



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 18th MARCH 2024

PRESENT: Councillor D Cook (Chair), Councillors R Claymore, G Coates, S Doyle, D Maycock, B Price and L Smith

The following officers were present: Rob Barnes (Executive Director Communities), Paul Weston (Assistant Director Assets), Leanne Costello (Senior Scrutiny and Democratic Services Officer) and Tracey Smith (Democratic Services Assistant)

79 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Bailey and C Bain.

Apologies were also received from the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning, Councillor S Smith.

80 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 7th February 2024 were approved and signed as a correct record.

(Moved by Councillor L Smith and seconded by Councillor S Doyle)

81 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

82 CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair highlighted that an update had been shared as requested by the Committee at the last meeting around the Assure Implementation. There were no questions or comments from the Committee on the briefing note.

83 RESPONSES TO REPORTS OF THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were none.

84 CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS REFERRED TO THE CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FROM CABINET / COUNCIL

There were none.

85 CORPORATE SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair introduced the report to provide the Committee with a draft of the Committee's Annual Report for 2023/24 (Appendix 2), together with a draft of the Introductory Report (Appendix 1) which will be presented to full Council in the 2024/25 municipal year.

RESOLVED that Committee:

endorsed the draft Annual Report and Introductory Report for submission to full Council, following agreement by the Chair of any final amendments and updates to reflect the March 2024 meeting.

(Moved by Councillor B Price and seconded by Councillor R Claymore)

86 LEASEHOLDER INSURANCE POLICIES

The Chair confirmed that the Committee had been asked to raise an item around Leaseholder Insurance Policies by Councillor Wade and that a briefing note had been circulated from Officers. The Chair asked the Committee to consider whether they felt that this was a matter that needed to be considered further by the Scrutiny Committee. The Chair noted that there had been an increase in insurance and asked Members for their thoughts.

It was highlighted that one of the issues was around why the Leaseholders could not obtain their own insurance and that had been addressed within the briefing note. They also highlighted that there is legislation covering how leaseholder properties are insured.

The Committee acknowledged that whilst the briefing note stated that the increase was not unreasonable there was no explanation/evidence for. It was asked that the Officer speak to finance and asked them to feedback to the Committee with more information around this.

The Committee highlighted that it was difficult to provide feedback without Officers present.

It was agreed that the Chair would invite Officers either to a working group meeting or a further Committee meeting to answer the Committees questions.

87 WORKING GROUP UPDATES

The Chair welcomed Councillors Dean and Clarke to join as part of the cross scrutiny working group. Following the meeting of the working groups, where a focus has been taken on voids questions had been sent to Officers who were at the meeting to provide a response.

The Chair handed over the Executive Director Communities, Rob Barnes and the Assistant Director, Assets for an update who confirmed that further data would be provided in a more detailed report on the 12th April but for now could provide the following information in relation to their questions –

➤ **Delays and quality of work:**

Officers confirmed that they were aware of some issues on standards of cleaning and quality of repairs on voids which would be talked about later. There can sometimes be delays in the issuing of certificates (gas/electric) and properties cannot be let without these. There have also been some high cost voids.

➤ **Time taken / loss of rental income due to delays:**

There was no data at this point, but Officer asked over what period the Committee would like the data to cover? The Committee confirmed that they would like to know how much is lost per void depending on how long it is not let for?

The Officer confirmed that he can provide data around delays due to handover but data on delays in letting once the property is ready would sit with Voids and Allocations.

➤ **Is there a standard process from keys handed back to re-let through Choice Based Lettings?**

There is a key to key process involving the contractor and the voids and allocations team who meet regularly to discuss this. Work could be done to develop those relationships.

➤ **Do Equans have the voids contract?**

There are two contractors, Equans, are the prime contractor for delivery of void work and Wates carry out planned maintenance. There are discussions around whether to move some of the larger void works over to Wates as they fall under a planned worked nature but there have been no action on this.

➤ **KPI's on Voids - can we separate out the more difficult ones to give us a clearer picture?**

More information to be provided in the report, the Committee requested data for up to 12 months as a starting point. The following information is available on costings of voids in the current year:

Less than £500 voids = 23

£501 – £2500 = 98

£2501 - £5000 = 49

£5000 plus – 80 (25 of which are £10000+)

It was highlighted that the Council receives a lot of properties handed back in poor condition due to unauthorised home improvements.

➤ **Is there a priority order in which works undertaken - 1 bed / 2 bed?**

Voids tend to be addressed in date order unless the voids and allocations team need a void handing over quickly due to a priority case.

➤ **Are delays due to availability of sub-contractors?**

They have been some delays around staff and resources but the biggest delay is due to cost and quality of properties coming back to the Council. It was confirmed that the Council have been working with Equans on a service improvement plan.

➤ **Do we quality check the work? Are there quality controls? Snagging reports/processes?**

A Council Project Officer inspects all the work at handover, including checking invoices against work done. There is no snagging reports, but an email is sent to the contractor of anything that need putting right. A photograph will be accepted for minor items, a re inspection will be carried out for major items.

➤ **Can we have any data raised on the Tenants survey raised recently?**

It was confirmed that the data wasn't available at this time, the Chair requested as soon as it was that it comes to Committee.

The Committee made the following comments/observations and asked the following questions:

1. Does the Council have any hard to let properties?
Officers confirmed that any hard to let properties tend to be within Sheltered Housing Schemes.
2. Do we have timescales within the contract?
Officers confirmed that the contract sets a number of days to turn a void around based upon the value of the works required once they have been scheduled, and these figures can be included in the data. High value voids are negotiated with the contractors.
3. On properties where DIY is completed does tenancy stipulate that this should be put right and if not, is the cost passed on?
Tenants are required to get permission before carrying out alterations. There are arrangements around recharges (there is a policy) however collections rate may not be good especially where tenants leave Council housing altogether.

The Chair confirmed that he would liaise with Officers to arrange a further Working Group meeting/Committee meeting once the full report was available.

The Committee thank the Officers for attendance and continued work.

88 FORWARD PLAN

There were no items identified from the Forward Plan.

89 CORPORATE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

There Committee were happy with the Work Plan.

Chair