

CITY OF DONCASTER COUNCIL

REGENERATION & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 17TH JULY, 2023

A MEETING of the REGENERATION & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICE, WATERDALE, DONCASTER DN1 3BU, DONCASTER on MONDAY, 17TH JULY, 2023 at 1.30 PM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Majid Khan

Councillors Iris Beech, Sophie Liu, Thomas Noon, Ian Pearson and Andrea Robinson

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Mark McEgan, Director of Housing Services St Leger Homes of Doncaster
Andrea Jarrett, Service Manager Access and Allocations, St Leger Homes of Doncaster

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Steve Cox and John Mounsey

		<u>ACTION</u>
1	<u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u>	
	There were no items on the agenda.	
2	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	There were no declarations made.	
3	<u>MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF THE REGENERATION & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON 9TH MARCH, 2023</u>	
	RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 th March, 2023 were agreed as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.	
4	<u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS - [A PERIOD NOT EXCEEDING 20 MINUTES FOR STATEMENTS FROM UP TO 5 MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON MATTERS WITHIN THE COMMITTEES REMIT, PROPOSING ACTION(S) WHICH MAY BE CONSIDERED OR CONTRIBUTE</u>	

	<p><u>TOWARDS THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMITTEES WORK PROGRAMME].</u></p>	
	<p>There were no members of the public in attendance and therefore no statements made.</p>	
<p>5</p>	<p><u>CITY OF DONCASTER COUNCIL LOCAL LETTINGS POLICIES REVIEW</u></p>	
	<p>The Panel gave consideration to a report outlining the Local Lettings Policy review undertaken by St Leger Homes of Doncaster. The report presented set out 10 lettings policies that sat outside the main Housing Allocation Policy in place across the borough in the allocation of Council homes.</p> <p>The Panel addressed the following issues during it's discussion:</p> <p><u>Consultation</u> – In response to a question relating to how thoroughly the consultation had been undertaken, particularly the effectiveness of face to face discussions, it was explained that in terms of Member engagement the consultation period had been extended ensuring all Members had maximum opportunity to engage. Community and Member Ward meetings had been used to gain views of residents and Councillors. Many Ad hoc meetings had also been held presenting the information to different groups and individuals. The discussion also referenced section 14 of the report outlining consultation undertaken.</p> <p>It was clarified that the newsletter, used as part of the consultation was not available in audio format, however if a person had, for example, a language barrier then reasonable arrangements would be put in place and a flag retained on file for any future contact. It was again stressed that there had been many face to face meetings as part of the consultation process.</p> <p><u>Banding priority</u> – A Member questioned whether personal circumstances were taken into account when allocating a housing allocation band. It was explained that the bidding order was the same as in the overarching allocations policy for each property type ensuring legal compliance. The Local Lettings policies allowed the system administration to bypass people who either do not qualify or who do not meet the local priority order of the New Build Local Lettings Policy, not change the shortlisting order.</p> <p><u>Securing reasonable preference for specific categories paragraph 9.1 of the report</u> – A Member sought clarification on what was reasonable when an individual seeking housing had a whole range of needs, for many reasons. In response it was explained that when someone made an application for housing a number of checks were undertaken and all decisions were evidence based, and the system could be bypassed to ensure need was met. It was noted that priority was given to many</p>	

applicants who fell within the following categories:

- Homeless persons, or person threatened with homelessness;
- Persons occupying insanitary or overcrowding housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- Persons who need to move on medical or welfare grounds; and
- Persons who need to move to a particular locality within the local authority's area and a failure to meet that need would cause hardship to themselves or others.

In response to additional questions relating to protecting people within the protected characteristics, it was explained that when a client bids on a property they would already be placed in a band relating to their level of housing need and identified their priority and protective characteristics.

It was explained that when properties were let, St Leger Homes was very honest about any ongoing issues in areas where people were bidding, for example, any anti-social behaviour.

It was also explained that with regard to new build St Leger Homes' properties, they would be prioritised to people with local links but again this would need to be evidence based. Applicants would be prioritised starting with the platinum band.

Members recognised the hard work required to ensure the Local Lettings Policy was administered effectively.

