



SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.30pm to 6.20pm

27 February 2014

Present: Councillors Stephenson (chair), Maxwell (vice chair), Bradford, Brimblecombe, Brociek-Coulton, Carlo, Galvin, Haynes (substitute for Howard) Manning, Sands (S) and Storie

Also present: Councillor Bremner (cabinet member for housing)

Apologies: Councillors Grenville, Howard and Lubbock

1. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2014.

3. WORK PROGRAMME

In response to a question from a member, the scrutiny officer said that a report on the ongoing work with community centres would form part of the annual review of scrutiny which would be presented at the March meeting of the scrutiny committee. The scrutiny officer would also contact representatives from the Norfolk county community safety partnership scrutiny sub panel and the Norfolk health overview and scrutiny committee for their input into the review.

RESOLVED to note the work programme.

4. OPTIONS FOR ENHANCING COUNCILLOR KNOWLEDGE ON HOUSING

The head of housing introduced the report and gave members a PowerPoint presentation. An extra slide was included in the presentation in response to a question received prior to the meeting. The slide summarised the training opportunities available to tenants and members which were:

- Councillor briefings
- Councillor induction
- Taster sessions for tenants who may wish to become involved tenants
- Tenant briefing for tenant panel

- Tenant academy (ten module training programme which covered operating in meetings, governance and confidence building among other topics)

During discussion surrounding questions submitted by members prior to the meeting, the deputy chief executive (operations) explained that information on the NCC let scheme could be found on Norwich city council's website and information was currently available in the main reception of city hall. He said that the NCC Let scheme was an established scheme and he was not aware of any issues with this service. The executive head of strategy, people and democracy explained that the properties let as part of this scheme were allocated by need and were not advertised directly.

In response to a member's question, the head of housing explained that the housing strategy went out to full public consultation and this would be members chance to influence changes to the strategy. The strategy was refreshed every four years but progress against the strategy was reviewed annually to identify any amendments for consideration.

She also encouraged members to attend meetings with the shadow portfolio holder. She also reminded members that they were welcome to attend local events for tenants such as the walkabouts, patch panels and tenant summits. Information on upcoming events would be sent in advance to members to allow them to plan to attend. The executive head of strategy, people and democracy said that events and news items were added to the e-councillor website and a weekly email was sent out to all members to advise of new items added.

Members expressed concern that if information on housing issues is passed to them by tenants in an informal manner, this could lead to incorrect information being passed on. They said that it was not about having a detailed knowledge of housing policy but more that they would like a broad overview of current issues so that they can effectively signpost constituents. This could include information on non council owned properties as well. They acknowledged that some tenants should be more informed around certain issues as they are receiving the service, however, members should know which officers to contact in case of a query. Members asked that they were made aware of common issues and upcoming matters of concern to help in their role as ward councillors.

The scrutiny officer said that the work programme for scrutiny committee for the next year would soon be set and the executive head of strategy, people and democracy reminded the members that the role of scrutiny committee was to look at the performance of all council services so progress against the housing strategy could be brought to scrutiny committee in the future. Members were also reminded that councillor training sessions were held regularly and through the councillor development group, they were able to suggest topics for future sessions.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) Ask housing officers to
 - (a) consider ways of identifying common themes from MP or councillor enquiries and sharing them with members through the most appropriate route including emails and e-councillor,

(b) email invites to members to attend tenant events and to advertise dates of events in advance, in addition to including this on e-councillor; and

(c) email ward councillors to provide fore-warning of potential issues that might arise related to housing in their area

(2) Ask the councillor development group to

(a) look in detail at the timing of briefings such as those on housing matters, to ensure the best possible attendance, including the possibility of arranging more than one session on important issues; and

(b) consider adding training on issues surrounding non-council owned housing to the member development programme.

CHAIR