



Minutes of the meeting of the HOUSING AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE held at 7.00 PM on TUESDAY 27 MARCH 2018

- Present:** Councillor C Williams (Chair), Councillors Coventry, Ferrans, Ganatra, Geaney, P Geary, Hosking, Khan, and Wallis
- Officers:** M Kelleher (Service Director (Housing and Regeneration)), A Turner (Senior Planning Officer (Development Plans)) and E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)
- Also Present:** D Gleeson (Managing Director, YourMK), S Young (Head of Strategic Asset Management, YourMK) and 6 members of the public
- Apologies:** Councillor D McCall

Disclosures: None

HAC32 MINUTES

RESOLVED -

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2018 be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

HAC33 ANNUAL REPORT FROM YOURMK AND COUNCIL POLICY ON REACTIVE / PLANNED REPAIRS IN DESIGNATED REGENERATION AREAS

Witnesses: D Gleeson (Managing Director, YourMK) and S Young (Head of Strategic Asset Management, YourMK)

The Committee received a presentation from Mr Gleeson and Mr Young updating it on progress with the Gas Services contract, repairs to council owned dwellings, including those in designated regeneration areas, processing void properties, improvements to properties purchased on the open market and the company's plans to improve communications between it and the Council's tenants. During the presentation the Committee noted that:

- (a) YourMK had inherited a backlog of 600 properties needing gas servicing from the Council's previous contractor which had required additional resources to process;
- (b) In order to ensure that all properties were annually compliant YourMK was working on a 10 month cycle of service checks;
- (c) Most tenants had been very helpful and there were only 11 properties where YourMK was seeking legal access in order to carry out the checks. However, the consequence of this

meant that the Council could not meet its 99% compliance requirement;

- (d) During the day, the YourMK repairs helpdesk operated a triage system to assess the urgency of a request and what the response time needed to be;
- (e) All requests for repairs were assessed on an individual basis, regardless of whether the property was in a designated regeneration area;
- (f) There had been no withdrawal of funding for repairs to properties in regeneration areas. Wherever possible a repair would be carried out but the Council could not compromise on either tenants' comfort or safety and replacement with new fittings / materials would be made as and when necessary;
- (g) Thus far during 2017/18 YourMK had dealt with 608 void properties, at a cost of £2.8m. The average cost of repairs to a void property was £4,600, with the average time to carry out the necessary works being 10.2 days;
- (h) The Council and YourMK were in the process of establishing a pre-term process where a property would be visited by a Housing Officer and a member of YourMK staff prior to the termination of the tenancy to inspect and identify rechargeable repairs which were either due to damage by the tenants, or which were the tenants' responsibility;
- (i) YourMK's preferred means for tenants to contact them to request repairs was by telephone as staff could then ask the right questions to assess the extent of the problem, the urgency and allocate work as appropriate. However, YourMK was currently consulting with tenants about what they thought was the best method so that improvements to the service could be made; and
- (j) YourMK was dealing with a huge volume of work and there was a need to discuss expectations in relation to reasonable timescales for repairs with tenants.

The Committee then discussed the work of YourMK with Mr Gleeson and Mr Young. In response to questions, the Committee also noted that:

- (a) The average period for bringing void properties back into use from the previous tenants leaving to new tenants moving in was 26 days. The Service Director (Housing and Regeneration) explained that at present the Council did not have a specific target for the total time taken to process a void property, but he agreed that 26 days was too long and that work needed to be done to reduce this. He undertook to supply the Committee with more detail about the time taken to process void properties;
- (b) The cost of refurbishing properties bought on the open market was slightly higher than the cost for normal void properties, but

this was to ensure that the purchased properties met the Council's Decent Homes standard before they were let to tenants;

- (c) Purchasing properties on the open market was more expensive than new build projects for council housing but was quicker. The price offered / paid by the Council reflected the estimated need for refurbishment of the properties;
- (d) The Service Director (Housing and Regeneration) was not aware of any of the properties purchased by the Council on the open market yet being subject to a Right to Buy application, but it could happen in the future;
- (e) Most of the properties bought on the open market were three bedroom properties. Although the overall number of families in temporary accommodation was going down, the number of larger families needing a 3 or 4 bedroom house was going up, with these families tending to be in temporary accommodation longer than average due to the shortage of suitable accommodation. The Council was also buying some 2 and 4 bedroom properties as and when something suitable became available;
- (f) All YourMK heating engineers were trained to carry out full diagnostic services on boilers although there were sometimes delays in completing the process if new parts had to be ordered and delivered;
- (g) YourMK was working to an average lifespan of 11 years for gas boilers and was currently replacing old boilers at a rate of 1000 per year;
- (h) Currently 20% of the YourMK workforce was sub-contractor labour;
- (i) YourMK had a dedicated team to deal with responsive repairs, both internal and external, including missing slates, leaking down-pipes, broken guttering etc;
- (j) All YourMK staff had I/D and should be automatically presenting this when they visited a tenant's property – they should not have to be asked to produce it; and
- (k) All replacement fitments were 'off the shelf' items so that the Council benefitted from best value for money by shopping around. It was not restricted to using any specific make or model of fitment.

