

Secure Sub-committee

Monday, 25 September 2023

Present: Councillor A Newman (Chair)
Councillors R O'Keefe, J Cruddas, J Johnsson,
J Kirwin, J Mudzingwa, O Scargill, J Walker and
M Wilson

S5 Apologies for Absence

Councillors L Bell and D Cox

S6 Appointment of Substitutes

There were no substitute members reported.

S7 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

Councillor R O'Keefe declared a Non-Registerable Personal in Item 6 Review of North Tyneside Lettings Policy as she is a North Tyneside Council tenant.

S8 Minutes

Resolved that the minute of the meeting held on 10 July 2023 be agreed.

S9 Work Programme 2023-24

The Chair reminded the sub-committee to contact him with any suggestion for future topics for the work programme 2023-2024 going forward, and that there was an aspiration to include future areas such as Community Protection and Equality.

S10 Review of North Tyneside Lettings Policy

The sub-committee received a report and presentation on the North Tyneside Council Lettings Policy and the changes proposed by the service. The report's proposals were designed to manage the current demands on the housing register, help alleviate current pressures on staff and focus lettings on those in the most urgent and high need. Members were asked to note and comment on the report.

The presentation covered changes in format/branding, the frequency of the Letting Policy review, a change in banding titles, the implementation of band 2 reviews for tenants and the possible introduction of rehousing tenants outside of the borough with a priority status to rejoin the housing register.

Members agreed that the policy should reflect the current corporate branding as well as adding further clarity for residents and some introductory information to describe the current housing situation in North Tyneside.

In relation to the discussion of the frequency of the Letting Policy review, the current two-year review cycle was said to be very intensive for the service and could also be brought in line with other housing policy reviews. There was a discussion about the movement from biennial to every four / five years, and members were reassured that the policy could still be reviewed at any time at the request of the council and would remain responsive to changes in legislation, better practice or wider strategies. The committee was reassured that this change would not affect members being able to query or request changes to the policy if they felt this was needed.

A discussion took place about the proposed banding changes and creation of band 1+, with officers saying this was primarily about giving customers a better understanding of the process by re-clarifying the categories and the band's criteria. Members were assured that this process would not affect comparisons with other authorities. Members were concerned that this may lead to heightened expectations and some initial confusion from tenants, whilst not affecting the core issues or the volume of enquiries that members face. Members asked for confirmation that any potential temporary closure of the Housing register would not become permanent. Officers confirmed that the period of any potential

closure would be guided by the Authority and this could free up significant officer time to assist potential residents.

The Chair stated that the Affordable Homes programme documentation could be added to the work programme for a future meeting if members required.

A discussion took place on the current Mutual Exchange process and how the individual exchanges were primarily resident driven. It was felt this may exclude those who would like to downsize / exchange but may need support to engage with and complete the process e.g. elderly residents. Officers suggested this was something that could be investigated.

The Chair asked officers if social factors would be taken into consideration with any future banding changes, giving tenants the option of movement due to issues of family support or school preference and factors not figured into the policy. Officers explained the team's remit and assured the committee that focus was on assisting families.

The committee considered the proposal about homelessness and using out of borough provision to meet housing needs and relieve homelessness. Officers confirmed this provision was currently used for temporary accommodation and it was stated that current capacity would allow officers to properly assess any outside borough moves to ensure the tenancies were successful. It was stated that giving priority to any resident returning to the borough was explicitly considered.

A question was asked about who would be involved in the consultation on possible policy change, and it was stated that this would involve residents as well as external bodies and services area within the Authority. Members asked that this committee was also sighted on the results of the consultation and the cabinet proposals.

The Chair raised a concern about Direct Lets and how much they reflected the needs of the residents offered those properties and how happy those residents were. Officers said they would be able to supply data on appeals to members related to the Lets and could bring more detailed complaint information to a alter meeting if required.

On behalf of the committee, the Chair thanked the Housing and Property Service for their hard work.

It was **agreed** that (1) the Review of the North Tyneside Lettings Policy be noted; and (2) the recommendations of the committee be noted by the Housing and Property Service.

S11 Building a Better North Tyneside – Housing Strategy Action Plan

The sub-committee received a report on the Building a Better North Tyneside – Housing Strategy plan. The report outlined the Authority's plan for providing Housing in the borough, giving more detail on the five priorities and drivers; to deliver affordable homes and support regeneration plans, to prevent homelessness and improve the specialist housing offer, to help improve the private rented sector and tackle derelict properties, have greener homes to support carbon net-zero by 2030 and supporting tenants to improve our communities.

The chair queried whether the Authority had made any preparations to anticipate any possible incoming legislation covering damp and black mould. Officers responded that while new laws were not currently in place, they were currently meeting monthly to discuss and adapt current processes and procedures in preparation.

Officers took on board the Chair's suggestion that repairs begin to use a 1-10 scoring system via text for feedback on works completed and would investigate the possibility going forward to increase tenant engagement.

It was **agreed** that (1) the Building a Better North Tyneside – Housing Strategy Action Plan be noted; and (2) that a progress report on the Action Plan be received at a future meeting.

S12 Date and Time of next meeting

Meeting confirmed for Monday 20 November 2023 at 6pm.