

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY 28 MARCH, 2017 AT 4.00 P.M.
IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK
PART 1

PRESENT: Councillors:

Foley, D. (Chairman)
Burnett, G. (Vice-Chairman)

Cartwright, Mrs. S.M.	Snape, D.J.
Cooper, Miss. J.	Stretton, Mrs. P.Z.
Dudson, A.	Witton, P.T.
Hoare, M.W.A.	

Also Present: Observing:

Councillor F.W.C. Allen, Housing Portfolio Leader.

20. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs. D. Grice, Mrs. C.L. Peake and Miss. S. Whitehouse.

21. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restrictions on Voting by Members

No further declarations were made in addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members Interests.

22. Minutes

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 November, 2016 be approved as a correct record.

23. Presentation – Private Sector Housing Service

Mike Walker, Environmental Protection Manager gave a presentation with regard to the private sector housing service.

He provided information on the following:

- Housing Conditions – which included inadequate heating and insulation, mould impacting upon the structure of the property and lifestyle of the person and gas/electrical/fire safety
- HMO Programme
- Liaising with the Fire Service
- Projects
- Empty Homes
- DFG Programme
- In House DFG agency
- Home safety/security
- Drainage
- Property accreditation – the fitness of a person
- Park Homes – where a fee could be taken for inspections
- Planning Consultations

He advised that some of the achievements of 2015/16 included:

- 457 requests for service received
- 10 HMOs Inspected with 2 emergency prohibitions, 1 improvement notice and 3 prohibitions being given

With regard to single occupation he reported that there had been:

- 2 emergency remedial action notices including work in default
- 4 prohibition orders
- 3 improvement notices
- 2 notices for smoke alarms

Also there had been:

- 5 Improvement notices
- 1 prohibition order
- 4 Hazard awareness notices
- 5 Smoke alarm notices
- 1 Building Act notice
- 132 accredited properties
- Also close to completing the first Compulsory Purchase Order

He also reported that with regard to DFGs there had been:

- Over 80 completed
- 81 Home Security Grants completed
- 44 Safe as Houses Grants completed
- 28 Safer Communities Grants (new) completed
- 3 empty homes loans approved

Mike Walker reported that during 2016-17 a prosecution had taken place due to 'sale blocking' at The Firs which had resulted in a fine and costs of £14,525. There was also a prosecution for unsafe accommodation at 'Spices' located on

the Walsall Road, Cannock which had resulted in a fine and costs of £5180.

He then provided information on grants awarded:

- Disabled Facilities Grants
 - 57 completed with a spend of £586,216
 - 23 awaiting approval
 - 14 new referrals
 - 38 in progress at various stages
- Safe as Houses
 - 31 completed with a £23,333 spend
- Home Security Grants
 - 61 completed with a £23,590 spend
- Safer Community Grants
 - 23 completed with a £3,965 spend

Members were then invited to ask questions.

In response to a question raised by a Member, Mike Walker indicated that carbon monoxide detectors were not installed as there was very few fuel burning appliances in properties such as open fires.

A Member referred to the presentation and was keen to know if the Council kept the monies collected from fines issued where prosecutions had taken place.

Mike Walker explained that the money from fines was not kept by the Council; however if a Category 1 notice was served, a fee could be charged or if a prosecution went through the courts the Council could be awarded costs.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the number of empty properties in the District, Mike Walker indicated that there were possibly around 400 empty with at least 50 or more being vacant for over 2 years. Furthermore, he advised that the Local Plan did not bear any correlation under the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. He advised that a list was produced by the Local Taxation and Benefits section which provided information where properties had been vacant for 6 months or more. If a property was flagged up that had been vacant for more than 2 years, the Council would offer assistance through the Empty Homes Loan of up to £10k to make improvements to the property.

The Member commented on the costs associated with Disabled Facility Grants and asked if the Council could incentivise the accreditation scheme in order that more people would join.

In response to a question raised by a Member concerning Park Homes inspections, Mike Walker explained that they were licensed and a one off inspection would take place and a fee charged on a yearly basis. He advised that if problems did occur, a notice could be served and costs claimed back.

