

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER  
2012**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Mrs Blackmore (Chairman), Butler, Gooch, Mrs Joy, D Mortimer, McLoughlin, de Wiggondene.

**22. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast.**

**It was resolved that** all items be webcast

**23. Apologies.**

Apologies were received from Councillors Brindle, Munford and Vizzard.

**24. Notification of Substitute Members.**

Councillors Butler and Mrs Gooch substituted for Councillors Brindle and Munford respectively.

**25. Notification of Visiting Members.**

There were no Visiting Members.

**26. Disclosures by Members and Officers.**

There were no disclosures.

**27. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.**

It was agreed that all items be taken in public as proposed.

**28. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2012.**

It was highlighted that minute number 13 should read "Councillors Butler and Mrs Gooch substituted for Councillors Brindle and Munford respectively" which required the final two names in the sentence to be alternated. This amendment was made.

**It was resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2012 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed.

## **29. The wider impact of Welfare Reform on Housing and Housing Associations**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Jillie Smithies, Director of Operations at Golding Homes, Gary Hunter, Benefits Manager and Neil Coles, Housing Services Manager.

Jillie Smithies gave a presentation which outlined the wider effects of Welfare Reform and in particular the implications for Golding Homes and its response to the changes (attached at **Appendix A**).

Members considered the information and guidance Golding Homes provided to its tenants. It was felt that it would be helpful if the information circulated to tenants could be sent to all Councillors to enable them to further assist residents with queries brought to them as a result of the information they received.

New legislation as a result of the Localism Act 2011 would give social landlords the ability to introduce flexible tenancies. Members considered whether or not the changes affecting housing providers as a result of Welfare Reform was a driver for this. It was clarified that the term referred to an assured short-term tenancy which was common place in the privately rented sector and that they could only be introduced incrementally. Existing lifetime tenancies could not be changed. Mrs Smithies explained that Golding Homes had decided not to introduce this type of tenancy at present but this decision would be reviewed in a year's time. The Tenancy Strategy which had been adopted by Maidstone Borough in March 2012 set out expected standards for registered housing providers, included tenancy type and length. Members were informed that this document set direction for Golding Homes and other register housing providers. The document stated that lifetime tenancies would be granted unless the registered housing provider could demonstrate that flexible tenancies made best use of its housing stock.

The Committee offered its support to Golding Homes' review of flexible tenancies and expressed that it saw this as a way forward for making social housing available to those with a genuine need.

Some Members felt that flexible tenancies would help address issues such as subletting. Mrs Smithies explained that anecdotally subletting was perceived to be a problem but Golding Homes Tenancy Audits showed this to be at a low level.

The Committee considered ways in which the message being given through the introduction of Universal Credit, that was people will be consistently and transparently better off in work, could be established further. Members were informed that the Maidstone Borough Council's Housing Allocation Scheme was being redrafted at present which included a community contribution policy. This would act as an incentive for applicants which could result in them being given priority for some homes. If adopted the document would be in place and operational by April 2013.

The Committee felt that it would be beneficial to consider the Draft Housing Allocation Scheme alongside the Tenancy Strategy at its next meeting.

**It was recommended:**

- a) That The Council's Draft Housing Allocation Scheme and current Tenancy Strategy be the focus of the next normal meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- b) That Golding Homes be invited to return to the Committee in October 2013 to evaluate the impact of Welfare Reform thus far and to discuss its review of Flexible Tenancies and the approach adopted by other RSLs; and
- c) That Golding Homes include all Maidstone Borough Councillors in all its information circulars to residents.

**30. Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Planning Evaluation**

Sarah Robson, Community Partnerships Manger provided an overview of the evaluation report.

Members discussed the report's structure and the recommendations made. It was observed that some of the recommendations made were statements and they were found to be repetitive by the Committee. It was felt that the report could be more concise consisting of an executive summary and recommendations only. The Committee asked that the revised document be circulated to it via email for comments and approval be given by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman on behalf of the Committee before the document was sent to the Cabinet Member.

**It was recommended that:**

- a) The Park Wood Neighbourhood Action planning Evaluation Report be redrafted into a short version consisting of an executive summary and recommendations only; and
- b) The redrafted report be circulated to the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comments and final approval be given by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman before the document goes forward to the Cabinet Member for a decision.

**31. Future Work Programme and Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

The Future Work Programme and Forward Plan of Key Decisions was considered by the Committee.

The Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee on a date for a joint follow up meeting on Gypsy and Traveller Sites with the Regeneration and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October. It was felt that a pre meet with officers and the other Members would be beneficial.

**It was recommended that** a pre-meet be organised with members of the Regeneration and Economic Development Committee and appropriate officers in relation to the Gypsy and Traveller Sites.

**32. Duration of meeting**

6.30 p.m. to 8.45 p.m.