

North Yorkshire Council

Housing & Leisure Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 10th June 2024 commencing at 2.00 pm at County Hall, Northallerton.

Committee Members present: Councillor Malcolm Taylor in the Chair; plus Councillors John Ritchie, Karl Arthur, Caroline Dickinson, Kevin Foster, Richard Foster, George Jabbour (sub), Nigel Knapton, Steve Mason, Bob Packham, Stuart Parsons, Yvonne Peacock, Clive Pearson, Kirsty Poskitt and Phil Trumper.

In attendance: Councillors Carl Les and Michelle Donohue-Moncrieff

Officers present: Nic Harne, Andrew Rowe, Jo Ireland and Carl Doolan

Apologies: Councillor John Mann

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

1 Apologies for Absence

Councillor John Mann gave apologies and was substituted by Councillor George Jabbour.

2 Minutes of the Meeting of the Transition (LGR) Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 11 March 2024

Resolved – That the minutes of the last meeting of the Transition (LGR) Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 11 March 2024, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and confirmed as a correct record.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Yvonne Peacock declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in agenda item 5 as a Director of Upper Dales Community Partnership, who are a tenant of North Yorkshire Council.

Councillor Steve Mason also declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 as a private landlord.

4 Public Participation

There were no public questions or statements.

5 Housing Services - Introductory Presentation

Considered – A presentation on North Yorkshire Council's new Housing Service

The presentation was provided by Andrew Rowe, Assistant Director for Housing which included an overview of the overall structure of the new Service and a breakdown of the

different components that made up the Service e.g. Landlord Services, housing allocations, repairs, maintenance and safety, homelessness, affordable homes etc.

He also provided an overview of the scale of the Authority as a landlord and of the full range of services the new Authority was now responsible for, including:

- The housing stock from three legacy council areas (Harrogate, Selby and Richmondshire), with 8400+ council homes and 30,000 service requests for repairs etc a year;
- The prevention of homelessness, with 200+ homeless currently in temporary accommodation
- Services for rough sleepers
- The resettlement of refugees;
- Regulating and taking action to improve housing conditions in the private rented sector – carrying out regular inspections and carrying out enforcement action where needed;
- Providing Disabled Facilities Grants and carrying out both major and minor adaptations every year;
- Providing improvement grants and carrying out interventions around fuel poverty;
- The retrofitting and decarbonisation of social housing stock;

The Committee noted the need to have in place a new Housing Allocations Scheme by 2025, combining the two schemes currently in place across the county. They also noted the Council's intention to develop new council homes, deliver supported housing and extra care, and support community led housing.

Overall members noted the magnitude of the task ahead of the new Council to develop and deliver a cohesive housing service to the high standard required by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH). They noted the Authority had already completed its restructure of the Housing service, enabling officers to now move forward with redesigning their service areas to enable the Authority to work towards delivering a housing service to the required standards. They also noted the Authority had already assessed itself in regard to its level of non-compliance with the new consumer standards of the RSH.

Finally, the Committee were keen to explore their role in supporting the Council to achieve compliance, through the effective monitoring and holding to account of the Authority's delivery of Housing related services. They agreed there was a long way to go and a lot of work which they wished to contribute to.

Resolved – That:

- i. The introductory presentation of the new NYC Housing Services be noted;
- ii. A contact list of the wider Housing team be circulated to committee members

6 Presentation on Assessment of Compliance with the Consumer Standards and Housing Improvement Plan

Considered – A presentation on the RSH consumer standards introduced by Nic Harne, Director for Community Development.

The presentation provide an overview of the recent reform of the social housing regulations and the increased powers of the regulators in addressing health and safety in the sector and redressing the balance between social landlords and tenants.

Members noted the four new consumer standards which had been put in place as part of the reform following a number of consultations. They recognised the new regime was a huge shift for both the regulator and local authorities and were pleased to note the

regulator wanted to work closely with local authorities.

As part of its strategic housing role, it was noted the Authority had a legal responsibility to ensure housing standards were being met by housing associations etc and would also have to decide how best to meet the standards with its own housing stock. They agreed that a new regime for data collection, using all available tools would be required if council tenants were to be reassured.

In regard to meeting the decent homes standards (the new safety and quality' standard), it was noted that surveying the council's properties would be key, and achieving the big six (gas checks, electricity, fire risk assessment, legionnaires, lifts and asbestos management) would be the bare minimum requirement. It was expected there would be an emphasis on quality moving forward and it was noted the Authority's data on quality was currently minimal.

Members noted that whilst tenant satisfaction feedback was currently acceptable, there would need to be a pro-active inspection regime with a shift in focus so that rather than waiting for tenants to report problems there would be pro-active repairs with a rolling 5-year programme. They also agreed that improved engagement with tenants would be key.

