

Policy Review Committee

Venue:	Committee Room
Date:	17 December 2013
Present:	Councillors M Jordan (Chair), Mrs M Davis, K Ellis, Mrs K McSherry (Vice Chair), Mrs E Metcalfe, R Musgrave, R Packham and A Spetch.
Apologies for Absence:	None
Also Present:	Councillors C Lunn and J Crawford
Officers Present:	Karen Iveson, Executive Director (S151); Simon Parkinson, Lead Officer Community Support; Julia Jennison, Policy Officer; Dean Richardson, Business Manager and Richard Besley, Democratic Services

18. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor Packham declared that he had registered as an “other interest” his role on the Selby and District Housing Trust. He chose to leave the room during the consideration and voting on the Asset Transfer Policy (minute 23).

19. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

To receive and approve the minutes of the Policy Review Committee held on 15 October 2013 and they are signed by the Chair.

20. CHAIR’S ADDRESS

The Chair welcomed Councillor Mrs McSherry to the Committee as a replacement for Councillor Reynolds. The Chair proposed Councillor Mrs McSherry as Vice Chair, this was seconded.

RESOLVED:

To appoint Councillor Mrs McSherry as Vice Chair of Policy Review Committee.

The Chair notified the Committee that he had attended the final meeting of the Renewable Energy Task and Finish Group and the lead Policy Officer would be bringing a report to the January meeting for discussion.

The Chair informed the Committee that he had sought clarification on whether to proceed with the report on Contaminated Land (Item 6) following the challenge to the Core Strategy. He assured the Committee that the item could be considered.

21. PR/13/11 – WELFARE REFORM

Simon Parkinson, Lead Officer Community Support presented the report that concentrated on the impact of the Spare Bedroom Subsidy (SBS) within the Selby District.

The report sought a steer on three elements of the effects SBS had on Council procedures:

- Rent Recovery;
- Discretionary Housing Payments and
- The adoption of exemptions

The Officer confirmed that records indicate that there are 291 tenancies with 1 extra bedroom and 57 with 2 extra bedrooms and these levels were diminishing as movements take place. The levels of under occupancy with Housing Association tenants are lower.

Rent Recovery

Officers had worked with the Tenants' Association to prepare the paper tabled on Rent Recovery and the Lead Officer confirmed that there were safeguards in place offering tenants plenty of opportunities to engage with the Council to address arrears. The Committee heard that there had been no increase in evictions this year. The Officer set out the engagement opportunities offered by the Council to avoid eviction.

The Committee expressed concerns there may be tenants with under occupancy issues but that no smaller properties were available. As such, some tenants may find themselves in arrears through no fault of their own

In respect of arrears and the threat of eviction, the Committee agreed to defer a decision and to form a Task and Finish Group to work with Officers and look at the matter further.

The Committee agreed that councillors Mrs Davis, Mrs Metcalfe and Jordan would form the Task and Finish group.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

The Lead Community Officer confirmed that DHP should not be seen by tenants as a long term solution and should be used whilst they seek to move house or stabilise their financial position. The policy provided had been approved across the North Yorkshire Local Authorities.

The Officer confirmed that 178 tenants from either Council properties, Housing Association or Private Rental properties had been offered DHP since April 2013. The Committee was informed that Housing Officers were available to offer assistance and Community Officers contact all households prior to the end of DHP to ensure they receive continued advice and support. The Officer accepted that there was continued work to be done on the financial advice available to tenants and how the advice can be shared. The Committee discussed the issue of lodgers as a potential solution.

The Committee supported the DHP Policy paper.

Exemptions Policy

The Committee recognised that the situation with Exemptions was fluid with case law changing regularly. A number of recent legal cases had overturned Council decisions, especially on the definition of room size.

The Committee felt it best to defer the decision of Exemptions at this time as well as the Bond Guarantee scheme, the Homeless Prevention fund and the Tenants Transfer Incentive scheme. The Committee agreed that these items be considered by the Task and Finish Group.

RESOLVED:

- (i) To establish a Task & Finish Group to consider the current rent recovery policy and to bring a report back to the Committee.**
- (ii) To endorse the Discretionary Housing Payments policy.**
- (iii) To refer consideration of exemptions in relation to re-classification of bedrooms to the Task & Finish Group.**

22. PR/13/12 – Contaminated Land Strategy

The Strategy, presented by Dean Richardson, Business Manager, had been considered by the Executive who requested that Policy Review Committee examine the strategy during its consultation stage.

The Committee heard that the Strategy drew on current regulations and guidance along with good practice in dealing with land which may, by virtue of its past use, be contaminated with material which poses a risk to human health or may have a detrimental effect on the environment. The Strategy set out the options and resources required to discharge the Council's statutory duties in this area.

The Committee was informed that the responsibility for the removal of the contaminant was with those whose activities resulted in the contamination. However, if it were not possible to locate those responsible, it would fall to the Council to take remedial action. Officers were reviewing the potential financial risk to the Council.

The Business manager confirmed that the Environment Agency did get involved where there are risks of water pollution or run off into water courses.

RESOLVED:

To endorse the report

Following the declaration of interest on the next item, Councillor Packham left the meeting at this point.

23. PR/13/13 – Asset Transfer Policy

The report was presented by Executive Director (s151) and set out that the Asset Transfer Policy provided guidance as to when assets may be considered for transfer, and an evaluation process to ensure that the justification for disposal set out in the Asset Management Strategy was met.

The investment into the Housing Trust would be risk assessed and the Council would work to ensure the project was managed effectively. The levels of borrowing would be administered and would be on a long term repayment to ensure the Council receives returns on its investment year on year.

The Policy still supports the tenants' Right to Buy choice and was not an attempt to rundown the Council's housing stock. It would create opportunities to build new homes.

RESOLVED:

To endorse the report

24. WORK PROGRAMME 2013/14

The Chair confirmed that due to the position with the Core Strategy it was likely that the Issues & Options stage of the SAPP would not come to the January meeting of the Committee and would need to be rescheduled. The Chair asked the Committee to consider items that may be placed on the Work Programme for 2014/15.

RESOLVED:

To note and amend the Policy Review Committee Work Programme for 2013/14.

The meeting closed at 7.05pm.