Void rent loss – In response to a question relating to minimising how long a property was empty to reduce rent loss, it was explained that there were currently 130 empty properties with the strong desire to reduce to 80. It was acknowledged that quarterly performance was available and considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee where these figures could be monitored.

In response to a further question it was explained that renovations to an empty property could be labour intensive, for many reasons including material availability, and "yes" targets could fall. The Panel noted that properties were advertised at the earliest opportunity to enable shortlisting, offers and viewing. With regard to new build schemes, if for example there were 5 x 3 new homes on a scheme, only 1 of each property type was advertised ensuring customers only used 1 bid. Regular communication with the Local Authority's Strategic Housing Team was imperative with regard to the delivery of new build schemes.

It was confirmed that if a property required planned maintenance, eg.

major adaptation they were not included in the 26 day renovation target, only minor adaptations were included, for example fitting hand rails.

Hospital discharges - In response to a question, it was noted that St Leger Homes met weekly with the hospital team ensuring people returned home as soon as they were able. At the time of the meeting there was 1 person who was due to be housed but they were in rehabilitation.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) reduction – It was explained that when allocating a property a person's history would be addressed, for example if there had been any ASB within the preceding two year period they would be discounted. A client must show they have suitable conduct for 12 months prior to being offered a property.

Home Choice Website - It was explained that 98% of customers currently chose to bid for a property via the website. It was highlighted however that a review of the website was currently being undertaken to ensure it was more accessible. A Member stated that the system needed to be easy to follow and offered to take part in the review to assist with access for people with a disability. In relation to any new system, it was confirmed that value for money and customers being at the forefront from any system, as being a priority.

Future Housing requirements – Whilst noting there were approximately 7,000 applicants currently on the housing register, the Panel was assured that conversations were regularly held with the Council's Strategic Housing Team, with a range of initiatives being undertaken to address supply and demand. With regard to any proposed new build properties it was recognised that it could take up to 3 years for these to be made available. There were also incentive schemes for people living in under occupied properties to help make them available for larger families.

It was noted that the target with regard to property acquisition was approximately 240 over a 5 year period, approximately 60 per annum, with the ability to purchase being financially driven.

New Build Schemes – it was outlined that St Leger Homes would normally be given 100% of nomination rights on the first let, reducing to 75% or 50% depending on the agreement. Therefore when new build properties were advertised for St Leger Homes the clients would go through the same process and need to adhere to the Local Lettings Policy. It was noted that with some recent new build properties the enhanced local criteria was added to the letting.

St Leger Lettings – it was noted that this part of the business was encouraging as many private landlords as possible to rent and manage their properties through St Leger Homes.

	<p>It was also stressed that South Yorkshire Housing was now advertising all its properties through St Leger Homes. To summarise any property let through St Leger Homes, then the shortlist for letting a property would be undertaken using the same policy and rules.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u> That the Local Lettings Policy, be supported.</p>	
6	<p><u>CITY OF DONCASTER COUNCIL GYPSY AND TRAVELLER PITCH ALLOCATION POLICY REVIEW</u></p>	
	<p>A report was presented by St Leger Homes of Doncaster outlining ten proposed changes to the Council's Pitch Allocations Policy for the four Gypsy and Traveller sites at Armthorpe, Long Sandall, Thorne and Sprotbrough.</p> <p>The Panel was informed of the consultation undertaken with residents, active waiting list applicants, key stakeholders and Councillors through a number of mechanisms including social media and traditional methods for example, focus groups. Through the Housing Development Officer, who has built good relationships within the community, face to face sessions were held at different times of the day and had made consultation much easier.</p> <p>It was noted that there were currently 30 applicants on the waiting list but some had been on for a number of years and not actively seeking a site, however, it was good practice not to remove the applicants.</p> <p>With regard to the number of current pitches it was explained that there were no current plans to expand the number of pitches available, however plans to improve pitches were being explored.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED:</u> That the Policy, be supported.</p>	
7	<p><u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PLAN AND COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS</u></p>	
	<p>The Senior Governance Officer highlighted the Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan and Council's Forward Plan of key decisions to the Panel for its attention.</p> <p>Resolved: That the information, be noted.</p> <p>Chair: _____</p> <p>Dated: _____</p>	