

Minutes

Corporate Services and Partnerships Policy

Overview Committee

Thursday 19 March 2015

Meeting held at Committee Room 3 - Civic Centre,
High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW



HILLINGDON
LONDON

	<p>Members Present: Councillors Richard Lewis (Chairman), Richard Mills (Vice-Chairman), Tony Burles, Nick Denys, Narinder Garg, Raymond Graham, Carol Melvin, and Robin Sansarpuri.</p> <p>Apologies: Wayne Bridges.</p> <p>Officers: Sarah Glazebrook (Deputy Principal Lawyer - Housing) and Khalid Ahmed (Democratic Services Manager).</p>	
45.	<p>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 FEBRUARY 2015</p> <p>Agreed as an accurate record.</p>	
46.	<p>EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC</p> <p>It was agreed that all items of business would be considered in public.</p>	
47.	<p>SECOND MAJOR REVIEW - SOCIAL HOUSING FRAUD</p> <p>Sarah Glazebrook, the Council's Deputy Lawyer for Housing attended the meeting and provided the Committee with the legislative framework around social housing fraud.</p> <p>Members were informed that in relation to allegations of social housing fraud, her primary responsibility in the Social Housing Fraud project was to recover property for the Council which was being fraudulently occupied, and to re-allocate to those people on the waiting list.</p> <p>The Committee was informed that consideration was given to whether cases were suitable for prosecution.</p> <p>Reference was made to the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act which had given local authorities the power to prosecute those who had unlawfully sublet their social housing. The law related to social housing tenants and introduced two new criminal offences; where tenants had sublet or had parted with possession of a property or ceased to occupy knowing that it was a breach of tenancy. The second, more serious offence was where a tenant had dishonestly and in breach of tenancy, sublet without consent and ceased to occupy the property as</p>	<p>Action By:</p>

<p>their only or principal home.</p> <p>Members were informed of the difficulties which the local authority had in proving breach of tenancy and dishonest sub-letting, but that it was slightly easier to bring possession proceedings. This was because the Council would be able to include multiple grounds and provide evidence of the practical steps that could be taken by officers to identify and evidence non-occupation / sub-letting cases.</p> <p>The Committee noted that the Council's officers were meticulous in their recording of notes of cases which were important for building up a body of evidence.</p> <p>Reference was made to tenants under their tenancy agreements, having the right to take lodgers in their homes, provided they had sought the permission of the local authority. Permission for this was subject to the individual circumstances of the tenant and if the property would not be overcrowded if there was to be a lodger.</p> <p>Discussion took place on tenancy agreements and Members were informed that the terms and conditions of agreements were not reviewed annually but were reviewed periodically every five years or so. Reference was made to the terms and conditions of tenancy agreements and the requirement for these to be clearly and concisely communicated to tenants. Members asked that consideration be given to tenancy agreements being witness countersigned to ensure that terms and conditions were clearly understood and communicated clearly to all social housing tenants.</p> <p>The Committee also asked that consideration be given to providing reminders to tenants on terms and conditions on an annual basis which would re-enforce the message and provide an evidence base for courts in any prosecutions that the tenant had been made aware of their tenancy agreement requirements.</p> <p>Reference was made to the need for magistrates to understand fully the complexity of social housing and the issues which confronted local authorities as social housing landlords. It was suggested that the offer of training should be given to magistrates.</p> <p>The Committee was made aware of the policy statement on serious housing fraud which had been agreed by the Leader of the Council which added further clarification to the Council's approved Anti- Fraud Strategies and Policies. In this, reference was made to Hillingdon Council having a zero tolerance approach to housing fraud.</p>	<p>Action By:</p>
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	<p>Members suggested that a more general policy could be developed which could provide a framework for the Council to prevent, identify and address social housing fraud with the Council's social housing stock. Officers were asked to give consideration to this.</p> <p>The Committee thanked the Council's Deputy Lawyer for Housing for providing the legal framework for tackling social housing fraud.</p> <p>RESOLVED –</p> <p>1. That the information provided be noted and officers be asked to provide a summary of evidence received during the review to enable suggested recommendations to be worked on for the next meeting of the Committee.</p>	<p>Action By:</p> <p>Khalid Ahmed</p>
48.	<p>CABINET FORWARD PLAN</p> <p>Noted.</p>	
49.	<p>WORK PROGRAMME</p> <p>For the next meeting of the Committee, Members were asked to consider future review topics for the next Municipal Year</p> <p>Noted.</p>	
	<p>Meeting commenced at 7.30pm and closed at 8.30pm</p> <p>Next meeting: 28 April 2015 at 7.30pm</p>	

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Khalid Ahmed on 01895 250833. These minutes are circulated to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.