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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 29 SEPTEMBER 2014 (SPECIAL MEETING)

(19.15 – 21:45)

PRESENT

Councillor Russell Makin (in the Chair),
Councillor Stan Anderson, Councillor David Dean,
Councillor Ross Garrod, Councillor Tobin Byers (substitute
for Abigail Jones), Councillor Imran Uddin,
Councillor John Sargeant, Councillor Janice Howard,
Councillor Abdul Latif (observing)

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Nick Draper (Cabinet Member for Community and
Culture), Pauline Ford (CHMP), Paul Quinn (CHMP), Mark
Anderson (CHMP), Jenny Marshall (CHMP), Steve Langley
(Head of Housing Needs and Strategy), Steve Webb
(Business Support and Relationship Manager), James
McGinlay (Head of Sustainable Communities), Rebecca
Redman (Scrutiny Officer), Councillor Dennis Pearce,
Councillor Suzanne Grocott

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Chris Lee (Director of Environment and
Regeneration).

3. OVERVIEW OF STOCK TRANSFER AND UPDATE ON DELIVERY OF COMMITMENTS

The presentation given by Pauline Ford (CHMP) is available on the council's
website. The presentation covered:

- Delivering on the promises within the stock transfer agreement;
- Response to Welfare Reform;
- Projects such as increasing employment and skills, tackling hoarding
and community schemes delivered through the community fund

Councillor David Dean asked about overcrowding and the numbers that need
re-housing as a result of this. Steve Langley confirmed approximately 1200
CHMP residents requested a transfer to alternative accommodation which
could be as a result of medical factors, downsizing or overcrowding.

Councillor David Dean asked why there were so many people on the housing list. Pauline Ford explained this was due to a range of issues however, homes displayed as much under occupation as overcrowding. The issue therefore becomes how to solve a range of housing issues which are very complex.

Councillor David Dean asked if there should be an increase in sheltered accommodation for people who are in need and what short and long term estimates are for residents requiring this type of accommodation. Pauline Ford stated that sheltered accommodation was not the answer to rehousing older people and that instead this should be based around choice, and offering a range of solutions for local communities, enabling some to remain in their homes and offering access to high quality accommodation that would aid their mobility. Pauline Ford did not have this information at the meeting and agreed to forward these figures to the Panel after the meeting.

Councillor Stan Anderson asked if lack of housing was due to a lack of land available for new properties to be built, or due to a lack of building. Pauline Ford stated that land availability was a factor and that, at the time of transfer, analysis was undertaken to look at opportunities regarding land availability and how to provide value for money and deliver a sustainable scheme. However, land supply in the borough was limited.

The following questions submitted by Councillor Suzanne Grocott were asked by Councillor Janice Howard and responses received during the meeting:

- Do CHMP follow prioritisation criteria in determining whether, and if so when, repairs should be undertaken.
- What is the expected turnaround time for tenants' repairs to be undertaken
- What steps are needed to evict disruptive tenants? Dundonald Councillors have been corresponding with CHMP for almost a year now about a noisy, disruptive tenant living in a quiet residential street in our ward. MPH has agreed that the tenant is unsuitable for the property, but seem unable to do anything it.

Councillor Ross Garrod asked about void housing where the tenant has moved out and the property is put back onto the housing register, and what the turn around time was for repairing these properties to make them available to residents. Pauline Ford explained that the amount of time required to repair these homes in Merton is quite extensive and that the average cost of repairing a void property ranges from £5000 to £7000, but costs can increase dependent on the extent of the repair needed. CHMP work with the provider to

ensure that there are clear timescales and that properties move through the system quickly. Yet some properties need an extraordinary amount of work.

Councillor Ross Garrod asked why properties are allowed to go back on to the housing register when they are not adequate for residents to move into.

Pauline Ford stated that they do not go on to the register until they are ready.

Steve Langley explained the process regarding nomination rights to the Panel and how they work with CHMP to minimise delays.

Councillor John Sargeant asked about tenant scrutiny and if the people involved are the same as the resident advocates. Pauline Ford explained that the regulator expects there to be a process in place for co-regulation with residents and this is where the scrutiny process has come in. Residents received training to undertake this role. Councillor John Sargeant asked if the panel could see the tenant panel's final reports. Pauline Ford agreed to share these with the Panel.

Councillor Janice Howard asked what steps had been taken to evict disruptive tenants. Pauline Ford explained that there is an Anti Social Behaviour team who work with neighbourhood wardens and a range of tools are in place to monitor any issues. This team also work closely with environmental health and adult social care to establish if there are any issue regarding vulnerability. The burden of proof for eviction is substantial in such cases and human rights need to be taken into consideration. CHMP can evict but need the appropriate evidence base.

Councillor Russell Makin asked if ambience reports could be shared with the Panel which are compiled by wardens in certain wards. Pauline Ford agreed to look into this.