Representatives of the tenants' groups attending the meeting also raised various concerns about the Council's repairs service with the Committee, the Service Director (Housing and Regeneration) and the representatives from YourMK.

Particular concern was raised about misinformation being given to tenants by Mears plc operatives about how long repairs took and that the 4 hour response time for vulnerable tenants was not being adhered to. Mr Gleeson advised that he was aware of these issues

and was in discussion with Mears to resolve them. He also said that YourMK currently had a 96-97% customer satisfaction rating covering the time of reporting the problem to the helpdesk to the repair being completed. YourMK was currently reviewing how customer satisfaction was being measured and reported as it needed to be accurate in order to be meaningful. The Service Director (Housing and Regeneration) commented that he planned to include this as part of the revised tenant / community participation process as he was not convinced that a 96% satisfaction rating was correct and agreed that the way it was measured needed reviewing.

Tenant representatives were also of the view that there were a disproportionate number of repairs necessary in the designated regeneration areas and wondered whether this was due to past neglect of these estates. Mr Gleeson advised that the average number of repair visits per property per year was between 3-3.5 visits. YourMK was now trying to be proactive and do more preventative work on properties.

The Service Director (Housing and Regeneration) advised that repairs carried out by tenants themselves could do more damage and cost more to fix than having the repairs service do the work. Tenants needed written permission from the Council before they carried out any works to their property. The property would be visited by housing staff who would make an assessment of what was being proposed and set a required standard for the completion of the work. Where a tenant had installed a new kitchen or bathroom at their own expense, the Council would not take it out and replace it if it was up to the required standard. Mr Kelleher added that he thought not enough inspections of properties were being made and that he hoped to work better with tenants on this in the future.

RESOLVED -

1. That David Gleeson and Stephen Young from YourMK be thanked for their attendance at the meeting, their report on the work of YourMK over the past year and their contribution to the Committee's subsequent discussion.
2. That the Committee's 2018/19 Planning Group considers adding a review of the end to end void process, from old tenants moving out, through the repairs / refurbishment process to the new tenants moving in to the 2018/19 Work Programme, to see if the turn-around time can be reduced and whether it is possible to set realistic and achievable performance standards.
3. That Mr Gleeson and Mr Young respond in writing to those items where the Committee has requested clarification or further detail.
4. That the Service Director (Housing and Regeneration) ensures that the necessary resources are available to enable community engagement between the Council and its tenants to be an effective, two-way process which meets the needs all parties.

DRAFT AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD)**Witness: A Turner (Senior Planning Officer (Development Plans))**

Andrew Turner, Senior Planning Officer (Development Plans) explained that the Draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document would, once approved, replace the existing document which had been in use since 2013. Changes to the Affordable Housing Policy were being made through Plan:MK and in line with national changes to the country's planning policy. The draft document was now out for consultation from 19 March to 27 April 2018. He also advised that Plan:MK would be submitted to the Housing Inspectorate on 29 March for approval.

The Committee expressed concern that table 3.1 (figure 69 from the Milton Keynes Strategic Housing Market Assessment [SHMA] 2016-2013) appeared to contradict the information on affordable housing target and tenure mix in the highlighted box in point 2.4. The Senior Planning Officer explained that the data in table 3.1 gave the preferred mix of housing to be sought, whereas the highlighted box in point 2.4 set out what the Council thought was achievable, given that that not all percentages could be rigidly applied across all sites.

Mr Turner assured the Committee that the Council would challenge any claims made by developers as to the viability of providing the required mix of affordable housing and tenures on any one site. All applications would be open to scrutiny and there would be nowhere for developers to hide. However, although the Council was committed to maximising the amount of affordable housing provided across new developments, it also had to work within the existing national planning policy.

The Committee also learnt that the Council's current need was for 8,200 new affordable homes to be built and that there were already 6,000 in the pipeline through existing applications. In addition, there were plans for a further 3,000 homes to be built east of the M1 by 2031, 31% of which would meet the affordable housing requirement. The Committee agreed that on paper the Council appeared to be on course to meet its housing needs as set out in the SPD, but it was concerned as to whether this would, in reality, meet the actual needs of residents as these properties would be "affordable" once only.

Mr Turner advised the Committee that the Council had achieved an average of 28% affordable housing on new developments over the last 10 years, based on the current requirement for 30% affordable housing. Increasing the requirement to 31% would increase the delivery of affordable housing but there was a need to be realistic and be aware that 31% would not be achieved every time. He also confirmed that the approach of Plan:MK was to prioritise the provision of affordable housing over other S106 obligations.

