

## **Housing & Community Safety Select Committee**

A meeting of Housing & Community Safety Select Committee was held on Thursday, 22nd April, 2010.

**Present:** Cllr Julia Cherrett(Chairman), Cllr Jackie Earl, Cllr Jean Kirby, Cllr Bill Noble, Cllr Bill Woodhead

**Officers:** Caroline Wood, Barry Jackson, Dave Kitching(DNS), Graham Birtle, Michelle Jones, Sarah Whaley (L&D)

**Also in attendance:** Maggie Gibson (Tristar)

**Apologies:** Cllr Allison Trainer

### **HCS 1/10**

#### **Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Jackie Earl declared a personal prejudicial interest in relation to item no. 4 - EIT Review of Regulatory Services - Action Plan, in particular Houses with Multiple Occupation (HMO's) as Cllr Earl was herself a Landlord of an HMO.

Councillor Cherrett declared a personal/non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item no.3 – Choice Based Letting Schemes Update as she was a member of the Tristar Management Board.

Councillor Woodhead declared a personal/non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item no.3 – Choice Based Letting Schemes Update as he was a member of the Tristar Management Board.

Cllr Bill Noble declared a personal/non prejudicial interest in relation to agenda item no.4 – EIT Review of Regulatory Services - Action Plan, as he was a Member of the River Tees Port Health Authority.

### **HCS 2/10**

#### **Draft Minutes from the meeting held on 25th February 2010**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting dated 25th February 2010.

CONCLUDED that the minutes be approved.

### **HCS 3/10**

#### **Choice Based Letting Schemes - Update**

The Committee was asked to consider and comment on the attached update report in relation to the new Choice Based Letting Scheme which was introduced in July 2009.

The Housing Options Manager highlighted the following points:

1) A steering group had been formed comprising of representatives from each partner organisation to develop and implement the Choice Based Letting Scheme and to monitor and evaluate the scheme as detailed within the report.

2) Common procedures and good practice had been identified across the Tees valley which had resulted in a similar level of service being offered across neighbouring authorities.

3) There were increases in the number of Registered Social Landlords putting properties up for rent through the Choice Based Letting Scheme which offered an increase in opportunities for clients to acquire the accommodation they were looking for.

4) Members learned about a new mutual exchange scheme which was to be introduced in summer 2010 allowing clients to exchange across landlords giving more choice.

Members and Officers discussed the effect of the current economic downturn and how this had impacted in many new private landlords entering into the rented housing market, however it was also noted that as the housing market became more buoyant some of these new landlords may sell properties resulting in a lack of rentable housing.

The Committee discussed in further detail how failed tenancies were dealt with and also additional schemes such as the bond guarantee scheme and direct payments to landlords especially where some clients had had previous debt issues.

Members heard that the number of failed tenancies was on the decrease due to clients being able to bid for the homes they want to live in which meant clients were less likely to leave. It was also discussed that there were clients who rented private homes amongst private estates who didn't take care of the homes and gardens they were renting. The Trading Standards and Licensing Manager informed Members that there was a registered landlord scheme in operation that they could use to help them with issues like this.

The Committee also discussed the long term security of renting for clients as a lot of privately owned houses were offered on a six month basis which didn't offer much security to tenants. Stockton Council was working with landlords to increase this to a minimum of twelve months.

Members asked what help was available to help minimise owner occupiers losing their homes during financial crisis which in turn would increase the need for rentable accommodation. The Housing Options Manager explained that there was a specialist available to owner occupiers to help these people facing difficulty not lose their homes. Members requested that the details of this service be circulated to all Councillors.

CONCLUDED that

1) the update for Choice Based Lettings be noted.

2) Information be circulated to all Members as detailed above.

4/10

The Trading Standards and Licensing Manager presented Members with the Action Plan for the EIT Review of Regulatory Services.

The Committee heard that Trading Standards were currently going through a website update and Members would be invited to a demonstration when complete.

It was highlighted to members by the Scrutiny Officer that the completion date indicated on the Action Plan at point 2 for Houses of Multiple Occupation should possibly be changed to April 2014 as this was the indicated date for the income which was scheduled to be generated, otherwise the action would not be monitored after April 2010 when the schedule of fees was introduced.

CONCLUDED that:

- 1) the Action plan be noted.
- 2) the completion date for Action 2 to be amended as stated above.

**HCS**  
5/10

### **Review of Taxi Trade Licences**

The Committee was presented with the potential remit for the Review of Taxi Trade Licences by the Trading Standards and Licensing Manager.

It was highlighted to Members that a previous review of Taxi Licensing by the Licensing Committee had already covered the following items:

- 1) Drivers
- 2) Licensed Drivers
- 3) New Vehicles
- 4) Licensed Vehicles
- 5) Operators/Application process
- 6) Existing Operators

It was suggested that the scope of this review should therefore include the Funding of the Service and Transport Planning. It was also agreed that the Highways department would also need to be involved when discussing the review of Transport Planning.

Members agreed an additional meeting was needed to enable this review to be carried out efficiently and to ensure that there was sufficient time for the Taxi Trade to submit questions and raise any concerns.

CONCLUDED that:

- 1) the review be noted.
- 2) an additional meeting be arranged for the 1st July 2010.

3) Taxi Trade to be sent a letter informing them of the review and inviting questions.

**HCS 6/10 EIT Gateway Review of Administration, Business Support, Customer Services, and Performance Management**

Members considered the proforma that was agreed at Executive Scrutiny for the review of Administration, Business Support, Customer Services, and Performance Management.

It was noted that this would be a Gateway Review and therefore Members would receive information from leading Officers inviting the Committee's contribution at key points during the review process.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.

**HCS 7/10 Work Programme**

Members noted the Gateway Review and Taxi Trade Review.

CONCLUDED the information be noted.

**HCS 8/10 Chair's Update**

There was no outstanding issues to be updated.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.