

DRAFT

**Neighbourhood Services and Housing Needs
Panel Meeting
16 February, 2023 10am – Council Chambers, Civic Centre**

Attendance

Involved Tenants: Barbara Rickards; Lesley Peplow; Richard Hinson; Gary Bridge; James Jenner; Pauline Lockley

Staff: Margarita Gibson (Housing Needs Manager); Steve Wilson (Neighbourhood Services Manager); Lucy Tyne (Tenant Involvement Officer)

Guests: Carol Reynolds - Tenant Participation Officer (Selby District Council)

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 Steve welcomed all to the meeting.

1.2 Apologies for absence had been received from Philip Waterworth, Teresa Fox, David Thomas, Michael Fenwick – Scott, Jenny Pateman-Harrison.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November, 2022

2.1 The minutes had been previously circulated and were approved as a correct record. As with other recent minutes these would now be publicly available on the tenant involvement section of the council's website.

3.5 – Maggie commented that the word elevate needed changing to alleviate.

5.2 Refusals Report – In response to a query from Barbara, Maggie confirmed that the housing options team will not tolerate

Action:

unacceptable behaviour toward staff through any mode of contact.

3. Housing Needs Update – *Margarita Gibson*

3.1 Maggie gave an update on staffing, it was stated that a vacant post in the rough sleeper team had been filled internally, leaving the temporary accommodation officer role vacant. Once filled this will bring the team back to full capacity and allow them to do more outreach work.

3.2 Maggie explained how the team are looking to provide planters at Fern House, to offer a space that encourages wellbeing. Every two residents will have a planter to share. She added that there are various workshops, breakfast clubs and cooking groups at Fern House that are going really well. The team are also currently working with Brimhams Active to deliver a wellbeing package to hostels.

3.3 Lesley asked if games were played that would encourage people to join leagues that took place outside of the hostels. Maggie explained that at this moment in time the games that are played were just between those living in the hostels, as it was necessary to take into consideration the needs and individual circumstances facing those housed there.

3.4 Gary queried if we have programme to upskill people who are interested in doing so. Maggie explained that Fern House houses a diverse group of people with different needs, there are support workers who can identify how to work best with individual people based on their circumstances and needs.

3.5 Maggie went on to talk about work that is ongoing with private landlords, the team have managed to attract new landlords who have agreed to release some properties to Harrogate. Sometimes there can be concerns around how rules or ways of doing things are explained to the customer by the housing options team, in comparison to how the private landlord would explain things. There is an awareness that the housing options team have to advise the customer with their best interests in mind.

In addition to this Maggie stated that a landlord had approached the team who specifically want to assist in housing Ukrainian families and households.

3.6 Severe weather emergency provision – Work on this continues and will be running from Fern House, it includes male and female cubicles, a space where people can use showers and get a hot meal.

3.7 Maggie gave an update on funding that will be used to enhance the no second night out provision. The idea is to create more space and more rooms. Funding has the potential to allow the purchase of another building.

Maggie went on to add that there are works ongoing for Avondale, if cabinet agree to it. It was purchased around 18 months ago with the aim of refurbishment. The aim is to make the accommodation more fit for purpose. Once completed it may alleviate some other problems faced, for example it will provide, bigger spaces for families and warmer spaces at night.

3.8 On the topic of Local Government Reorganisation, Maggie explained that the focus is still on day one. At the moment each local authority has its own housing options team with its own ways of working. These teams will be brought together and given the opportunity to ask questions about how things will be working moving forward.

3.8.1 Barbara expressed concern about how CBL will affect homelessness. Maggie explained that she has experience in how it can work. She went on to explain the process of auto bidding. An officer can take the responsibility to bid on someone's behalf once areas are agreed.

3.9 Lesley suggested that some of the newer involved tenants should go and visit Fern House, it was agreed this would be beneficial. Lucy will speak with Maggie to organise it.

4. **Update report from Neighbourhood Services Manager – Steve Wilson**

4.1 Steve began by giving an update on staffing. He explained Lucy is now in post as tenant involvement officer. Georgina had stepped up to become a housing officer on the estates side, but this had left a housing support officer post vacant.

4.1.1 The income team have filled a couple of vacancies but aren't yet fully staffed. Any vacancies at the moment are a little slower to recruit to as they need to go through job evaluation due to local government reorganisation.

4.1.2 The Allocations team is fully staffed – the team had experienced some issues with the homes online system, this had created quite a backlog however this was being dealt with.

4.1.3 Andrew Rowe the new assistant director for North Yorkshire Council had been to visit staff at Harrogate. He is currently Head

of Housing at Scarborough, Steve explained that he had thanked everyone he had met and is feeling inspired by what he had witnessed.