In response to a query as why the Council did not ask for more than 31% the Senior Planning Officer explained that any requirement for

affordable housing provision needed to be viable and achievable. The Council had carried out research to assess what level of provision the market would take; in some cases more than 31% might be achievable as each development application would be assessed on a case by case basis.

The proposal that 2/3 of affordable housing should be allocated for social rent and 1/3 for other forms of affordable housing, such as shared ownership, was thought to be realistic. The SHMA was just one form of evidence used; other evidence and the technical methodology used by the Planning Service showed that this was a viable requirement. The Council could ignore this and propose a higher level but this was likely to be found unsound by the Planning Inspectorate and reduced back down to 31%. It might lead to more speculative applications with even less than the 31% provision.

The Committee also noted that there was nothing to stop councils developing new estates entirely of affordable housing but the modern approach was to have a mixture of tenures across all new developments. At a recent stakeholders meeting to discuss affordable housing and mixed communities a level of no more than 50% affordable housing was thought to be desirable. Mixed tenure communities also meant that there was a more balanced income from Council Tax across the borough. Mr Turner advised the phrasing in the draft policy would be reworded to reflect this.

However, Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP) was committed to providing 36% affordable housing on its development site and the Council would be working closely with MKDP to facilitate this. It was also hoped that some of the other development schemes would also be able to provide more than the 31% quota.

The Service Director (Housing and Regeneration) advised that the Council needed to engage more with tenants who might need support to maintain their properties. At present there was no proper enforcement and he planned to ensure that more education and support for tenants in difficulty would be in place in the future.

RESOLVED -

1. That Andrew Turner be thanked for his attendance at the meeting and for answering the technical issues in relation to Affordable Housing raised by the Committee during its discussion of this item.
2. That the following sentence *"In addition, on some sites there may be other higher priority objectives that provide wider benefits to Milton Keynes which may mean a reduction in the amount of Section 106 obligations that the development can sustain."* which appears in point 3.10 on page 9 of the Draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document be removed as it conflicts with the need to secure a sufficient supply of affordable housing.
3. That all relevant statements in the Draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document be modified to say "...at

least xx% of Affordable Rent / Social Rent / Shared Ownership ...” to better reflect the Council’s minimum requirements for the provision of such housing by developers.

4. That the Council be requested to support the Government’s independent review into delays in construction on development sites with planning permission and the possibility of introducing a tax to be paid by developers on any such sites which appear to have been “banked” by developers.
5. That the Council continues to press the Government to relax the limitations on local authority house building so that local authorities can build the houses they need, not what the Government is willing to fund.
6. That the Cabinet be advised of the Committee’s recommendations above.
7. That the Senior Planning Officer supplies the Committee with the rate of affordable housing achieved on new developments in Milton Keynes over the last 10 years in relation to the current 30% quota.

HAC35

INFORMATION ITEM: BRIEFING NOTE ON LOCAL FIRE SAFETY MEASURES FOLLOWING THE GRENFELL TOWER FIRE

RESOLVED -

1. That the briefing note from the Council’s Internal Audit Service updating the Committee on local fire safety measures in high rise accommodation be received and noted.

HAC36

QUESTION FROM THE PUBLIC

Ms S Taylor, on behalf of the Tinkers Bridge Residents’ Association, sought clarification from the Service Director (Housing and Regeneration) about funding for tenants / residents groups as their annual “health checks”, on which their eligibility for funding was based, had not taken place for 2018/19.

Mr Kelleher confirmed that all groups would receive funding on the same basis as last year. He advised that mini-health checks would be carried out later in the year to ensure that organisations were receiving all the funding to which they were entitled as their status might have changed since the beginning of the year.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 9.15 PM



Minutes of the special meeting of the COMMUNITY AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on WEDNESDAY 16 MAY 2018

Present: Councillors Ferrans, Ganatra, Geaney, Khan, Marklew, Morris, Reilly and Wallis,

Also Present: Councillors Akter, Alexander, Baines, Bint, Brackenbury, M Bradburn, R Bradburn, Brown, Brunning, Buckley, Cannon, Carr, Clancy, Crooks, Dransfield, Exon, A Geary, P Geary, Gilbert, Gowans, Green, D Hopkins, V Hopkins, Hosking, Jenkins, Legg, Long, Marland, McCall, McLean, McPake, Middleton, Miles, Minns, Morla, Nolan, O'Neill, Morla, Petchey, Patey-Smith, Priestley, Rankine, Small, Wales, Walker, Webb, Williams, C Wilson and K Wilson

Apologies: Councillor McDonald

CH01 ELECTION OF CHAIR

RESOLVED -

That Councillor Ferrans be elected Chair of the Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee for the Council Year 2018/19.

CH02 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRS

RESOLVED -

That Councillors Ganatra and Wallis be appointed Vice-Chairs of the Community and Housing Scrutiny Committee for the Council Year 2018/19.