A Member asked whether the Council helped with costs towards home security in Council owned properties, and also asked about the situation regarding Council Tax payments for empty properties.

Mike Walker responded and advised that if a property was empty for a certain period of time, Council tax would be increased to 150%. However, he indicated that it could be difficult to locate the owner of a property or difficulties around probate.

With regard to safety he advised that the Council could make arrangements for a security contractor to assess the requirements of a property which could include advising on the type of locks, lighting etc and then make the necessary arrangements for work to be carried out.

24. Voids Process – Action Plan

Janet Baldasera, Strategic Housing and Tenancy Services Manager provided Members with a Voids and Allocations Review Improvement Plan 2016-17 and discussed each area.

A Member referred to the costs associated with the clean up of voids and asked if the Council required a security deposit from prospective tenants.

Janet Baldasera advised that the Council could not ask for security deposits, however prospective tenants were asked to pay a rent payment a week in advance and the Council was also trying to make sure all tenants were set up for direct debit payments.

A Member highlighted the average overall re-let time for voids of just over 35 days which could be improved, although he indicated that other circumstances had impacted upon this. He then asked that the area around voids be retained on the future Work programme.

In response to a question raised by a Member concerning the disconnection of utilities in voids, Janet Baldasera responded and advised that this was now normal practice and the Council now had an agreement in place with Scottish and Southern Electricity in order that new tenants would have a utility supplier from the day they moved into a property. This had improved the process and there were currently no issues.

25. Draft Neighbourhood Plans

Belinda Wildey, Estate Management Team Leader provided Members with the draft Housing Services Neighbourhood Plans (areas 1 – 3) and discussed the documents.

A Member commented that the information would be very useful for both Members and tenants and was keen to know when the documents would be implemented, reviewed and updated.

Belinda Wildey indicated that this was an ongoing service objective and each estate would have a programme schedule, however the plans would come back to the Committee at some point.

With regard to carrying out a tenant census, Belinda Wildey indicated that work would soon commence on estates highlighted within the Neighbourhood Plans where forms would be issued and any forms not returned by residents would be chased up. This would help capture data from new tenants and hopefully those that had held tenancies for a long time. It was hoped that in the future the Council would hold a full profile list of tenants.

A Member referred to rent arrears and court orders and asked how benefit payments were currently made to tenants.

Nirmal Samrai, Head of Housing and Waste Management advised that new benefit claims would be paid direct to tenants following the introduction of Universal Credits, and this would soon replace the existing system.

26. Quarter 3 Performance Update 2016-17 – More and Better Housing Priority Delivery Plan

Members considered the Quarter 3 Performance Information 2016-17, More and Better Housing Priority Delivery Plan (Item 6.1 – 6.6).

More and Better Housing: Planning for the Housing Needs of the District

It was reported that with regard to the number of affordable dwellings secured through S106 agreements, there had been one agreement signed this quarter and one waiting to be signed.

Increasing the Supply of Affordable Housing: Progress the Redevelopment of 5 Former Garage Sites and other Areas of Council Owned Land

It was reported that work on three sites Berwick Drive, Hannaford Way and Brunswick Road had just started. Agreement had also been given for another six sites.

Janet Baldasera reported that St Michael's Drive was not suitable for housing, however High Meadow was being considered and information was due to come forward from Reema. A report would however be submitted to the next meeting.

Planning for the Housing Needs of the District

It was reported that this area was now covered by the Head of Economic Development, and therefore an update would be emailed to all Members.

Members noted the Quarter 3 Performance Update 2016-17 – More and Better Housing Priority Delivery Plan.

27. Work Programme for 2016-17

Members noted the current Work Programme for 2016-17 and the future proposed items for 2017-18 which would also include:

- Voids Update
- Neighbourhood Plans (including garages)

28. For Information Only – LGA Briefing – Homelessness Reduction Bill

Nirmal Samrai reported that information had been circulated to all Committee Members following a meeting that she and the Chairman had attended where the Homelessness Reduction Bill was discussed.

CHAIRMAN

(The meeting concluded at 5.30 p.m.).