4.2 Steve then went on to give an update on the restructure in Independent Living that has been in place from the 1st January. It saw the team go from 14 officers to around 10 and a half. They now work on a rota system that seems to be working well.

4.3 Steve confirmed that rent charges will be going up by 7%, he stated that this will be adopted by most councils, other charges that do not relate to rent are going up by 6%. This rise is to be ratified by full council next week (w/c 20th February 23).

4.3.1 Lesley queried whether these rising charges will change when we become North Yorkshire Council. Steve confirmed they will not, every area will be experiencing the same rises. Maggie added that there needs to be consistency across all services in all areas. People within the new council need to receive the same service no matter what area they live in.

4.4 In response to a query from Lesley about mutual exchange, Steve explained that mutual exchange is an agreement between the two parties, managed by the council. It is agreed before the move what the outgoing and incoming tenants responsibilities are. The council will still conduct a follow up visit after the move.

4.5 Steve went on to explain that there are several ongoing projects within the team – in Independent Living, there are plans to improve general safety and fire safety within the schemes.

4.5.1 Works are also ongoing on garages - the waiting list for garages is being updated to ensure it is fit for purpose.

4.5.2 Barbara queried the idea of garages being demolished if they were not used and using the land for housing. Steve explained this has been the case for some sites but some sites were not suitable for this. He explained the unused garages could also be used as storage spaces, there is a plot that can be used for a pilot to see if this idea is successful.

4.5.3 Lesley asked how many garages we have left. Steve confirmed there are around 300, people do put their name on the waiting list but are very particular on where they want the garage to be and what they want if to offer.

4.6 Steve stated there was an updated training process coming for staff around domestic abuse.

4.7 Steve then gave an update on those households that are living in properties that are too big for their needs. He explained there are around 50 households wanting a smaller property. The team are working to address this by covering the cost of removals and disconnections for example.

4.8 Steve commented on how the team are looking at helping people who are falling into debt, with a focus on prevention. Maggie explained that there are funds set aside for individuals that are facing eviction due to arrears, the team look at the reason for the arrears and make a decision as to whether the funds can be used to pay the arrears off or at least reduce them to stop court action.

4.9 Steve went on to mention that there would be some work with promoting the Thistle contents insurance scheme to tenants.

4.9.1 Barbara queried if having contents insurance was in the tenancy agreement, Steve explained it was but it's not something the council can force people to have.

5. Performance Information Report

The Performance Report (Third quarter 22/3) had been circulated with the agenda and a number of points were highlighted during the discussion.

CHP01 – Rent performance. Steve explained that there had been more input into rent collection since this figure, he was hopeful that it would reflect in the figure in Q4.

CHP18 – Barbara queried who funded the bed and breakfast stays and how much were they per day. Maggie explained that the prices can range, often due to what is going on at the convention centre. It can range from £40 per night to £140 per night. The local authority pay for this but the money is recouped partially through housing benefit – (usually around 30-40%).

Gary raised the point that bed and breakfasts in Harrogate are expensive, due to this can we not place people in this type of temporary accommodation out of the area. Maggie explained that this sometimes does happen but the individuals circumstances need to be taken into account, it is not always suitable for them to be placed out of the area until housing is found.

CHP19 – Steve explained that neighbourhood services are constantly working with the property team, thinking of ways in which properties can be turned around quicker, obviously without cutting any corners.

CHP40 – Maggie gave some context to this figure. She explained that some people have no choice but to stay in temporary accommodation for long periods of time. For example a family waiting for a specific sized property.

Maggie also added that the team are experiencing an increase in people who are approaching them in crisis rather before, when there is still potentially time to save their tenancy. This can make it more difficult for the team to work with people however ways in which intervention can take place sooner are always being looked at.

5.2 Refusals Report

The refusals report for the third quarter had been prepared by Kim Richardson and circulated.

At the end of Quarter 3, it had been reported that 66 tenancies were set up. The total number of households on the waiting list at the end of Quarter 3 was 2468.

The individual cases and circumstances were discussed and it was agreed suitable action has been taken.

Barbara made a comment on people refusing properties due to their perception of an area and wondered if steps could be taken to attempt to change these perceptions. Steve explained that we can do our best to 'sell' our properties but unfortunately we cannot always alter people opinions.

6. Any other business

6.1 The matter of training was brought up and it was discussed that the plan to conduct a training session led by Yvonne Davis would take place late March. It was agreed that it should be in tenant's interest to attend training and participate where possible.

6.2 Everyone was thanked for their attendance and the meeting was closed at 12pm.

7. Date for next meeting

7.1 The next meeting will take place on Thursday 18th May 2023, Council Chambers, Civic Centre.