

MINUTE of MEETING of the SERVICES FOR THE COMMUNITY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEST LOTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, on 5 FEBRUARY 2019.

Present – Councillors George Paul (Chair), Andrew McGuire, Alison Adamson, Frank Anderson, Lawrence Fitzpatrick, Peter Heggie and John McGinty

Apologies – Tenants' Panel representative David Rintoul and Voluntary Sector Gateway representative Pamela Roccio

In attendance – Tenants' Panel representatives Jessie Duncan, Alison Kerr and John Rooney

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. MINUTE

The panel confirmed the minute of its meeting held on 11 December 2018 as a correct record. The minute was thereafter signed by the Chair.

3. COMMUNITY SAFETY UPDATE

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services informing members of the strategic development of Community Safety and Quarter 3 performance for the Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT).

The report advised that the draft three-year Community Safety Plan 2019–2022 had been noted at the Community Safety Board meeting held on 10 December 2018. The plan would then be presented at the Community Planning Steering Group and then follow on the Community Planning Partnership Board for Final Approval.

The report also provided performance data from the Safer Neighbourhood Teams in relation to anti-social behaviour and noise nuisance. Appendix 1 to the report examined performance data in detail.

During discussion, it was noted that members of the public were encouraged to report incidents as appropriate information helped the team resolve issues and identify trends.

It was recommended that panel members note the report and the Quarter 3 performance information detailed for the Safer Neighbourhood Team.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

4. PROPERTY TURNOVER OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2018

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services providing an update on the property turnover for the Quarter October–December 2018.

It was reported that the number of permanent lets for the period was 418 compared to the same quarter in the previous year when 229 properties had been let.

Details of all lets and property numbers for the reporting period were provided in Appendix 1 and council stock figures by ward in Appendix 3. Appendix 2 showed assisted move lets.

It was recommended that the panel note the current levels of activity relating to property turnover for the third quarter of 2018/19 and in particular note:

- That there had been an increase in property lets compared to the same period in the previous year;
- That of the 47 communities in West Lothian, 4 had only 1 mainstream property to let and 19 had none; and
- That 61% of lets were allocated to people who were homeless or potentially homeless.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

5. AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY UPDATE

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services providing an update on various initiatives to increase the supply of affordable housing in West Lothian and advising of a contractor's withdrawal from developing 37 new build council houses at Deans South.

Since the beginning of 2012/13, 1632 affordable homes had been built or acquired in West Lothian. A total of 513 affordable homes were under construction at eight sites across West Lothian, while a number of new sites were expected to commence during 2019. Six sites for the new affordable housing programme had been approved on 17 April 2018. A variety of procurement options were envisaged and the appropriate approach for each site would be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

The report also indicated that in December 2018, Lovell Partnerships had intimated to the council that they would withdraw from participation in the development of 37 houses at Deans South in Livingston as part of the council's new build programme. Options to replace those units included re-tendering for a new contractor, relocating the units to another site,

negotiating with on-site suppliers and further open market acquisitions.

It was recommended that the panel:

- Note the progress being made on delivering 3,000 affordable homes in West Lothian over the period 2012–2022; and
- Note that Lovell Partnerships had withdrawn from developing 37 new build council houses at Deans South and that options for replacing those units were being explored.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

6. THE RENTAL EXCHANGE

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing Construction and Building Services advising of how the service intended to respond to the motion raised at council on 22 January directing Housing Customer and Building Services to prepare a report to explore the possibility of making the Rental Exchange initiative available to Council tenants wishing to participate in the initiative in order to improve their credit rating.

The report explained that the Rental Exchange was a partnership between the credit reference agency Experian and The Big Issue Invest aiming to help tackle some of the issues faced by rented sector tenants. A motion had been previously raised at full council for officers to examine the potential of The Rental Exchange to operate in Housing, Customer & Building Services. The full motion was contained in Appendix 1.

Benefits of the proposal included: building a positive credit history, financial inclusion and enabling tenants' access to goods and services, accurate, fair and informed decisions on the part of credit providers in evaluating customers, and encouraging on-time rent payment.

