

**Neighbourhood Services and Housing Needs  
Panel Meeting  
16 November, 2023 10am – Council Chambers, Civic  
Centre**

**Attendance**

**Involved Tenants: Barbara Rickards; Richard Hinson; Gary Bridge**

**Staff: Margarita Gibson (Housing Needs Manager); Steve Wilson (Neighbourhood Services Manager); Lucy Tyne (Tenant Involvement Officer), Carol Reynolds (Tenant Participation Officer, Selby)**

**Action:**

**1. Welcome and apologies**

1.1 Lucy welcomed all to the meeting.

1.2 Apologies for absence had been received from Teresa Fox and Lesley Peplow, James Jenner; David Thomas; David Morgan

**2. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 August, 2023**

2.1 The minutes had been previously circulated and were approved as a correct record. As with other recent minutes these would now be publicly available on the tenant involvement section of the council's website.

2.1.1 Barbara asked about Cavendish house and why the council are selling it. Maggie explained that it's no longer fit for purpose for the intended customer group and the agreement is, it will be used for shared ownership.

2.1.2 Steve updated the group about Allhallowgate, it is fully refurbished - all 9 flats are let. Barbara commented that it looks very good.

2.1.3 Richard asked about the new properties on Dene Park. Steve explained that the properties are physically complete and there are 2 customers lined up to be allocated, the team are just finalising the sign off.

### **3. Housing Needs Update – *Margarita Gibson***

3.1 Maggie began explaining how the team are working post vesting day. They are aiming to work consistently, in the same ways. The service developed their policies before vesting day, now it's a case of putting them into practice. The teams have improved their working relationship with adult and children's services, and mental health teams/services. This means customers are getting a more joint up service.

3.1.1 There are still high numbers of individuals using the service – they are seeing more people having to leave the private rented sector and also seeing a rise in those using temporary accommodation.

3.1.2 The teams have recruited to 4 posts. These roles are for officers to work with eligible refugee households. They will work with households to source accommodation and source grants to furnish their new homes as then work with them to sustain a tenancy. They will refer and work with other agencies to also aid with employment and language.

Barbara asked if these people will be a part of choice based lettings; Maggie explained that these households will most likely gain accommodation from the private sector.

3.1.3 Maggie then went on to give an update on the rough sleeper team. They are doing some great work, working with other agencies to provide wrap around support.

On the evening of 7<sup>th</sup>, the team did a rough sleeper count and were able to gather a lot of valuable data. In Harrogate, we have 1 person rough sleeping. The team do also work with additional people who are of concern, living in unsafe accommodation or from sofa to sofa.

3.2 Maggie touched on the restructure that is ongoing. Jobs are being evaluated and once this process is finished the restructure can progress.

3.3 Working is ongoing on the young person pathway. It will be a large piece of work that will assess if accommodation we have for young people and the way we work with them is suitable and if changes are required.

3.4 The teams are also to work with Public Health England on a project called swap and stop. This campaign will focus on the

customer group living in temporary accommodation, looking at people stopping smoking and swapping to vaping, it will be a 12 week programme and those involved will be provided with vapes during this period.

3.5 The service is also doing a lot of work in Harrogate around drugs, alcohol and mental health to establish a pathway for customers who have needs in these areas. As a result of this we could have further services available in Harrogate to help those who may not engage due to struggling with these factors.

3.5.1 Barbara asked what the council defines as young people. Maggie explained that it is 16 to 25-year-olds.

Barbara asked if the private rented sector would refuse a 16-year-old. Maggie explained that a person can't legally hold a tenancy without a guarantor until they are 18. It was also commented that in most cases it would not be appropriate to send a 16-year-old into private rented accommodation.

We may instead offer 24/7 supported accommodation if a person's needs require this. An individual can be in this sort of accommodation for 2 years, they then go from the hostel to dispersed accommodation as their needs lower.

Gary asked if the team explore the return to family home. Maggie confirmed that they do, this is usually the first step and mediation is offered. She reported that a lot of the time problems can be solved with this intervention. This is obviously not always the case.

3.6 Maggie concluded that adult services and the mental health team will start to work from the Civic Centre late December 2023 as Jesmond house closing. This again offers greater opportunities for the teams to work together.

#### 4. **Update report from Neighbourhood Services Manager – Steve Wilson**

4.1 Steve began with updating everyone on the restructure process. Carl Doolan, the head of service, is on with carrying out various reviews to the ways of working. Currently reviews going on around income management and anti-social behaviour. The process of restructure is taking longer than was first thought but hopefully something will be in place by April time. The neighbourhood service teams are continuing as normal as this work is ongoing in the background.

4.1.1 The consultation process of the allocation policy has been extended by a couple of weeks.

4.1.2. Steve and Lucy gave an update on the TSM survey. It is well underway, postal surveys have been sent and telephone interviews will be carried out soon. Response rates are good so far.

4.1.3 Barbara asked how the data from the TSM survey will be shared. Lucy explained that it will be available to tenants in a data report, and it will be presented to involved tenants. It will also be available on the website.

4.1.4 Various teams within the service are still carrying vacancies and it's not looking like these can be recruited to until we have a new structure.

4.1.5 The council are going to be accredited to the domestic violence housing alliance. As part of this, managers are being trained to bring more awareness around domestic violence and knowing how to deal with situations surrounding this topic. This training will also feed down to non-managers.

4.2 Barbara asked if with choice-based lettings, will applications need to be done online. Maggie explained that yes, applications will need to be done online and that only people who are considered vulnerable will be given a paper application. Carol also added that at Selby, they do offer paper applications when it is absolutely needed but they do push online. It was discussed that it would be a good idea if computers were made available within council buildings for applicants to use to submit an application if they didn't have access to a computer.

## **5. Performance Information Report**

5.1 Maggie explained that in her area the key performance indicators have been reviewed – they now report on –

Number of assessments

Number of successful prevention and relief – She explained that the service has seen a slight reduction in this area. This is reflective of the difficulties that the teams are having with accessing the private sector. There is a huge demand for housing, so landlords are able to put rents up and still see uptake.

Number of main duty positive decisions made

Number of people in temporary accommodation - the service has also seen a significant increase in this figure, across all areas.

Barbara asked if someone is in temporary accommodation can get sent to another area within North Yorkshire. Maggie stated that if

nothing is available in their area, they can be sent out of area with the intention to come back into the area when something is available. This is quite rare though as other factors such as family, mental health needs and employment need to be considered. A decision would never be made that would worsen someone's situation or exacerbate health issues.

5.2 Some performance information that Steve has gathered was shared with the group – Figures are looking positive. he reported -

- Average time taken to re let local authority housing (days) – 42. We are doing a lot more void works as part of upgrading EPCs.
- Local authority rent collection and arrears: rent arrears of current tenants as a proportion of the authority's rent roll - £237,753 (1.31% of annual rent debit).
- Percentage of dwellings vacant but available to let at the end of the month - 55 empty dwellings 10 available to let at end of October from stock of 3826 properties held. 5 of these were sheltered scheme properties, these prove more difficult to let. On average teams are doing around 3 relets a week.

Barbara asked if there had been any evictions, Steve commented that there had not been any this financial year. It was discussed that the service work hard to prevent evictions where appropriate.

Barbara raised a concern of someone getting evicted then going to seek housing somewhere else in North Yorkshire. It was explained that if a person is evicted, they are not able to re-enter the housing list in other area of North Yorkshire. A decision made within a locality stands for the whole area now that we are unitary council. Maggie explained that a number of initial checks are made for applicants to ensure people don't slip through the net.

## 5.2 Refusals Report

5.2.1 The refusals reported for the last quarter were discussed

| Address             | Reason for refusal                                                                                                                                  |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 145a Dene Park      | Personal reasons- first refusal                                                                                                                     |
| 15 Willow Drive     | No response- cancelled application                                                                                                                  |
| 65 Stockwell Avenue | Wants different area - Knaresborough not suitable suddenly - works in Harrogate and needs to pop home at lunchtime to let the dog out-first refusal |

|                            |                                                    |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| 55 Lead Lane               | Wants different area- since rehoused               |
| 47a Dene Park              | Wants different area- first refusal                |
| 130 Newby Crescent         | Needs a garden due to dog- first refusal           |
| 1 Bridge View Road         | Property Unsuitable due to health issues           |
| 2 Carrside, Great Ouseburn | Wants different area- first refusal                |
| 169a Dene Park             | Wants to be in Wiltshire- cancelled                |
| 1 Frogmire Drive           | Wants different area- second refusal - cancelled   |
| 21 Beech Lane, Spofforth   | Wants different area                               |
| 28 Willow Drive            | Withdrawn due to being pregnant                    |
| 12 Kennion Road            | Personal reasons, not ready to move ,first refusal |

5.2.2 Carol asked how many refusals applicants can have in Harrogate, Steve confirmed it is 2.

5.2.3 Maggie explained a piece of work called the 'suitability form' that her team carry out with applicants that helps them assess the suitability of different areas. This can help to set expectations and try to reduce the chance of refusal.

5.2.4 Steve went on to go through some refusals on nominations that were given to housing associations. There were a number of refusals on new build properties; the meeting was shocked at this. Steve explained how this can illustrate extra pressures and workload that is being managed by the allocations team.

5.2.5 Barbara highlighted the exchange list and if mutual exchange was promoted to those who are thinking about refusing an offer. Maggie reported that when she carries out reviews of refusals, she does often explain the option of being able to enter the exchange list after a year in a property.

5.2.6 Richard asked what mutual exchange is, Steve explained that we have a system called 'homeswapper' where people exchange homes. This contract is under review as well, to combine the 3 areas.

Gary asked why the mutual exchange process can't be added into the choice-based lettings system. Steve said at the moment this isn't something the council are looking at. Maggie and Carol commented

that the system allows this, and it does work in other areas, so it may be considered at a later date.

## **6. Any other business**

6.1. Barbara submitted a few questions in advance –

How much of the £1.52 million profit made from Bracewell Housing has gone into the housing revenue account.

As far as Steve knows it hasn't, Lucy will update Barbara on this.

What stage are the council at with updating Avondale on Cold Bath Road. Maggie explained that plans have altered slightly. The council are not looking at full redesign anymore, they are now looking at a refurbishment. This is due to the need to decant the hostel for a full redesigned – the council are not in a position to do this.

Once costings are returned to the team, they can choose a contractor and go ahead. The plan is to work on 3 flats at a time whilst other residents still live in the building.

Barbara asked if people living there will be moved into refurbished rooms as the plans roll on. Maggie explained that this will depend on room size need.

6.2 Everyone was thanked for their attendance and the meeting was closed at 11:30am.

## **7. Date for next meeting**

### **7.1 To be confirmed**