It was noted that whilst the regulator would take a holistic view, it had shown a specific interest in the 'neighbourhood and community' standard.

Officers confirmed that in response to the Authority's self-referral, the regulator had requested a whole sweep of information which officers were now working on. They also confirmed an improvement framework was being put in place and a whole range of new policies would be required to achieve compliance. Members were asked to consider how the committee might best contribute to that work and monitor its progression and it was agreed that a Task Group may be required to carry out a deep dive into some of the new policies as they are drafted.

Finally, the relationship with adult social care and children's services was acknowledged in regard to the provision of extra care and sheltered housing support for care leavers.

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

7 Housing Review - Performance & Service Improvement Report

Considered – A report of the Corporate Director of Community Development presenting the findings from the Housing Review 2023/24 summarising the tenant satisfaction measures, complaints self-assessment and a review of management costs.

Carl Doolan, Head of Housing Management & Landlord Services presented the report which showcased the end of year position and demonstrated compliance with the regulatory standard and the requirements to assess complaints, as laid out by the Housing Ombudsman service. He confirmed the Authority now had a starting position.

Members noted the summary of complaints handled in relation to the landlord service, the nature of those complaints and the associated learning from them e.g. the need to improve:

- Communications;
- The time taken to complete repairs, and;
- The pace at which complaints are dealt with;

The Committee went on to consider the findings of the Housing Review as detailed in

Appendix F of the report. They noted the Authority was performing less well in certain areas in comparison to other retained stock authorities i.e. positive contribution to neighbourhood, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and keeping tenants informed. Members agreed that the issues around ASB needs further investigation.

They were pleased to note the Authority would be moving towards a single allocations scheme with the intention of it being in place by 2025. They also agreed the use of flexible tenancies was the correct way forward and should be considered as part of a review of the Tenancy Policy.

Finally they agreed that creating a solid baseline from which to operate should be the first priority and acknowledged the challenges around data collection and merging, and the loss of key personnel. They also noted the strong position of the Authority's HRA and welcomed the planned comprehensive stock condition survey programme recognising it would assist the Authority's future decision making.

Resolved – That

- i. The report be noted;
- ii. The Authority's current baseline position be noted.

8 HRA Policy Framework Presentation

Considered – a presentation on the HRA Policy Framework provided by Andrew Rowe, Assistant Director for Housing.

Andrew Rowe confirmed there were over 70 policies, standards, procedures, guidance documents etc relating to tenancy management and housing standards inherited from the 3 stock holding authorities and went on to outline the strategic plan and the HRA Business Plan to develop a range of new strategies/policies for the new council. Members acknowledged the scale of the task ahead and agreed it would be beneficial to set up a Task Group to assist with their development.

The Committee went on the note the next steps as detailed in the presentation, and it was

Resolved – That the presentation be noted.

9 Draft Training Plan for Members

Considered – A draft training plan for Committee members.

Members noted the proposal to hold the first training session on Consumer Standards in week commencing 8 July 2024, and having considered their diaries it was

Resolved – That the first training session be held on Friday 12 July 2024

10 Leisure & Culture - Introductory Presentation

Considered – an introductory presentation on Leisure & Culture provided by Jo Ireland, Assistant Director for Leisure & Culture.

The presentation provided an overview of both service areas including the key challenges and opportunities, and priorities e.g.:

- Their contribution to the Council's wider objectives;
- Delivering the services locally creating places where people want to live and work;

- Identifying new funding and income generation opportunities;
- Identifying efficiencies;
- Building and asset condition;
- Financial sustainability;
- Getting the balance right between commercial and community use;
- Developing a North Yorkshire Cultural Strategy;
- Reviewing existing cultural grants;
- Increasing accessibility and inclusion;

Members also received a progress update on the Strategic Leisure Review and the key recommendations arising from it. They agreed that bringing the service back in-house would deliver economies of scale, universal and targeted services and consistency in provision. They also agreed the new service model needed to include community groups and outreach provision etc and suggested that should any assets be considered for disposal in the future, they should be offered up to town councils and/or community groups to consider running.

Members noted the next step was to develop a Leisure Investment Strategy which would involve using a consultant to carry out a survey to assess the quality and sustainability of each site and the investment required to maintain a quality service. They noted the initial focus would be on council owned facilities.

Resolved – That:

- The presentation be noted;
- A further update on the Strategic Leisure Review be provided at the next meeting;

11 Draft Work Programme 2024/25

Resolved – That the draft work programme be noted and updated to reflect the discussions at the meeting.

12 Date of Next Meeting - 2 September 2024

The meeting concluded at 4.00 pm.