

ENTERPRISE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 15th July, 2021

Present:-

Councillor Flood (Chair)

Councillors	Dyke	Councillors	Snowdon
	Coy		Brittain
	Hollingworth		

*Matters dealt with under the Delegation Scheme

1 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' AND OFFICERS' INTERESTS
RELATING TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**

There were no declarations of interest received.

2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Caulfield and Mann.

3 **CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING - SOCIAL HOUSING WHITE
PAPER**

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report on the Social Housing White Paper and informed the committee that the intention of the report was to help to determine the scope of the paper and to identify areas where scrutiny could have an impact.

The Service Director for Housing explained that the white paper was produced as a response to the Grenfell disaster and was important legislation for Housing. One of the key messages from the paper was the need to listen to residents more and involve them more and it was felt that this was an area that scrutiny could be involved, particularly during policy development.

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager gave an overview of the white paper, covering the seven key headlines and noting that the

emphasis of how social housing is managed will change as a result of the implications.

The first area of the paper concerned safety in homes; which included building safety and fire safety and was the element with the most detail so far. It was acknowledged that there would be more requirements in future to bring things in line with the private rental sector such as regular electrical testing. The Housing team had anticipated that compliance would be a key theme and had therefore been developing appropriate policies which were being reviewed by an external consultant before being presented to Cabinet.

The second point looked at tenants knowing how their landlord was performing. The council would need to demonstrate performance using a number of indicators and detail how money was being spent. The third area covered tenants' rights to have their complaints dealt with and a new complaint handling code was under development. The Housing Ombudsman had been given greater powers to hold landlords to account. Procedures for making a complaint would need to be published on the Council's website. These improvements would all be fed into the Council's complaints project group which was developing a new complaints policy and system.

Part four concerned treating tenants with respect. The regulator would be implementing changes including an inspection regime with the ability to impose fines for non-compliance. The details on the required standards had not yet been provided. Part five looked at tenants' having their voices heard by their landlord. The changes in this area were still in development but included a potential review of qualifications in the housing sector. It was acknowledged that an organisational culture where the tenant is always at the centre of development was the aim.

Part six referred to the decent homes standard, with a new definition of 'decent' expected in the summer of 2022. It was noted that the capital programme already included some of the key areas expected for review. As better support for decarbonisation was identified as a potential element of the review, it was highlighted that the Housing service was developing a green policy covering the measures that it had already begun such as sourcing local materials to reduce its carbon footprint, replacing boilers, improving external insulation etc.

Part seven concerned providing support to tenants wishing to take their first steps into ownership. It was anticipated that this section would have the least impact on the council and was more aimed at Housing Associations.

The potential impact of the paper was summarised by the following points;

- The council had already started taking steps towards compliance with the anticipated regulations
- The paper was being used to help shape the Housing restructure
- The cost implications would become clearer as more detail became available and these would be incorporated into the HRA business plans including any additional resources required
- At this stage there was a lack of detail in some areas
- Some of the emphasis of the capital programme may need to change in response to the paper

The Chair thanked the officers and cabinet member for a helpful summary of a complex document. The Service Director responded to questions about the recording of safety checks carried out in council properties and the potential additional costs of compliance. The committee heard that it had been recognised that the asset management systems and the housing management systems needed to be better integrated in order to prevent any gaps in recording and work on this was underway. Additional resources would be required, particularly front line and this would also be considered as part of the service restructure.

It was acknowledged that sometimes access to properties to carry out mandatory safety checks was difficult, as currently experienced with gas checks but that annual visits to council tenants will be carried out to build connections which would then enable the safety check visits to become more compliance focussed.

A discussion took place around storage for mobility scooters and electric charging points for mobility scooters and vehicles. It was explained that there were some storage facilities at sheltered housing schemes and that if storage was required as part of an adaptation then this would be supported. The provision of electric charging points for vehicles was part of planning policy and as such featured in all new builds and some major refurbishments. The difficulties of providing charging points in communal parking areas was recognised as well as managing people's expectations alongside the fast changing nature of the technology available.

The Cabinet Member for Housing concluded by thanking the Service Director and all the staff for their hard work and affirming that progress was already being made in response to the paper.

RESOLVED –

1. That the briefing be noted.
2. That a succinct briefing be prepared for all Members
3. That officers liaise with the Democratic Services team as more information becomes available to schedule further briefings.

4 SCRUTINY MONITORING

The Committee considered the Scrutiny recommendations monitoring schedule.

RESOLVED -

That the Scrutiny monitoring schedule be noted.

5 SCRUTINY PROJECT GROUP PROGRESS UPDATE

An update on the Air Quality Scrutiny Project group was presented to committee. The Chair indicated that the intention was for the group to resume as soon as it was practicable and that the terms of reference would need to be adjusted to reflect the change in circumstances since COVID-19.

RESOLVED –

The update was noted.

6 FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan for the four month period 1 August, 2021 to 30 November, 2021 was presented for information.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

7 **WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE ENTERPRISE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The 2021/22 Work Programme for the Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee was reported for information.

RESOLVED –

That the work programme be noted and updated to include the decisions of the current meeting.

8 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED –

The Minutes of the meeting of the Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee held on 1 April, 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.