

Decisions of the Business Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee

16 September 2013

Members Present:-

Councillor Hugh Rayner (Chairman)
Councillor Brian Salinger (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Maureen Braun	Councillor Geoffrey Johnson (In place of
Councillor Brian Gordon	Kath McGuirk)
Councillor Alison Moore	Kanu Dave (Housing Co-optee)
Councillor Barry Rawlings	Maxwell Doku (Housing Co-optee)

Also in attendance:-

Councillor Tom Davey - Cabinet Member for Housing

Councillor Andreas Ioannidis
Councillor Julie Johnson
Councillor Zakia Zubairi

Apologies for Absence:-

Councillor Jack Cohen	Councillor Rowan Quigley Turner
Councillor Kath McGuirk	Councillor Andrew Strongolou

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chairman advised Members that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2013 would be approved at the next scheduled meeting of the Committee on 7 October 2013.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

Apologies for absence had been received from:

- Councillor Jack Cohen who was absent on Council business;
- Councillor Rowan Quigley Turner;
- Councillor Kath McGuirk who was substituted for by Councillor Geoffrey Johnson; and
- Councillor Andrew Strongolou

3. DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

None.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (IF ANY)

None.

5. MEMBERS' ITEMS

None.

6. AMENDMENTS TO HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME AND THE INTRODUCTION OF A PLACEMENTS POLICY

The Committee received public comments from Mr Julian Silverman in relation to the item.

The Committee welcomed Councillor Tom Davey, Cabinet Member for Housing, Paul Shipway, Head of Strategy and Performance, Kate Laffan, Head of Housing Options at Barnet Homes and Ian Helcke, Service Manager, Housing Needs at Barnet Homes who were in attendance to answer questions on the revised Housing Allocations Scheme and Placements Policy which had been updated following a public consultation process.

In introducing the item, Councillor Davey outlined that the Council were seeking to make the best use of limited housing stock and that the policy was seeking to minimise the issue of voids. The Committee were advised that the public consultation had shown that the public were broadly supportive of the policy, but that there were some concerns regarding what constituted a reasonable offer of accommodation.

A Member highlighted that of the 800 Barnet Homes tenants that had been sent the consultation documents, only 100 had responded. It was noted that more people had disagreed (47.8%) with the amendment of the scheme to one offer of accommodation only than had agreed (41.1%).

Councillor Davey advised the Committee that he supported the principle that people should live where they could afford to and that market forces should apply to social housing.

The Committee proposed that the Appendix 3 (Draft Placements Policy) be amended to make more explicit reference to religious needs, particularly Section 8 (How the Council will ensure it makes suitable offers of accommodation to discharge the full homeless duty), Test 3 (Suitability and property location and subjective circumstance of the applicant) under the heading 'Suitability and the consideration of any other subjective matters' to make specific reference to religious / cultural needs and places of worship.

A Member commented that he considered the current banding system should be abandoned and replaced with a choice based system. Officers advised the Committee that the Council were currently operating a system of assisted choice which had become unsustainable due to the lack of supply (currently 30% lower than April 2012).

The Committee noted that the Mayor of London's recent decision to set the new affordable rent amount at 80% of market rates would have a significant impact on low paid workers, including council employees. Councillor Alison Moore MOVED a recommendation that the Chairman be requested to submit an objection to the Mayor of

London on his recent decision to set the new affordable rent amount at 80% of market rates. Upon being put to the vote, the motion was LOST.

A Member made the following recommendations for minor amendments to the Cabinet report, Housing Allocations Scheme and Placements Policy:

- Appendix 2 (The Housing Allocations Scheme, September 2013) – under the ‘Procedure for Appeals and Reviews’ amend to refer to two working days instead of 48 hours.
- Appendix 3 (Draft Placements Policy) –Section 8 (How the Council will ensure it makes suitable offers of accommodation to discharge the full homeless duty), Test 3 (Suitability and property location and subjective circumstances of the applicant) under the heading ‘The suitability Regulations relating to location’ – amend section (c) to include proximity to carers.

The Cabinet Member for Housing agreed to the amendments set out above.

A Member queried whether there should be an additional bullet point at 9.21 of the Cabinet report. The Cabinet Member for Housing agreed to check this.

A Member suggested that under the definition of a community contribution should be amended to include parents who were looking after their own children under two and not just people who were involved in caring for other children under two on a voluntary basis.

A Member suggested that the decision to reduce the number of affordable houses on the West Hendon Regeneration Scheme had contributed to a reduction in supply. The Cabinet Member for Housing was requested to consider the impact of decisions regarding the provision of affordable housing in housing schemes on the availability of social housing more widely in the borough.

The Housing Co-opted Members expressed concern about the affordability of the private rented sector for housing applicants in light of increasing rents and benefit caps. The Cabinet Member for Housing advised the Committee that an offer in the private rented sector would only be made if this was an affordable solution for the applicant. He added that the supply was an issue for all London boroughs and that many authorities were discharging their housing duties outside of the borough.

RESOLVED that:-

- 1. The Committee recommend to Cabinet that Housing Allocations Scheme retain the option for applicants to refuse the first reasonable offer of accommodation and have a further choice from the property pool.**
- 2. The Committee recommend to Cabinet that the Housing Allocations Scheme retains the requirement for houses with gardens to be reserved for households with children under 10.**
- 3. The Cabinet Member for Housing be requested to provide details of the Council’s plans to develop social housing in the borough to the Housing Co-opted Members.**

7. ADVANCED NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

RESOLVED that the Committee note the Forward Work Programme.

8. BUSINESS MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED that the Committee note the Forward Work Programme.

9. ANY OTHER ITEMS THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT

None.

The meeting finished at 7.52 pm