

Minutes The Housing and Neighbourhood Partnership

Tuesday 3rd December 2013, 14.00 at River Tees Watersports Centre, North Shore Road, Stockton on Tees

Chair: Dave Pickard (Vela Homes)	
Vice Chair: Stewart Tagg (Fabrick Housing Group)	
Members: Emma Gordon (Stockton & District Advice and Information Service); Sue Thompson (Teesside Landlords Assoc); Michelle Street (Stockton Flats); Barbara Watson (Coast & Country); Suzanne Fletcher (Central Area Partnership); Philip Addison (Western Area Partnership); Steve Simpson (National Landlords Association); Val Scollen (Northern Area Partnership Board); Jim Scollen (Northern Area Partnership Board); Paul Thomas (Central Locality Forum)	
Advisors: Caroline Wood (SBC Housing); Julie Higgins (SBC Housing); Bev Bearne (SBC Strategic Housing); David Stamper (SBC Strategic Housing); Stephen Shaw (SBC Tech Services); Melanie Greenwood (SBC Tech Services)	
Apologies Councillor Steve Nelson	
Item/Issues	Action
1. Welcome and Apologies	
2. Minutes of the last meeting No issues - minutes agreed	

<p>3. Matters arising – nothing arising</p>	
<p>4. Empty Homes Survey</p> <p>Dave Stamper gave an Empty Homes Survey Update Report which he shared with members of the partnership. This report was produced after analysing the results of a recent survey which was sent to owners of empty homes in the borough. The deadline for surveys to be returned was mid-October and the results are based on the responses of those surveys that were returned which equates to 11% of the total number of empty properties in the borough. The owners of properties remaining unoccupied will be contacted to ask how the Council could help bring their property back into use. Those actively marketing or leasing their properties will be informed of schemes the Council has in place to help them.</p>	<p>Contact Dave Stamper</p> <p>01642 526589</p> <p>David.stamper@stockton.gov.uk</p>
<p>5. Warm Homes/Healthy People</p> <p>Melanie Greenwood updated the Partnership on this project running in Stockton. Melanie explained this project draws together all services already available in the Borough, it is a targeted approach to cut down on excess winter deaths and hospital admissions due to cold weather related illnesses.</p> <p>There is a single point of access referral hub to enable help to be accessed from all the partners such as boiler repair service, emergency heating, befriending service. Help from this project does not depend on qualifying for benefits. Melanie explained that 10,000 households have received leaflets and we are actively targeting households where there are high incidents of fuel poverty, referrals mostly come through our agency staff/health visitors etc.</p>	<p>Contact Melanie Greenwood</p> <p>01642 526596</p> <p>Melanie.greenwood@stockton.gov.uk</p>
<p>6. Welfare Reform</p> <p>Julie Higgins spoke to the partnership on various issues relating to welfare reform:</p> <p>Local Council Tax Support</p> <p>Cabinet has approved the scheme for 2014/15. No significant changes, with working age customers</p>	<p>Julie Higgins</p> <p>01642 526662</p> <p>Julie.higgins@stockton.gov.uk</p>

continuing to pay a minimum of 20% of the council tax charge. To be considered by full Council in January 2014.

Benefit Cap

Not as many clients affected as first advised –77 households to date. As part of a joint project between the housing benefit service, housing options and SDAIS all customers affected have been contacted by phone and through home visits and are being offered support for example housing advice, budgeting and debt advice.

Universal Credit

The timescales for the implementation of Universal Credit are still very uncertain. Current information is that the transition of claimants onto Universal Credit will not take place until at least 2015/16 but it is still not clear which claimants will be affected and in which areas.

Government plans to include housing costs in Pension Credit have been postponed whilst single tier pensions are introduced. Housing costs for pensioners will remain with the Housing Benefit Service until at least 2017/18.

Single Fraud Investigation

Housing Benefit investigation will transfer to DWP in the future. Date still to be confirmed.

Exempt Supported Accommodation

Housing costs are higher and more complex for these cases due to the vulnerabilities of the clients and the additional support services being provided. We have now been advised that the LA will continue to deal with these cases until at least 2015 and they are likely to be the last type of cases to be affected by UC. Discussions are being had about how they will be paid for once UC comes in. We are waiting further

<p>information.</p> <p>Monitoring Impact of Welfare Reform across Local Authority</p> <p>Information from across the council is being collated on a quarterly basis and is being monitored to identify any key impacts of the welfare reforms. Information is reported to Cabinet on a regular basis.</p> <p>Discretionary Housing Payments</p> <p>Cabinet has agreed the DHP policy for 14/15. We are working closely with landlords to proactively target customers who have been affected by the welfare reforms and who are struggling.</p>	
<p>7. Housing and Neighbourhood Partnership Terms of Reference</p> <p>Dave Pickard explained that comments had been received and would be incorporated into existing TOR. Once complete these would be sent out for final comments and once agreed they will be implemented.</p>	
<p>8. Fuel Poverty Partnership</p> <p>Stephen Shaw gave an update; he explained that under LSP it is a partnership in its own right. The second meeting of the partnership is to be held in January 2014. Three of the largest landlords with a presence in the Borough are represented on partnership and that Voice Forum is looking at community representative to join the fuel poverty partnership. Stephen explained that anyone interested in coming along to the meeting on 28th January which will involve getting feedback from 1700 homes that have benefitted from insulations and external wall insulation, boiler replacement and double glazing and how these improvements have benefitted them should contact Bev Bearne or Ann Pursey and they will feed names and numbers back to him and once time/venue is confirmed invitations will be issued.</p>	<p>Contact Stephen Shaw</p> <p>Environmental Policy Officer</p> <p>Stephen.shaw@stockton.gov.uk</p> <p>01642 526446</p>
<p>9. Welfare Reform</p>	

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<p>A question was raised by a member of the partnership as to whether Stockton landlords were sending letters to tenants in rent arrears because of bedroom tax stating in the letter that information may be passed to Social Services and implied that children may be taken into care. Caroline Wood explained that Local Authorities have a duty to report to Social Services if rent is not paid and in some cases it can result in eviction.</p>	
<p>10. Stockton Renaissance Update</p> <p>Dave Pickard explained that there were no meetings held recently to update on.</p>	
<p>11. Date and Time of future meetings</p> <p>Once terms of reference are agreed a new series of meetings will be arranged, members will be informed of date/time and venue once arrangements are in place.</p>	
<p>12. Any other urgent business</p> <p>Should you have any urgent business then please contact the Chair.</p>	