Councillor David Dean asked if CHMP had a need to raise funding and if they were able, as an organisation, to ask for funding from the Mayor's office. Pauline Ford explained that funding was sought, yet the levels available to councils and housing associations to support housing need had decreased over the years. The majority of the work undertaken to date to improve housing stock had been funded by CHMP.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the presentation and asked for an update on performance at their March 2015 meeting.

4. REGENERATION PROGRAMME

The presentation given by Paul Quinn (CHMP) is available on the council's website. The presentation covered:

- Rationale for the programme;
- Scale of the project;
- Consultation and engagement undertaken; and
- Next steps

Councillor Stan Anderson asked where residents were placed while regeneration works were underway and if residents had a right to return to their properties once complete. Paul Quinn explained that there are a number of options available to CHMP in how they handle this process. One option could be to build homes first on empty land which would allow people to move in and then free up other buildings to regenerate the remaining stock. CHMP are also looking to acquire sites near estates to build homes ahead of the regeneration scheme and have held discussions with council officers on this. This means some homes would be available for people to live in during this time on the estates, or as close as possible to these estates. He added that the right to return is reflected in the regeneration master plan, which is in its first drafting stage, and takes account of peoples housing needs. CHMP would encourage resident's right to return.

Councillor David Dean asked what the discrepancy was between cabinet, CHMP and residents about the types of homes they wanted as part of the scheme resulting from the consultation undertaken, in particular with regard to density. Councillor David Dean asked if we would see something other than tower blocks and a design that would look relevant in the future in the plan. Paul Quinn explained that planning would take place based on what they think is the right mix of properties and also in response to consultation outcomes. Density will be considered as part of the master planning.

Councillor Russell Makin asked CHMP to ensure that they consulted the group leaders on the master plan when available.

Councillor Janice Howard asked about the staged offer of market value plus 10% being offered to any residents that wish to leave sooner. How confident are you that you have the funds for all that may wish to take this option. In addition, if residents move out and they are offered right to return, will the cost be the same value CHMP paid to them when they moved out ahead of the regeneration scheme. Paul Quinn explained that the additional 10% is to reflect that their lives are going to be disturbed with the work being undertaken but if they leave early then this will not be the case. With regard to buy back, when properties come to the market, the values of peoples existing homes will have increased and therefore will be valued at that time. If people wanted to buy back and the price of the property was higher then CHMP would provide shared equity options. Options will be explored with homeowners as part of the

consultation programme to support residents to buy and remain in their homes. Workshops will be run on this during the winter.

Councillor Janice Howard added that there is still an underlying concern that when residents do buy back it will only be 80% of the property they previously owned outright.

Councillor Tobin Byers asked if all three schemes were financially dependent on one another and if they needed to come forward at the same time. Councillor Tobin Byers also asked how CHMP would make a decision to proceed. Paul Quinn explained that High Path estate was key to the regeneration and that developing East fields and Ravensbury on their own was not a viable option.

Paul Quinn explained that CHMP were seeking resident's views to get an indication of how people are reacting to various types of homes that could be built and on the financial offer. CHMP have also taken residents to other sites where regeneration was underway to show them that it is not as disruptive as they might imagine.

Councillor Russell Makin asked if the regeneration on all three sites would be carried out over 10 years. Paul Quinn confirmed this.

Councillor Ross Garrod said that residents didn't feel like they were being heard as part of the current consultation and asked for more detail on the consultation process planned for autumn/winter. Paul Quinn confirmed that a range of consultation methods and approaches would be employed as part of the consultation programme. In addition, despite careful design residents can feel that they are not being heard.

Councillor Ross Garrod expressed his concerns with when this consultation was being undertaken and how this might impact on the response rate. Paul Quinn confirmed that CHMP regeneration team would be going door to door and producing written materials on the master plan, house types etc. Paul Quinn added that they will be engaging with hard to reach groups also and testing out their offer as part of the workshops mentioned earlier.

Councillor Ross Garrod asked what the percentage contact rate was for this consultation programme. Paul Quinn explained that previous consultation campaigns have engaged 80% of residents. Also there have been lots of consultation events during summer and active residents groups have been keen to share ideas and participate so far.

Councillor John Sargeant stated residents associations don't feel this consultation has been as robust as it could be or that many have been

engaged in the events run by CHMP during the summer. In addition, he asked if the survey Merton Council was undertaking would cut across that being undertaken by CHMP. Paul Quinn confirmed that CHMP had held more events with experts and met with customers on a number of occasions to seek their feedback during the summer and that there had been a good turnout. Yet there have been no plans to be able to share with residents until this stage which will now be consulted on. Furthermore, Paul Quinn explained that there wasn't an overlap as the local authority was consulting on the planning framework which CHMP planning applications will be considered against, at that stage.

