

Place Select Committee

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday, 10th December, 2018.

Present: Cllr Derrick Brown(Chairman), Cllr Sonia Bailey(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Louise Baldock, Cllr Evaline Cunningham, Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Paul Weston, Cllr Bill Woodhead MBE, Cllr Nigel Cooke

Officers: Jamie McCann, Craig Willows, Dale Rowbotham, Edward Tannahill (CS), Jane Edmends (HS), Richard McGuckin, (EGD), Gary Woods, Marianne Sleeman (DCE)

Also in attendance: Ian Wardle, Chris Smith, Julie McNaughton, Valerie ??(Thirteen Group)

Apologies:

PLA 49/18 Evacuation Procedure

The Evacuation procedure was noted.

PLA 50/18 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Paul Weston declared a personal, prejudicial interest in respect of the agenda item 6 'Scrutiny Review of Consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group' as he was currently an employee of Thirteen Housing Group. He therefore left the meeting whilst this item was being considered.

Councillor Derrick Brown declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in respect of item 6 'Scrutiny Review of Consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group' as he had family members who were Thirteen tenants.

Councillor Evaline Cunningham declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in respect of item 6 'Scrutiny Review of Consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group' as she had a family member who was a Thirteen tenant.

PLA 51/18 Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th November (to follow)

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings held on 12th November 2018.

AGREED

That the minutes of the meetings held on 12th November 2018 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

PLA 52/18 Scrutiny Review of Bring Sites (Recycling)

Consideration was given to the draft final report and recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of Bring Sites (Recycling).

AGREED:

That the final report of the Scrutiny Review of Bring Sites (Recycling) be approved for submission to Cabinet in January 2019.

**PLA
53/18**

Scrutiny Review of Consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group

Members received information regarding the Scrutiny Review of Consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group from senior representatives of Thirteen including the Chief Executive, Executive Director of Service Delivery and Development and Accommodation Manager. Evidence related to Thirteen's recent decision to withdraw from the Tees Valley-wide Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme, the main points of which included:

- Thirteen would be withdrawing from CBL as part of a wider review into how it delivers key frontline services to customers and due to customer dissatisfaction with the present system. The process was currently lengthy, onerous and time-consuming, resulting in customers making incomplete applications and / or abandoning the system.
- As a member of the CBL partnership, Thirteen has expressed concerns about the system and approach for some time. Around 18 months ago, Thirteen and SBC agreed to work together to try to influence the wider CBL Steering Group to look at more fundamental changes to allocations across the Tees Valley.
- The CBL Steering Group decided to appoint a Service Development Officer that would work on behalf of the group to implement an agreed Improvement Plan (including the development of a shorter housing application form and, where identified, improvements to the back-office), though Thirteen felt this would not address the fundamental issues with CBL. Although this post has been filled (commenced July 2018), no changes have yet been introduced.
- Members of the CBL Steering Group were aware that Thirteen was carrying out an option appraisal and that various options were to be presented to the Thirteen Board for consideration. The decision to withdraw from CBL was communicated to the Chief Executives of the five Local Authorities and the Chair of the CBL Steering Group on the 26th September 2018. Thirteen gave six months' notice of this intention (double the three month requirement in the partnership).
- Thirteen are developing their own Digital Lettings Platform for customers with the help of an ICT provider (Saadian). The new policy would incorporate the nomination process with Stockton Borough Council (SBC) and the banding would remain the same. The new system will be more automated and therefore requires the applicant to do less, and will be a 'one stop shop' for anyone wanting to access Thirteen accommodation in the Tees Valley.
- Thirteen informed the Committee the Digital Lettings Platform would be up and running in April 2019 but have agreed with the CBL Partnership to extend the period for a further 3 months.

- To communicate these proposals, Thirteen were attending regular meetings with partners to provide regular updates, answer queries and communicate progress. Thirteen will also continue to be an active member within the CBL Steering and Operational Group meetings to facilitate this approach and enable a smooth transition.

The main issues discussed by the Committee, Thirteen representatives and Local Authority Officers also present were:

- Would help be put in place for older / vulnerable individuals who were not digitally minded? Thirteen stated that their focus was not solely on digital contact channels, and that face-to-face communication would remain very important in their future operations – the Neighbourhood Co-ordinators are a key part of this. If someone was in dire need, they should talk to Thirteen, not log on to an online service.
- Will there be any difference in Thirteen’s own lettings policy compared to what is used as part of the current CBL scheme? Thirteen stated that they had followed the existing CBL approach and had strengthened certain elements – this had been consulted upon (SBC consulted in summer 2018).
- Regarding the application process, Thirteen’s aim is to only request information that is absolutely necessary for the application, whilst still making sure that an individual’s needs are identified.
- Would people have to re-register after the ‘go live date’ or would data be transferred? Thirteen are expecting a data transfer and would contact current applicants to see if they did wish to register with Thirteen (Thirteen would then action on the customers behalf).
- Would people have to access more than one system in order to register their interest in seeking affordable / socially rented housing? Individuals may potentially have to submit dual applications to Thirteen and the existing CBL scheme.
- Why does the Thirteen’s definition of ‘need’ differ from SBC’s? Concerns were raised around priorities differing.
- Thirteen’s decision to withdraw from the CBL scheme will have a financial impact on SBC. When Thirteen are no longer part of CBL, SBC will need to administer the CBL Housing Register (for Stockton-on-Tees residents who wish to continue with a CBL application) and deliver the agreed Nomination Agreement. Thirteen confirmed they would be happy to look at any stranded costs the Council incurs as a result of their decision.
- The Local Authority currently do not use the system Thirteen would be using in the new arrangement and were not in the position to say it was the best system for use.

- Members confirmed the partnership with Thirteen was much valued but their concerns were for the residents of the Borough

AGREED:

That the information be noted.

PLA 54/18 Exclusion of the Public

AGREED

That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

PLA 55/18 Scrutiny Review of Consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group - Commercially Sensitive Information

Members considered commercially sensitive information regarding the Scrutiny Review of Consolidation of Thirteen Housing Group.

AGREED

The information be noted.

PLA 56/18 Work Programme 2018-2019

Consideration was given to Work Programme. The next Committee meeting is scheduled for the 14th January 2019.

AGREED:

That the Work Programme be noted.

PLA 57/18 Chair's Update

There was no update from the Chair.