



SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

03 April 2012 at 7.00 pm

Conference Room - Council Office

AGENDA

Membership:

Chairman: Davison Vice-Chairman: Brown

Cllrs. Abraham, Mrs. Ayres, Ball, Butler, Edwards-Winsor, Firth, Mrs. George, Hogarth, Horwood, Mrs. Parkin, Pett, Piper, Raikes, Scholey, Towell and Walshe

| | <u>Pages</u> | <u>Contact</u> |
|---|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| Apologies for Absence. | | |
| 4. Actions from the Previous Meeting | (Pages 1 - 2) | |
| 7. In depth Scrutiny of Under-occupation of Social Housing | (Pages 3 - 6) | Pat Smith Tel: 01732 227355 |

To assist in the speedy and efficient despatch of business, Members wishing to obtain factual information on items included on the Agenda are asked to enquire of the appropriate Director or Contact Officer named on a report prior to the day of the meeting.

Should you require a copy of this agenda or any of the reports listed on it in another format please do not hesitate to contact the Democratic Services Team as set out below.

For any other queries concerning this agenda or the meeting please contact:

The Democratic Services Team (01732 227241)

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| ACTIONS FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 31.01.12 | | | |
|---|--|---|---------------------|
| Action | Description | Status and last updated as at 21.03.12 | Contact Officer |
| ACTION 1 | A further update on the financial contributions received and potential use of the money, to be given at the next meeting. | Financial contributions from development in lieu of affordable housing. Current update is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the pipeline is £397,000 • £174,000 actually received | Pat Smith |
| ACTION 2 | The Head of IT and Facilities Management to investigate supply of colour and/or wireless free printer in the Members room. | There is currently a monochrome printer that is available to use within the Members Room. This can either be accessed from the provided PC or can be attached to a personal device using the provided cable. The IT Team are investigating current technologies to see if there is a suitable alternative solution. | Jim Carrington-West |
| ACTION 3 | The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Resources agree a draft meeting timetable with Working Group Members. | A report updating Members on Universal Credit In-depth Scrutiny (incorporating the timetable) is included on this agenda. | Pav Ramewal |

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|----------|---|---|-----------------------|
| ACTION 4 | The Head of Housing and Communications to send an email with suggested Panel members and questions to all Committee members along with the statistics from West Kent and Moat Housing and a case study. | An email was sent to all Members with case studies and statistics as requested. Questions have been sent to all Panel members in advance for the next Committee meeting. Places for People has been contacted to sit on the Panel but they have declined the invitation. They will send a written reply to the questions which will be given out on the night. | Pat Smith |
| ACTION 5 | The Head of Housing and Communications to speak to Property Services manager for background information on why the MOD were not used to clear the ordnance related items from the site. | An email was sent to all Members on 14 February 2012 attaching a note setting out the background to the ordnance removal at the Hever Road Gypsy Site which noted that the Army Bomb Disposal Unit were not prepared to undertake work beyond the initial disposal, as they did not carry out excavation work. The contractor (Bactec) was recommended to the Council by the Army Bomb Disposal Unit. | Pat Smith/Pav Ramewal |

In Depth Scrutiny meeting on under occupation, Tuesday 3rd April 2012

Questions to the panel of representatives

Alan Dyer – Planning Service Manager, Sevenoaks District Council

1. How can Planners help to improve down sizing of under occupied Social Housing?
2. Can Planning gains be used to supplement the West Kent HA “Small is Beautiful” scheme?
3. Can Planning gains be used to match fund, with say two Housing Associations, a dedicated Under Occupation Support Officer?
4. Can the synergy between Planning and Housing be improved to reduce under occupation in the social sector?

Deborah White – Housing and Communities Director, West Kent Housing Association

1. What percentage of the total stock do West Kent HA tenants under occupy?
2. In your opinion, what are the main solutions to reducing under occupation in West Kent HA's stock?
3. How many tenants do you assist to move from under occupied housing per annum, under the "Small is Beautiful" scheme?
4. Would more SDC funding for the "Small is Beautiful" scheme help to reduce the number of under occupied properties?
5. Would you consider sharing an Under Occupation Support Officer with Moat (with funding shared by West Kent HA, Moat and SDC)?

Sam Jacobs – Housing Options Manager, MOAT

1. What percentage of the stock do Moat tenants currently under occupy in this district?
2. In your opinion, what are the main solutions to reducing under occupation in the Moat stock?
3. Do you have any incentives in place to encourage tenants to move from under occupied properties?
4. Would you consider sharing an Under Occupation Support Officer with WKHA (with funding shared by West Kent HA, Moat and SDC)?

John Clark – Housing Services Manager, Places for People *(Not able to attend meeting in person, answers provided beforehand).*

1. What percentage of the stock do Places For People tenants under occupy in this district?
2. In your opinion, what are the main solutions to reducing under occupation?
3. Do you have any incentives in place to reduce under occupation?

Agenda Item 7

Brian Horton – Strategic Housing Advisor, Kent County Council

1. Are you aware of any concerns from older people, when considering down sizing in Social housing ?
2. Do you think an Under Occupation Support Officer would help address some of these concerns?
3. In your opinion, do you think in the older people client group, that single or couples would rather have 2 bedrooms when downsizing? If so, for what reasons?
4. Do you have any suggestions on how to reduce under occupation in this district?
5. How else could Kent County Council support us?

Liz Crockford – Housing Enabling Officer, Sevenoaks District Council

1. What are the main client groups under occupying?
2. Which tenants will be affected by the welfare reform?
3. What type of housing do we need to build to improve down -sizing options?
4. Are there any schemes for older people being developed to encourage them to downsize?
5. Is there HCA or CLG funding available to assist with the reduction of under occupation in the Social sector?

Lisa Webb – Housing Initiatives Officer, Sevenoaks District Council

1. What Kent wide schemes are in place to reduce under occupation?
2. Can we bid for any funding to reduce Under occupation in the social sector of this district?
3. Do you have the capacity to include "under occupation" work with the Empty Homes work you currently undertake?
4. Would a dedicated Under Occupation Support Officer working with HA tenants in the district, reduce under occupation?
5. Do you see the Empty Homes initiatives assisting to reduce under occupation?

In Depth Scrutiny meeting on under occupation, Tuesday 3rd April 2012

John Clark – Housing Services Manager, Places for People

(Not able to attend meeting in person, answers provided below).

- 1) What percentage of the stock do Places For People tenants under occupy in this district?

We do not have specific data for Sevenoaks available on under occupancy at this time as we have been working on our strategy nationally rather than getting into district areas at this stage. However, in our South East area (including Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex, Berkshire, Hampshire and Isle of Wight) our under occupancy rate for 2 beds is 66%. This figure seems high but is skewed as it includes our Seaside and Country Homes Properties across the region which is a scheme to free up family homes in London.

- 2) In your opinion, what are the main solutions to reducing under occupation?

There is no easy answer to tackling under occupation however tools that we use or consider using are; promoting HomeSwapper; undertaking affordability checks for new customers or existing if tenancies change, highlighting the upcoming proposals in the welfare reform that may affect tenancies where there is currently under occupation.

- 3) Do you have any incentives in place to reduce under occupation?

No, we do not currently have incentives in place to tackle under occupation.

Additional comments:

- Some rooms that are under occupied may be used by tenants to work from home and we try not to penalise these groups.
- Filling all rooms in properties in areas may cause communities to become overcrowded and unbalanced (e.g. services such as dentists, doctors).

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