduled at the end of April 2022.

Moved by Councillor Rose Bowler and seconded by Councillor Andrew Joesbury

RESOLVED that the Work Programme 2021/22 be noted.

(Scrutiny & Elections Officer)

The meeting concluded at 12:10 hours.