

HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel held on Thursday, 19 January 2017 at 10.00 am at the Civic Offices, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Darren Sanders (in the Chair)

Councillors Gemma New
Jennie Brent
Alicia Denny
Frank Jonas
Leo Madden

1. Apologies for absence (AI 1)

Councillor Denny apologised for her late arrival.

2. Declaration of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting - 15 December 2016 (AI 3)

The minutes of the previous meeting were still in draft form and would be considered at the next meeting.

4. Current review: Housing Need and Empty Properties in Portsmouth and the impact of Government Policy on them (AI 4)

Bruce Lomax, the Private Sector Housing Manager made the following points during the discussion;

- The council's response to the Housing and Planning Act 2016 white paper has been sent. Legislation is expected to come into force in August 2017.
- There is concern with regard to housing in multiple occupation and concerning room size.
- The Government is proposing to set a minimum room size of 6.52sqm per person for rooms used for sleeping accommodation in licensable HMOs.
- The council does have some concerns with regard to enforcement of this and how it relates to its current licences.
- The Government is proposing that properties occupied by five or more persons forming two or more households will be subject to mandatory licensing.
- It is estimated that there will be an additional 700 new licences, in addition to the 500+ larger properties licensable.

- Licence fees for these new licences will contribute towards the team and service as this is a self-funding service.

Mr Lomax then explained the process regarding HMO properties in Waverley Road.

There is a high concentration of high occupancy properties in Waverley Road and the surrounding area. The council have always had problems with the condition of properties and with some tenants. There have been a number of alcohol and/or drug abuse issues. This has created over time a 'no go' area. There have been reports of persons drinking in the park and public places and drug use. The Private Sector Housing have tried to work with one particular landlord to encourage him to change his business model. The landlord had contact with a number of agencies/charities and the prison service to provide tenants with a room. Often tenants would not turn up when on probation and their lifestyles spiralled downwards owing partly to the influence of the other tenants. The council were contacted by the Police last year and a multi-agency approach was taken. The council inspected all properties, owned by this landlord, and listed all defects and how the properties were being managed over a 4 month period. As a result the management company were deemed unfit to manage the properties and their licences were revoked. In their place the council issued interim management orders. This means that the properties come under the control of the council. This led to negotiations with the landlord and a way forward was proposed. The council insisted on a different licence holder and management of the properties. In the interim, persons who were causing the majority of the anti-social behaviour have been removed from three properties. The majority of these tenants have been housed either in alternative accommodation or are homeless through choice. The remaining few tenants will be evicted through the eviction process. Plenty of support has been offered to the tenants but some will not accept help of any sort. As a result of the council's action most of the properties owned by this landlord are of the required standard except for one property in Beach Road which has been served an improvement notice. Any action the council takes is against the management company.

Way forward.

The council could set up a focus group in Waverley Road. These groups work well and are a positive way forward for both landlords and tenants. Mediation also often helps, getting tenants together with local residents to share concerns and problems.

Lessons learned.

The council needs to act sooner. Action should have been taken a few years ago but there was concern about the well-being of the tenants when evicted.

As vice-chair of the Homelessness Working Group, Councillor Gemma New updated the panel with regard to the work of that group. She felt there was a need to reach out to homeless persons and to build up a trusting relationship with them so that they engage with services which can help them.

5. Date of next meeting. (AI 5)

It was agreed that the Assistant Director of Culture and City Development, the Housing Options Manager and a representative from the Society of St James' be invited to the next meeting which would be held in approximately four weeks' time.

The meeting concluded at 10.55 am.

Councillor Darren Sanders
Chair