In order to assess the viability of The Rental Exchange as part of the council's income management approach, officers would undertake a detailed investigation, and a report with the findings would be presented to a future Services for the Community PDSP in 2019.

It was recommended that the panel note and comment on the proposed approach that would be taken by Housing, Customer and Building Services in assessing the viability of the scheme

The panel was also asked to note that the service would return to PDSP in 2019 to present the findings of the report detailing the investigation into the scheme in depth and the associated recommendations.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

7. HOUSING CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2019/20 TO 2022/23

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Depute Chief Executive advising of the updated housing Capital Investment Programme 2019/20 to 2022/23 and the proposed exemption for works under the terms of the Best Value Framework.

The report set out the proposed updated Housing Capital Investment Programme for 2019/20 to 2022/23, with proposed investment of £115.481 million and anticipated expenditure of £40.250 million. It was noted that the planned borrowing figure of £67.124 million under section D4 in the report was incorrect and that the correct figure was £71.367 million, shown under 'borrowing total' in Table 2.

The programme built on and consolidated local housing needs identified within the Strategic Housing Investment Programme and Local Housing Strategy. Through the Housing Capital Investment Programme, the council continued to maintain quality standards and invest in the suitability and sufficiency of its housing stock to improve the environment within communities and meet the needs of existing and future tenants across West Lothian. Further information on Housing Capital Investment Programme Projects was included in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively, while Appendix 3 showed the Equality Relevance Assessment undertaken as part of the programme.

There was a strong focus on the creation of additional social housing including completion of the existing new build programme, delivering a further 250 new build homes and continuing with a programme of open market acquisitions.

All aspects of the programme were geared towards securing best value, and a review of the programme had been undertaken to determine works to be carried out by external providers and works to be carried out in house to ensure compliance with the council's Best Value Framework.

It was recommended that the panel note:

- The updated 2019/20 to 2022/23 Housing Capital Investment Programme and related funding as detailed in the report; and
- The updated exemptions for works under the terms of the Best Value Framework as outlined in section D5 of the report.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND RENT LEVEL 2019/20 TO 2022/23

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Depute Chief Executive advising of the updated Housing Revenue

Account (HRA) financial plan for the period 2019/20 to 2022/23 as well as the HRA budget, rent and service charges for 2019/20.

The updated four-year HRA Revenue budget strategy provided a balanced financial plan, incorporating a 3% per annum rent increase, which would allow the council to continue to provide value for money services to tenants and to be responsive to customers' needs. It also enabled continued investment in existing housing stock and infrastructure, as well as expanding the supply of new housing. An equality relevance assessment had been undertaken on the updated four-year rent strategy and related budget for 2019/20, which was attached to the report as Appendix 1.

The report listed a number of risks and uncertainties that could impact on the level of financial resource required and indicated that appropriate steps would be taken to mitigate against them and contain expenditure within available resources.

The Prudential Code had been taken into account when preparing the proposed budget. A key prudential indicator was affordability, which assessed the incremental impact of capital spending on rent levels, and this area would continue to be closely monitored.

It was recommended that the panel note:

- The 3% rent strategy for the period 2019/20 to 2022/23, encompassing HRA properties and garages, which would fund service needs and the Housing Capital Investment Programme;
- The 3% rent strategy for Sheltered Housing and Homelessness properties, as well as related service and support charges for the period 2019/20 to 2022/23;
- A rent increase of 3% in 2019/20 and the updated 2019/20 to 2022/23 HRA budget.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

9. PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services advising of the current levels of performance for Housing, Customer and Building Services indicators that were the responsibility of the Services for the Community Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel.

Performance of key service activities had been measured through the use of key performance indicators (KPIs), some of which were also specified performance indicators (SPIs).

The panel was informed that of the ten performance indicators, six were

categorised as green and four as red. Information in the appendix to the report allowed the panel to measure current performance levels and showed actions being taken to address where current performance was below target.

It was recommended that the panel note the current performance on Housing, Customer and Building Services key performance indicators and determine if further action or enquiry was necessary.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

10. WORKPLAN

A copy of the workplan had been circulated for information.

Decision

To note the workplan.