

HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel held on Tuesday, 30 July 2019 at 2pm at the Civic Offices, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Luke Stubbs (in the Chair)
Chris Attwell
Leo Madden
Claire Udy
Steve Wemyss

9. **Apologies for Absence. (AI 1)**
Councillor Cal Corkery sent his apologies.
10. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting. (AI 2)**
RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March be agreed as a correct record.
11. **Review of temporary accommodation. (AI 3)**
RESOLVED that the report be signed off and submitted to the Cabinet for consideration.
12. **Review of the experiences gathered after the decant of residents from tower blocks (AI 4)**
RESOLVED that the scoping document for this review be agreed.

Paul Fielding, Assistant Director, Housing introduced the presentation which explains the chronology and responded to questions from members along with James Hill, Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services, Charlotte Smith, Assistant Director Community & Communication and Jo Bennett, Head of Business Relationships, Growth & Support.

Small scale decants take place when stock is given to us by Housing Associations and need refurbishing before a tenant can move in. This can take between 1 week and 3 months to complete.

Both disturbance and home loss payments are made to tenants who cannot return to their home. Compensation payments are also made for other costs incurred including replacing curtains or sofas if these cannot be taken to their new home. The final accounting for the decanting of residents from Leamington and Horatia Houses will be provided at a future meeting.

In 2017 a plan was in place for decanting tenants but fortunately was not needed.

The Civil Contingency Team covers both Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council and part of a wider network.

A press briefing was held the day before with all news under embargo until 8am the next day. Most officers were not informed until the day before so that the message could be controlled.

Letters were hand delivered first thing on 5 June by officers who spoke to the tenants. The department has a good knowledge of the tenants and knew the best way to approach them. Translations of the letters were also available. Officers were stationed in the community room all day to answer any queries. The area office's opening hours were extended. Social media was monitored and questions responded to very quickly. 182 tenants were seen on that day; 23 were not available. Communication was key to ensuring that the tenants were well informed and could speak to council staff and Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service officers.

The first move took place at the end of July.

As a direct consequence of the decant, there was a reduction in the availability of temporary accommodation. It reduced from 19 to 7 at one stage, but this was not over the full period. In June 2018 there were a number of void properties.

A significant amount of work was carried out with the tenants regarding their needs and expectations for their new home. Each household was treated individually and the process tailored to them. A small number chose not to engage and then turned down the accommodation offered.

Engagement regarding the regeneration of the area involved previous and nearby tenants, groups and local businesses. Everyone in the city was given the opportunity to give their views. The results will be available in September.

The initial communication with tenants stated that it was hoped that everyone would have received an offer by Spring 2019. This was subsequently updated to late Spring.

The two tenants who remain have complex issues but were offered new homes a month ago. These have been adapted and will move shortly.

A company has been appointed to conduct surveys to determine the method of demolition.

The panel discussed the letter that was sent to tenants on 5 June 2018 and the possible options for the site. The Chair noted that social housing was unlikely as there was limited scope for profit. It was suggested that the University of Portsmouth be approached for assistance with talking to residents about their experiences. The panel requested that their thanks be passed on to all the council officers and agencies involved in the decants.

Action: An analysis of the impact that this decant had on the accommodation waiting list be brought to the next meeting.

The meeting concluded at 3.15pm.