

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 18 September 2017

Present:

	Cllr I Johnson (Chairman)	
	Cllr K M Davis (Vice-Chairman)	
Cllr Mrs H J Addison		Cllr G G Chrystie
Cllr A-M Barker		Cllr J Kingsbury
Cllr J E Bond		Cllr R Mohammed
	Cllr C Rana	

Absent: Councillor M I Raja

Also Present: Councillor C Kemp; Sue Barham, Strategic Director; Neil Coles, Housing Standards Manager and John Scott, Environmental Projects Manager for Thamesway Sustainable Communities Limited.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday, 24 July 2017 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

2. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to discuss.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor J Kingsbury declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute item 4 – Action Surrey Presentation arising from his position as a Councillor Director of the Thamesway Group. The interest was such that speaking and voting was permissible.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor J Kingsbury declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute item 6 – Scrutiny Review of Recommendations of the Executive from his role as a landlord to a property outside of the Borough. The interest was such that speaking and voting were permissible.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor R Mohammed declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute item 6 – Scrutiny Review of Recommendations of the Executive from his role as a landlord to a property outside of the area affected by the Selective Licensing designation area of Canalside Ward but within the Borough. The interest was such that speaking and voting were permissible.

In accordance with the Officer Procedure Rules, Sue Barham declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute item 4 – Action Surrey Presentation, arising from her position as a Director of the Thamesway Group of Companies. The interest was such that speaking was permissible.

Councillor C Kemp declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute item 4 – Action Surrey Presentation, arising from his position as a Councillor Director of the Thameswey Group. The interest was such that speaking and voting were permissible.

4. ACTION SURREY PRESENTATION

John Scott, Environmental Projects Manager for Thameswey Sustainable Communities Ltd (TSCL) presented information on the Action Surrey project, outlining the project's aims, initiatives and achievements. John Scott explained that there needed to be around 8 times more investment into energy efficiency schemes by companies to be able to deliver the national climate change targets. It was noted that several areas within the Borough had a higher than average level of fuel poverty because of older housing stock and a higher percentage of lower income families.

There would be an estimated £1.6m saved for Woking residents over the future lifetime of the measures put in place so far, with a total of £5.2m invested in Surrey through Action Surrey installations. Action Surrey aimed to raise awareness of energy efficiency schemes and grants available to families and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (**SMEs**) within the area and that more work with local SMEs was being looked into in partnership with Woking Works and Woking Chamber of Commerce. So far, Action Surrey had worked with Harvey Water Softeners and several other SMEs to recommend improvements including LED lighting, heating upgrades and renewable energy technology.

The Chairman thanked John Scott for the presentation and asked for further clarity on marketing strategies to residents and the other local authorities taking part in the scheme. The scheme relied more upon referrals from Adult Social Care and local authorities to ensure that fuel poor households were prioritised, though all residents were welcome to ask for advice. Action Surrey received a fee from installers for referrals, with the income put towards further marketing, administration and top-up grants for residents in need. Individuals were given a list of approved installers from which to choose the most suitable option for their circumstances. This process also ensured that the companies remained competitive in price and service. Runnymede Borough Council had dropped out in 2016 but that Action Surrey was still able to maintain a consistent number of completed installations, despite covering a slightly smaller geographical area and receiving less grant support.

The Committee discussed Action Surrey in relation to wider energy efficiency related schemes and the termination of British Gas' in-house energy efficiency programme.

Councillor Davis advised that the Action Surrey project regularly reported to the Climate Change Working Group and encouraged Members to promote the services available and encourage small businesses to contact the organisation.

RESOLVE That the Action Surrey presentation be received.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman reported that the Energy Innovation and South West Trains items had been deferred from November, as representatives from Thameswey were in a busy period and the new South West Rail franchisee, MTR, was currently busy with the handover and upgrades to Waterloo.

