

CITY OF DONCASTER COUNCIL

REGENERATION & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 23RD NOVEMBER, 2022

A MEETING of the REGENERATION & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER, DONCASTER on WEDNESDAY, 23RD NOVEMBER, 2022 at 11.00 AM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Majid Khan

Councillors Iris Beech, Steve Cox, Sue Farmer, Sophie Liu, John Mounsey and Gary Stapleton

In attendance

St Leger Homes Doncaster (SLHD)

- Dave Richmond – Chief Executive
- Andrea Jarratt - Access and Allocations Service Manager

		<u>ACTION</u>
1	<u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.</u>	
	There were no apologies made.	
2	<u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u>	
	None	
3	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	There were no declarations of interest made.	
4	<u>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9TH MARCH 2022</u>	
	RESOLVED: The minutes of the meetings held on the held on the 9 th March 2022 were agreed as a true record.	
5	<u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS</u>	
	There were no public statements made.	

The Panel received a report outlining the Housing Allocation Policy Review.

To support the report, Dave Richmond, Chief Executive of St Leger Homes of Doncaster highlighted that once approved, the updated policy would be adopted by Doncaster Council. The Panel were then provided with more detail on each of the suggested changes made to the policy.

During discussion, the following areas were addressed by the Panel;

Consultation – Members were assured that the consultation process was robust enough to proceed with the suggested changes to the Housing Allocation Policy. The Panel were reminded that they had previously received a presentation detailing the methodology of the consultation process. It was also explained that along with the report, additional information was provided highlighting the types and numbers of organisations/individuals consulted with, and all the comments made by those who took part in the consultation.

Exclusion of proposals – In response to a question it was explained that in section 15.5 of the report, following the consultation period, the responses were grouped into 4 main themes with some incorporated into the policy. The Panel understood that any proposals excluded from the refreshed report was due to the legal obligations within part 6 and 7 of the Housing Act.

Range of groups – It was explained that a wide range of groups were consulted with during the process which included;

- Staffing groups within St Leger Homes,
- Doncaster Council,
- Organisations such as Crisis and Shelter,
- Large sector of housing associations.

Members understood that the groups were consulted with, in a variety of ways such as during meetings, presentations and newsletters and it was felt that these methods of consultation had worked well.

It was advised, that the results of the consultation would be published on the web, within press releases and newsletters to groups, staff and stakeholders and direct contact would be made with active housing applicants. It was continued that along with the results of the consultation, myth-busting information would also be published to support the public's understanding as to why the changes were necessary.

Numbers of responses – A Member commented that the percentages reported under point 15.2 of the report added up to 107%. In response, it was advised that this was due to a typing error and that it would be duly amended.

It was clarified, that there were 866 responses to the consultation by individuals and that there were approximately 19,990 council properties, and around 50,000 tenants living within those properties.

A Member raised concern that 866 responses from 50,000 tenants appeared to be a poor response from a consultation point of view. Members were advised that all council tenants were encouraged to participate and additional support was offered if required. It was explained that the consultation was advertised in a numbers of ways in an effort to engage with all tenants. It was added that those who had responded were likely to have had an active housing application during the consultation period and the figures were representative of the numbers of people on the housing register.

Changes - A brief overview was provided with each of the changes made;

- Change 1** – It was advised that the incentives for under occupiers of council properties to downsize had not been defined, however, it would be worked on in consultation with the Portfolio Holder and may include practical help, for example, support with moving costs, providing boxes etc.
- Change 6** – It was explained that during the last 12 months, 41% of applicants moving from supported housing projects to independent living had been given platinum priority, and the majority were placed by the Single Point Of Access Teams through commissioned services. To ensure those most in need were given priority, it was hoped that St Leger Homes would work with and support non-commissioned services through Service Level Agreements or as preferred partners in order to identify and ensure that platinum priority was only provided to individuals most in need.
- Change 11** – It was highlighted to Members that by law, individuals who were homeless through no fault of their own, were vulnerable, and in the Platinum Band received one offer of suitable accommodation. It was recognised that presently, others within the Platinum Band were offered three choices of suitable accommodation. It was considered therefore for fairness reasons that there should be consistency across the bands and change 11 was proposed to incorporate a refusal penalty. It was explained that many people refused up to 10 suitable property offers making the process much longer for all involved. It was hoped that the inclusion of the penalty would ensure that the offer process would become much quicker, especially for those individuals most in need.

Choice Based Lettings System – A Member questioned whether

	<p>having a Choice Based Lettings System was too complicated. In response, it was acknowledged that the reality of the availability of properties and applicants expectations were quite different, and that the system had both advantages and disadvantages.</p> <p>Accommodation for Homeless – A Member of the Panel acknowledged that some homeless people were being placed in temporary accommodation and then moved again once more suitable accommodation was found. It was recognised that whilst this was not ideal, it was necessary due to the limited availability of housing stock, however, it remained a priority to ensure families were moved into permanent properties as soon as possible.</p> <p>Exchange System – It was explained to the Panel that to help support those tenants for whatever reason wished to move, an exchange system between housing association tenants was being looked into. This would enable tenants to swap accommodation through mutual exchange rather than them submitting an application to move.</p> <p>Right To Buy Scheme – It was advised that the Right To Buy Scheme would not put the housing stock at risk, and there was nothing within the review that would increase the potential for an increase in tenants using the Right To Buy Scheme.</p> <p>Gypsy and Traveller Sites - In respect of Gypsy and Traveller sites, it was explained that this had been considered as part of the Due Regard statement for the Housing Allocation Policy. Clarification was provided that work around the access to suitable pitches for the travelling communities sits outside the policy.</p> <p>Emergency Measures – In response to a question, the Panel were assured that the measures within the reviewed policy should help with increased demand. It was also noted that the authority had provided SLHD with additional funding and as a result, staffing levels had been increased to cope with rising demand experienced since the pandemic. It was reported that staff were starting to develop better partnerships with private rental landlords and had increased the private rental accommodation on offer recently from 0 properties to 30.</p> <p>Resolved; that the Panel supports the detail contained in the Housing Allocation Policy review prior to it being considered by Cabinet.</p>	
7	<p><u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN AND COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS</u></p>	
	<p>The Senior Governance Officer presented the Overview and Scrutiny work plan and advised that the next meeting was scheduled for the 7th December 2022.</p> <p>In response to a question the Chair invited Members to put forward</p>	

	<p>proposals for subject areas that the Panel may wish to look at.</p> <p>A Member asked for confirmation as to whether the authority had a strategy about asylum seekers and the impact on communities.</p> <p>Resolved; that the report be noted, and the Chair recommended that an update be provided through OSMC.</p>	
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