

COUNCIL MEETING – 14 JANUARY 2014

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

9 December 2013

Present: Councillors Morrall (Chairman), B Patel (Vice-Chairman), Ainge, Emerson, Higgins, M Patel, Raymond, Simmons, V Waters and Watts.

Also present: Mr S Wood, Head of Planning and Local Development, Mrs V Jessop, Principal Housing Manager, Mrs P McCourt, Senior Housing Officer, Mrs A Piatek-Bednarek, Energy Efficiency and Carbon Reduction Officer, Mr J Casserly, Managing Director Wellingborough NORSE and Mr A Barron, Democratic Services Officer.

(Councillors Elliott and Scarborough attended as observers).

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED to note that apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr and L Lawman.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

RESOLVED to note that in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, the council's code of conduct and the council's constitution, the under-mentioned councillors declared an interest in the following items:

Councillor	Minute No	Subject	Reason
Higgins	4	Housing Plan 2013-2018 – Monitoring and Progress Report	Registerable – Council appointed board member of Wellingborough Homes
Higgins	6	Energy Company Obligation – Insulation Programme	Other – Resides in a solid wall house
Higgins	7	Housing Allocation Policy	Registerable – Council appointed board member of Wellingborough Homes
M Patel	6	Energy Company Obligation – Insulation Programme	Registerable – Family members reside in four solid wall properties within Castle ward
Simmons	6	Energy Company Obligation – Insulation Programme	Registerable – Owns one such property in Wollaston

3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2013 be confirmed and signed.

4. HOUSING PLAN 2013-2018 – MONITORING AND PROGRESS REPORT

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received to provide members with a monitoring and progress report on the delivery of the 2013-2018 Housing Plan.

The Principal Housing Manager outlined the good level of progress achieved in a number of areas and explained that the low cost ownership action would be improved once the East Midlands Homebuy schemes had been uploaded to the Keyways system.

Members enquired about the lack of registered providers within the borough signing the pre-eviction protocol, but welcomed the response that the service plans to progress the action within the first half of next year and that any difficulties would be fed back to members.

Members' Briefing Notes were requested, and fully supported by the committee, in order to highlight significant points of interest throughout the year, alongside the annual end of year report to the committee.

RESOLVED to note the annual review of the Housing Plan 2013-2018.

5. LOCAL WELFARE SUPPORT

The joint report of the Head of Finance and the Head of Planning and Local Development was received to advise members of the response taken by the council to the changes introduced by the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

The Principal Housing Manager outlined some of the measures taken to mitigate the negative impacts of the Act. In order to plan the best possible response, members heard that information had been taken from welfare agencies, such as the FISH shop, which has recently experienced an increase in enquiries in particular in relation to housing benefit. Members welcomed the use of numerous computers in Tithe Barn offices that will help residents with the introduction of Universal Credit in Wellingborough, although the start date has yet to be confirmed.

Members also heard that the borough does not have an adequate supply of one and two bedroom homes, although this was being addressed through Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act agreements as part of planning consents, which would better suit the needs of the local population.

Members had concern that the implementation of Universal Credit would result in difficulties for the residents of the borough. The committee were, however, assured that officers would intervene at the earliest possible stage before any individual circumstances got out of control. The intention once the total implications of the scheme were known is to include peripatetic support within the community. This was further commented on and members heard of the importance in working in partnership with voluntary sector organisations in delivering an effective response to the changes. Members enquired about

discretionary housing payments and were assured that the 2013-2014 budget still had the capacity to deal with the anticipated number of applications up to the end of the fiscal year.

The Principal Housing Manager informed the committee that she was maintaining a watching brief on the Universal Credit pilot schemes being trialled in other parts of the country. This would inform the preparation of a strategy to outline the council's approach going forward. Members noted that future reports would be presented to the committee as further details emerged.

Members raised the issue of resources regarding the changes. The Head of Planning and Local Development addressed the committee at this stage and outlined the importance of strengthening the partnership work that was already in place. Members heard that resources would always be a challenge to predict but by ensuring that facilities were available for those that can self serve, would allow the remaining resources to be focused on the most vulnerable in the community.

RESOLVED to note the response to the changes introduced by the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

(Councillor Watts voted against this item).

(Councillor Scarborough left the meeting).

6. ENERGY COMPANY OBLIGATION – INSULATION PROGRAMME

The annexed report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received to advise members of a partnership with Yorkshire Energy Partnership (YEP) and Cosyseal Group to offer residents in the borough energy efficiency measures.

The Principal Housing Manager reminded the committee of the Council's obligations under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1985 to reduce harmful CO₂ emissions and the number of households in fuel poverty.

The report informed the committee of a new scheme to retro fit insulation to the solid walls of properties in the borough. Members were informed that the proposed programme would not have any financial implications for the council or the householders taking advantage of the scheme. Cosyseal, the company proposing the scheme for the borough was taking advantage of the Energy Company Obligations (ECO). ECO is focused on low income and vulnerable households helping them to heat homes to a healthy level and financed by UK energy suppliers.

The council would lead the initiative and work with Yorkshire Energy Partnership and their contractor Cosyseal to offer residents in Castle Ward the opportunity to take advantage of the scheme. The Energy Efficiency and Carbon Reduction Officer outlined the approach being taken in relation to the awareness campaign that would be undertaken to promote the scheme.

Members were in full agreement of the importance in agreeing to this partnership and had no hesitation in approving the action. The Chairman suggested to the Principal Housing Manager that awareness of the programme should be added to the next Landlords' Forum agenda.

RESOLVED to enter into a service level agreement with Cosyseal Ltd to offer residents in the Borough free solid wall insulations and energy efficiency measures.

7. HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY

The annexed report of the Head of Planning and Local Development was received to propose to members amendments to the Housing Allocation Policy following its implementation in April 2013.

The Senior Housing Officer outlined to members that the changes were largely further clarifications and additions in order to ensure that the Policy was understood and as transparent as possible to users of the scheme.

The committee sought further clarification about the speed of processing applications, the definition of anti-social behaviour, the allocation of tenancies in the villages and suggested a number of minor amendments in relation to debt amounts to improve the clarity of the policy.

RESOLVED to approve the amendments to the Housing Allocations Policy with effect from 1 January 2014.

(Councillor Elliott left the meeting).

8. UPDATE ON PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS: WELLINGBOROUGH NORSE

The annexed report of the Managing Director of Wellingborough NORSE was received to provide members with the latest quarterly update on the performance of Wellingborough NORSE between July and September 2013.

The Managing Director of Wellingborough NORSE informed members of the strategic action plan and operational update that provides the residents of Wellingborough with information about the priorities and performance of the company.

Members welcomed the news that Wellingborough NORSE were on course to achieving their financial targets.

Members enquired about the recent litter experiment, supported by Tidy Britain. The Managing Director informed members of the positive media exposure generated by the initiative. He committed to providing a detailed analysis of the impact of the scheme.

The Managing Director also informed the committee of a series of newspaper, television and radio links that would be e-mailed to members after the meeting.

The articles highlighted the positive work being undertaken by Wellingborough NORSE on a daily basis, but importantly the high profile exposure the articles gave both the Council and NORSE.

RESOLVED to note the content of the quarterly report.

Chairman

The meeting concluded at 8.20pm.