Regarding the Health and Wellbeing/Independent Living item on the Work Programme for 27 November 2017, the Chairman stated that the minutes of the most recent Health and

Wellbeing Task Group would be discussed with the Portfolio Holder outside of the meeting. In respect of the Woking 2050 and Climate Change Agenda item on the agenda for 22 January 2018, it was noted that the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and the Woking 2050 Strategy would not be able to attend the meeting of the Committee. It was therefore agreed to move the item to 26 February instead.

The Committee discussed the Parking Standards item on the Forward Plan of the Executive. It was reported that the Forward Plan had been republished on 13 September 2017 and the item had been moved to the Executive meeting on 23 November to ensure the LDF Working Group could feed into the consultation.

RESOLVED that the changes to the work programme be noted.

6. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Private Rented Sector Access Scheme Policy

Councillor Kemp introduced the Policy, highlighting the need to incentivise Landlords working with the Council due to rising private sector rents, the introduction of the new Homelessness Reduction Act and the expected rise in homelessness. He explained that individuals identified as homeless seeking accommodation were moved to temporary accommodation in Bed and Breakfast establishments. However prolonged periods in such accommodation could have detrimental impacts on the physical and mental health of individuals. Under the proposed policy, homeless individuals would have access to viable permanent private sector accommodation. Additional funding available during the introduction of the new Homelessness Reduction Act would be used to initiate the scheme.

The Committee discussed the current bond scheme, the changes between the current scheme and the new, the incentives offered, the current housing benefit allowance, whether the scheme would be viable for growing families and the feedback from Landlords using the Council's existing schemes.

It was noted that of the 217 households currently using the bond scheme, only 15 were recorded as being homeless. The new scheme would prioritise homeless individuals and there were also more incentives for the landlords, including rent in advance, a cash deposit and a £2,000 cash incentive. The scheme could be used to meet the rent shortfall of tenants going onto housing benefit, applications for which can take up to eight weeks to process. The cash incentive was also intended as a contribution towards covering the difference between the Local Housing Allowance and the market rent. It was reported that other local authorities had already put similar schemes in place and, overall, landlords had responded favourably.

Licensing Private Rented Accommodation – proposal to make a selective licensing policy in Canalside Ward

Councillor Kemp introduced the Selective Licensing Proposal and stated that the only current licence the Council utilised was the HMO licence. He added that the Selective Licensing Scheme was very similar to the HMO licence, except specific to smaller homes that were exempt from the HMO licence criteria and in a specific area. The national legislation on applying such criteria was very strict and Canalside had been selected in view of the high proportion of rented properties and the lower standards of living in the Borough. The public had reacted favourably to the policy and landlords had agreed that some form of policy was necessary.

The Committee discussed the safety precautions put in place for the tenants, including ensuring that unlicensed landlords were unable to evict tenants and that tenants of unlicensed landlords would be able to go to a tribunal to obtain up to a year's rent compensation. The Committee also discussed the £560 per property fee and the extra five staff needed to carry out the inspections and administrate the policy. There were concerns that the £560 fee would be passed on to the tenants to pay, which would increase rents by £46 a month. Neil Coles added that the cost may be passed on to tenants but that the housing stock in the area would definitely improve. The Committee also discussed improving the current social housing stock. The Committee requested that Officers look at the proposed cost of the scheme including staff resources and fees and add any further suggestions to the report for Council. OSC17-018

RESOLVE That Officers look at the proposed costs of the Selective Licensing Policy and include suggested alternatives in the report to Council.

RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL

That (i) the Council support the Private Rented Sector Access Scheme Policy; and

(ii) the Council support the Selective Licensing Policy.

7. TASK GROUP UPDATES

The tabled overview of the Task Group updates were received and the Chairman directed Members to direct any questions to either himself or Councillor Chrystie.

8. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

Councillor Barker queried the figures given for off-street parking fees and Wolsey Place rents where the accounts were below budget. It was agreed that a response to the questions would be circulated to Members in due course.

The meeting commenced at 7:00 pm
and ended at 10:00 pm

Chairman: _____

Date: _____