

Democratic Services
Salisbury District Council
PO Box 2117
Salisbury, Wiltshire SP2 2DF

officer to contact: Jade Hibberd
direct line: 01722 434353
fax: 01722 434478
email: jhibberd@salisbury.gov.uk
web: www.salisbury.gov.uk

Minutes

Meeting of : Community & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Meeting held in : The meeting room, City Hall, Salisbury
Date : Wednesday 18 February 2009
Commencing at : 6.00 pm

District Councillors:

Councillor M A Hewitt (Chairman)
Councillor B Rycroft (Vice Chairman)

Present:

Councillors J Broom, J M English, M J Osment, C G Mills, R Britton, D J Luther and J A Green

Tenants Panel:

Mr Watkins, Mrs Jewell, Mr Hinnis and Mr Southey

Present - Officers:

Laura Young (WCC), Derek Streek (Housing management) and Jade Hibberd (Democratic Services)

Apologies:

Councillors C J Morrison, I M Mitchell, R J Clewer and Mr Edwards.

102. Public Questions / Statement Time:

There were none.

103. Councillor Questions/Statement Time:

There were none.

104. Minutes:

Resolved: that the minutes of the last ordinary meeting held on 21st January 2009 (previously circulated) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

105. Declarations of Interest:

There were none.

106. Chairman's Announcements:

There were none.



Awarded in:
Housing Services
Waste and Recycling Services



107. Choice Based Lettings:

The committee received an update and overview on Choice Based Lettings from the Choice Based Letting Project Manager (WCC) Laura Young, who also addressed the previously circulated questions from Members.

- It was explained that Choice Based Letting was first piloted 2001 with the purpose of active participation and offering more choice to customers. The aim being that it creates more sustainable communities because the customer has taken responsibility through choosing their property and would therefore be motivated in its maintenance and the community's success.
- Anticipated problems with the scheme previously have been that the information would not reach the entire targeted population.
- In the current economic climate the scheme could positively affect a growing number of people.
- The scheme will be administered by the Homes for Wiltshire Team. When all positions are filled there will be 12 staff members included within this.
- The administration team for the scheme will be based in Devises.
- Feedback has been gained through questionnaires and open days held in the four areas which are mainly affected. In December 2008 all those on the housing list were also written to and a newsletter was issued to give information explaining the scheme. The team had been working with libraries which would be the primary source of information and adverts, with library staff given training to be able to communicate to the public how it all works.
- An advertising directory is also being developed which will enable alternative sites of information to be utilised should a member of the public contact the team saying they are unable to access their nearest library.
- Contact has been made with Parish Councils so that they may be utilised to communicate information to the public where necessary.
- Those officers on the Homes for Wiltshire team that are assigned to home visits for those less able will also be able to highlight those individuals that may encounter problems of access and the best route to resolve it.
- Previously, those on the housing list that had not bid were written to ask why this was the case. The most common reason given was that individuals had anticipated being on the housing list for several years before being offered accommodation and at that current point they did not want to move. There was also a small proportion that had reported not being able to understand the system, and they were then targeted and provided with assistance and training.
- When asked about the appeals process Laura Young explained that customers can appeal against their banding and another officer will reevaluate their case.
- Laura Young was asked how competing bids would be dealt with, to which she explained that each customer is categorised into five bands of priority which then go into the computer system that ranks customers by taking into account factors such as how long they have been waiting and if they have a local connection.
- Regarding living expenditure in the properties it was explained that heating cost, council tax banding and energy performance etc would be evaluated previously and the information would be available at the time of bidding so customers could be fully informed.
- Following the committees concerns regarding those such as the elderly or those with learning difficulties having problems in accessing and understanding the information, the officer was questioned about the use of advocates. It was explained that it was possible for advocates to bid on behalf of a customer as long as they had given their permission and appropriate details.
- A similar position is also true of under 18's, where an adolescent requires their own residence, a guardian can act on their behalf in bidding as long as it can be demonstrated that they will not be managing the tenancy alone.

Resolved – that the update be noted.

108. Housing Review Update:

The Panel considered the update, circulated at the meeting, on housing issues in the district from Councillor Fowler who sits on the Housing Group for the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Transition Board. The report stated that;

“Since the Overview meeting on 26th November the Housing Scrutiny Task Group (HSTG) has considered the following subjects for harmonization:-

Harmonization of Key Policies, Procedures, Practices and Fees/Charges, Council Nominations to Stock Transfer Associations, PFI report, Extra Care Housing Scheme, Housing Services Support for

Area Boards, Rent Arrears for Council Managed Temporary Accommodation, Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme, Removals and Storage, National Indicators and Local PIs, Joint Direction of Travel Report and regular updates on Budget, Key Issues and Risks.

I think members will be aware that the other 3 D.Cs have transferred their stock to Registered Social Landlords and it has been my objective to ensure Salisbury's unique position is understood by the other 4 members of the HSTG.

On the positive side our Care Connect Service has been adopted County wide. It is anticipated that our Housing Management will remain in Salisbury for at least the next two years.

Housing Director, Graham Hogg has maintained contact with our Tenants' Panel and anticipates organising training for the Panel to meet their future needs.

On the negative side Heads of Housing have not yet been appointed and whilst it is anticipated that Derek Streek will be appointed, the HSTG has added its representations to the JOSTG.

The HRA account has been a particular difficulty with its projected future shortfall and members will be aware of the setback arising from the IE minute No.179 of 13th January.

The next meeting of the Group will be on 12th March when the draft final report will be considered."

Resolved – that;

(1) a letter be written from the Community and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel to the Implementation Executive, Graham Hogg, Jane Scott and John Thomson to express its unhappiness at how housing staff have been left unknowing about their employment status in the Unitary Authority for so long.

(2) the update be noted.

*Meeting closed at: 19:30
Members of the Public: 0*