

Minutes of the meeting of the **SCRUTINY (COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION)** Committee held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Wednesday 14 December 2011 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor G J Hood

Councillors: B W Bano  
P M Beresford  
P I Carter  
R J Frost  
L A Keen  
M J Ovenden  
J F Tranter

Also Present: Brendan Ryan (Chief Executive, East Kent Housing)

Officers: Housing and Community Manager  
Democratic Support Officer

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P M Brivio, A S Pollitt and R S Walkden.

344 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4, Councillor B W Bano had been appointed as substitute for Councillor P M Brivio.

345 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

346 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 November 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

347 EAST KENT (JOINT SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE

The Democratic Support Officer advised that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 25 January 2012.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

348 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Democratic Support Officer advised that there were no items to which the Protocol for Public Speaking applied on the agenda.

349 ISSUES REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY COUNCIL, CABINET, SCRUTINY (POLICY AND PERFORMANCE) COMMITTEE OR ANOTHER COMMITTEE

There were no items for consideration at the meeting.

350 ITEMS CALLED-IN FOR SCRUTINY OR PLACED ON THE AGENDA BY A MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE, ANY INDIVIDUAL NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OR PUBLIC PETITION

There were no items for consideration at the meeting.

351 FORWARD PLAN

The Democratic Support Officer presented the Forward Plan to the Committee for its consideration.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan be noted.

352 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic Support Officer presented the updated work programme to the Committee.

RESOLVED: (a) That items 27 (to agree the Deed of Variation to Aylesham Village Expansion Scheme) and 31 (approval to consult on the key principles of a draft revised Allocations Policy which sets out how the Council will allocate social rented housing in the district) be added to the work programme.

(b) That the work programme, subject to the above changes, be noted.

(c) That the officers be thanked for the progress achieved in respect of promoting Fairtrade.

353 EAST KENT HOUSING

The Housing and Community Manager and the Chief Executive, East Kent Housing introduced the report on East Kent Housing.

The Committee was advised that across the four East Kent authorities the housing stock had reduced significantly over the years, reducing rental income while the operational fixed overheads had remained relatively constant. The idea behind pooling the housing stock under an Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) was to realise economies of scale from having a larger housing stock to manage and deliver an improved service for tenants.

The objective of the first year of the ALMO was to achieve a 10% saving in the new staffing structure, which had already been achieved with a reduction of 23 posts, although only two of those were through redundancies. Despite the reductions in the overall establishment, there had been an increase in the number of Neighbourhood Managers for the District and it was hoped that future savings could be reinvested to increase the number of Neighbourhood Managers even further. In addition, a review of tenant participation roles was being scoped with a view to consulting the tenants on what sort of service they wished to see implemented.

East Kent Housing was also seeking to identify best practice from the four housing services and embed it in the new organisation. There were only 26 'three star' housing authorities in the country, of which the majority were ALMO's and none

were councils. In East Kent, Canterbury City Council had been a 'two star' housing authority and the rest were 'one star'.

It was acknowledged that performance had been negatively affected during the restructuring and that steps were now being taken to correct it now the final structure was in place. In addition, the re-let time for Dover District Council's housing stock had suffered from contractor issues that had now been resolved with the introduction of Mears.

East Kent Housing had set-up Area Boards covering the District that would be a key component in developing the concept of 'tenant scrutiny' to hold the management to account. The Area Boards were also a means for local Councillors to get involved in East Kent Housing if they wished.

The Chief Executive of East Kent Housing and the Housing and Community Manager agreed to provide the following to Members:

- Structure chart with contacts for Elected Members.
- Details on how Elected Members can report faults, including on-line methods.
- Details on drainage arrangements for housing owned land.
- Details of training provided for tenants and the budget available for tenant training.
- A copy of the Tenant Compact.
- East Kent Housing Equality and Diversity Policy
- Details of housing walkabouts be provided to all district councillors and parish councils.
- An action plan of the actions/requests arising from housing walkabouts.
- The criteria for the environmental improvement grants.

In response to a question from Councillor J F Tranter the Committee was advised that the Council retained control over the setting of the allocations policy in respect of the types of tenant and this could include the introductory tenancies if the Council so wished. The Council was required by the Localism Act to agree a tenancy strategy by the end of 2012.

- RESOLVED: (a) That it be recommended to the Cabinet that each of the district tenants group have a website created to raise their profile with tenants and provide a mechanism by which tenants can contact their representatives.
- (b) That a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee setting out the membership of the tenant groups and the details of the process by which they are elected and how the tenant representatives inform the management group of the views of the tenants on particular topics.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm.