

**Neighbourhood Services and Housing Needs
Panel Meeting
22 February 2024 10am – Stray Room, Civic Centre**

Attendance

Involved Tenants: Barbara Rickards, Lesley Peplow, Gary Bridge, Richard Hinson

Staff: Margarita Gibson (Housing Needs Manager); Reno Cooper (Neighbourhood Services Team Leader); Lucy Tyne (Tenant Involvement Officer), Carol Reynolds (Tenant Participation Officer, Selby)

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 Lucy welcomed all to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November, 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 Richard asked why the properties at Dene Park aren't tenanted yet, Reno confirmed he would cover this in his update.

2.1.2 Barbara asked for an update on the Allocation policy, Reno and Maggie confirmed that the policy had been agreed now.

2.1.3 Gary commented on the arrears figure stated in the minutes. He asked about people getting into arrears whilst receiving benefits. Reno explained that housing benefit gets paid directly to the council, but universal credit gets paid to the individual and its up to them to manage that money and pay rent. In certain circumstances, the council can apply for direct payment to get the housing element of the universal credit paid to them. Gary expressed his concern that people who struggle with managing money don't get enough support. Reno and Maggie commented that in the new structure there will be

**Action
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tenancy support officers that aid people in maintaining their tenancy and help with things such as money management. Maggie also added that we will eventually have a 'tenancy support package' that we can offer. This will include a series of workshops; at the end of the programme the tenant will be accredited and understand what it means to maintain a tenancy and how to manage paying rent.

2.1.5 Barbara asked Maggie for an update on Avondale. Currently, 3 flats are finished, and others are ready to have work started. Maggie is very happy with the works but added that progress is slightly slower than she expected.

3. Housing Needs Update – *Margarita Gibson*

3.1 Maggie began by explaining the work that is going on around the county to align all teams within housing needs. From April 1st, the aim is to align all policy and procedure, so everyone is using the same documents when dealing with customers. At the moment, the IT systems that are used are being looked at, as currently not all districts/boroughs use the same system, the aim is that everyone uses the same one and same ways of working with the system.

3.1.1 Maggie confirmed that colleagues from adult and children social care and mental health teams are working from the civic centre. The ambition is to improve the relationship with these teams, and this will have a positive impact on the tenant.

3.1.2 Maggie moved on to updating the group on staffing levels, she explained that there are empty posts within housing options. The team have just recruited to 1 support officer role, they will be working between Fern house and bed and breakfast accommodation. The service is also advertising for 1 temporary accommodation post; they will work at Fern house and it's a full-time position. There are also 2 admin posts that are currently vacant and will be advertised.

3.1.3 Maggie confirmed that the numbers of people the service is seeing still increases, they are still seeing more people in crisis. Meaning that people are coming to the service when they are already homeless rather than before homelessness becomes a reality.

3.2 The work around rough sleepers continues. Through the restructure, the service will be looking at a North Yorkshire rough sleeping team.

3.3 Maggie updated the meeting on the Stop and Swap campaign, it's been rolled out in all hostels in Harrogate and Craven, hostels in Ryedale are also being looked at. The campaign will support those who are currently smoking to replace cigarettes with vapes.



3.4 Maggie then moved on to talk about the work currently going on to develop a consistent approach through the council to deal with customers who have problems around drugs, alcohol, and mental health. The approach will be trauma informed, this will show how a person's background can or may affect them moving forward. Staff will be trained around this. There will be a service manager recruited, the intended outcome is to offer new ways in which this customer group can be served and housed most appropriately.

4. Update report from Neighbourhood Services Team Leader – *Reno Cooper*

4.1 Reno began with informing that meeting that Housing services now have a draft staffing structure and the consultation period for this will come to an end on the 1st March.

4.1.1 Reno echoed some of Maggie's teams struggles in that housing teams across the county use different systems and we can't currently access other districts work.

4.1.2 Reno explained that the team are still carrying vacancies, recruitment will not start until the new structure is in place. He also added that there will still be a lot of work to do once the restructure is in place and people are appointed. The services that the council want to offer in the future are very ambitious and positive, it will take time to get to that point.

4.1.3 Barbara expressed her concern that tenants are losing out on certain things due to the restructure and vacancies. Maggie commented that the customer should never be impacted by what's going on behind the scenes. Teams are working really hard to make sure the customer is not impacted; services are still running as before. Reno added that the draft structure is going to allow us to be a lot more proactive than we currently are and tenants should benefit positively from this.

4.2 Reno explained that the properties in Dene Park are not yet tenanted and won't be for some months due to being held on a planning condition.

4.3 Lesley asked about North Yorkshire and York, she was confused about them working together. Maggie confirmed that York is a separate council, but we will be doing collaboration work with them. It is beneficial to us to work with them.

5. Performance Information Report

5.1 Some performance information was shared with the group.

5.2 In terms of arrears - As of the 18th February 2024 -

Current rent arrears (council dwellings only) were £218,062k
The Annual rent debit is £17,934,138k

The collection rate is 98.79% with 1.21% arrears.

5.3 Maggie shared some information with the group.

The number of homeless assessments completed in the last quarter was - 209

The number of households accepted as statutory homeless was 37

The number of successful homelessness preventions and reliefs was 79

The number of households in temporary accommodation at the end of the quarter was 83

Maggie added that the districts are comparing figures to see how other localities are comparing. If one area is doing particularly well, other areas can look into the ways that they work and approaches they may take in order to possibly learn from them.

5.4 Reno also gave some performance information.

The average relet time remained around the same at 42 days.

There are currently 47 empty dwellings, 15 of them are available to let.

We also have 37 properties under notice (people who have notified us they that are moving out or properties where the tenant has passed away).

5.4.1 Barbara expressed her concern about rural areas been hard to let and this being an issue when CBL comes in. Reno commented that he thinks CBL will actually be a positive change as it gives the tenant more choice. The idea is that if you are choosing your own property, in a chosen location, the likelihood is they will stay there longer.

5.2 Refusals Report

The refusals report was discussed.



Address	Reason for refusal
21 Aspen Close Harrogate HG3 1GG	Too Isolated
25 Norwich Drive, Harrogate, HG3 2TQ	Applicant wants Starbeck or K'boro
16 Manor Court, Knaresborough, HG5 0BH	Refused the offer due to the flat being first floor.
6 Nidd View, Lofthouse, Harrogate, HG3 5SB	Refused on the grounds that they would need two cars to live there due to the lack of public transport and the isolation of the village.
25 Stockwell Avenue, Knaresborough, HG5 0LA	Property too small.
8 Alder Road, Harrogate HG1 4NE	Mobility issues
2 Church Hill, Spofforth, Harrogate, HG3 1AG	Refused too small
125 Forest Lane, Harrogate, HG2 7EQ	Refused, removed from HWL as looking at buying own property.

6. Any other business

6.2 Everyone was thanked for their attendance and the meeting was closed at 11:20

7. Date for next meeting – 23rd May 2024