Councillor John Sargeant asked about finance and selling back homes to existing residents and what impact this might have on resident's ability to return to their homes. Paul Quinn confirmed that the sale values for properties would be determined at a much later date and were not known as yet. But that CHMP would produce a scheme that was as equitable and fair as possible. The aim was ultimately to offer a better quality of home to residents.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the presentation and asked that they be consulted on future developments in the regeneration programme.

5. REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

The presentation given by Mark Anderson (CHMP) is available on the council's website. The presentation covered:

- Repairs and maintenance undertaken since the housing stock transfer;
- Objectives of the service;
- Achievements;
- Challenges going forward; and
- Investment in the service

Councillor Tobin Byers asked if interest in the regeneration programme at High Path Estate was linked to resident's experience of the repairs programme, especially if this was negative. Furthermore, if surveyors are visiting properties but work is not completed then what percentage of work is undertaken based on these visits. Mark Anderson confirmed that he had heard that resident's have had many visits from different surveyors. CHMP needs to plan so that one survey covering a number of aspects is covered in one visit. In terms of day to day response to repairs, one of the downsides has been around staff retention given where the team is located and other places offering a higher rate of pay. A fixed stable team is currently in place and hopes are that they will become permanent.

Councillor Ross Garrod asked if the staffing structure for repairs was working as the team were accountable to the regional manager and the rest of the operation was accountable to the managing director in Morden. How many Housing Associations have this set up and how well is it working.

Mark Anderson explained that as the regional director for property service repairs he spent 3 days a week in Morden and was closely involved and that there was a customer service centre in operation under Wayne Hainsworth. There is daily dialogue between the two posts. However, going forward they will consider the effectiveness of the structure.

Councillor Ross Garrod added that communication seemed to be a problem between teams and with stakeholders and that perhaps there was a disjointed approach to resolving issues. Mark Anderson agreed that historically it has been disjointed but that changes have been made to address this.

Councillor John Sargeant asked about staff retention and performance and average length of service. Furthermore, what processes had been adopted to ensure that issues are not missed?

Councillor John Sargeant also asked for an update on allegations about Keep Moat in the local press. Mark Anderson stated that they had reviewed processes and staff performance and that previous communication issues have been acknowledged and dealt with. However, the focus of the team has always been on supporting the customer and less on the team responsible.

Mark Anderson added that there was an investigation underway regarding Keep Moat and informed the Panel that there is an independent audit every 6 months on the contract. This issue is being dealt with by the Executive Director of Governance. The results from the audit should be available to the CHMP Board shortly.

Councillor Stan Anderson asked if homeowners could go to other providers for repairs and maintenance. Mark Anderson explained that repairs relate to a common part of the building and that they encourage repairs to be requested through them as the main provider.

Councillor Stan Anderson asked if there was a price issue and if going elsewhere and getting it cheaper was the driver for residents. Mark Anderson explained that this was discouraged as there could be issues with warranty, quality of materials etc. CHMP has the responsibility for repairs and also for keeping a check on what repairs are being undertaken which would be difficult if other providers were involved.

Councillor Janice Howard explained that residents were still not happy and expressed her concerns about Keep Moat. Mark Anderson clarified that they were aware that 15% of residents were not satisfied and that this needed to be addressed.

Councillor Dennis Pearce asked about repairs and independent assessments being made on flats for planned maintenance and why there are no independent assessments undertaken which can then be shared with residents so that they know what they are paying for. Councillor Dennis Pearce also asked how the decent homes figures were calculated as residents are referred to the council to seek funding for new kitchens etc. via occupational therapy. How is this justified, shouldn't CHMP be funding this?

Mark Anderson explained that legislation does not require that an independent survey be carried out. However, CHMP have engaged an external consultant to review all works identified and a report will be produced and discussed with residents. The scoping is undertaken in advance of the next financial year and works are carried out in the subsequent year.

With regard to adaptations, CHMP has the right to engage Occupational Therapists when people have disabilities. It was confirmed that adaptations were not funded by the council. All maintenance and repairs are funded by CHMP. In terms of the decent homes standards, a survey was undertaken pre transfer which stood at 76% of homes were classed as non-decent and this figure has since increased.

Councillor Abdul Latif asked about density and size of rooms in new properties and what consultation will be invited on this. Paul Quinn explained that there will be a range of types of housing and also on size and height. These will meet the London Space Standards. There will be a higher density required but not beyond the size/scale of the tower blocks we currently have.

RESOLVED: Panel noted the presentation.

6. DISCUSSION OF PROPOSED SCRUTINY TASK GROUP ON HOUSING SUPPLY

The Panel discussed undertaking a task group review of housing supply. The Panel agreed to conduct the review and that the scope for this review is produced and presented for approval to the next available Panel meeting.

RESOLVED: Membership of the task group agreed: Councillor Ross Garrod (Chair), Imran Uddin, Dennis Pearce, Abdul Latif, Janice Howard.