

## MINUTES

### Community Services Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2006 at 5.30pm

**Present:** Councillors Howarth (in the Chair), Hopgood, Kinghorn, Moderate, Norman, Robinson, Taylor, Walton and Young.

**Also Present:** Councillors Cowper, Gibbon, Kellett, Marsden, Stoddart, Thomson and Turnbull.

Angelo Moscardini	-	Head of Property Services
Mike Thompson	-	Head of Community Services
Harry Lee	-	Operations Manager

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Griffin and Hepplewhite.

#### **2. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2006 were confirmed as a correct record.

#### **3. Review of Council House Repairs**

The Head of Property Services, Head of Community Services and Operation Manager were in attendance to update Members with progress made towards the recommendations made following the last review of this topic in March 2006.

Members were advised that ongoing staff training, in conjunction with Property Services, was being given to CityInfo staff. The Customer Services Manager herself had a great deal of experience in this area. There were now 21 full time trained repairs staff, together with 4 FTE part time staff, giving a total of 25.

The Head of Community Services advised that 3 vacancies had now been filled, and a further 2 were being recruited. He was confident that peak period demand could now be met.

A new booklet giving tenants property details to assist them in reporting repairs was currently being prepared. Further training for staff would take place on this. It was asked whether the booklet could be provided to Members for reference in case a resident asks them for assistance. The Head of Property Services confirmed that this was possible.

The Head of Property Services circulated information showing the 56% decrease in the repairs backlog. One Member commented that the amount of decrease appeared to be unrealistically substantial. The Operations Manager explained how the figures had been achieved, and while the Head of Property Services acknowledged that these figures could be described as a 'snapshot' of the time they were produced, he confirmed that the necessary staff were available to bring about this reduction in the backlog. The HPS also extended an invitation to any Members who wished to visit Dragonville for a demonstration of the repairs reporting and management systems. After due consideration, it was agreed that in view of the forthcoming procurement of a new computer system, this would be inappropriate at the present time. Members requested a full breakdown of the number of staff by trade. This information would be provided by the Head of Property Services, and circulated to Members.

Also circulated were the results of the Repairs Satisfaction Survey, which indicated a high level of satisfaction in all areas. Members agreed that these results were very positive. One Member noted that Members generally only became involved in complaints about the service and are not contacted when things are going well.

Members were advised that the voids tracking system was working well, with Property Services having now taken responsibility for what were previously 'grey' areas. The process was becoming much more efficient, with properties being returned to Housing more rapidly. Details of void turnaround times for the last four years, together with information for the current year to date were circulated to Members. It was noted that the target for this year had already been achieved.

The Chairman and Members of the Panel expressed their thanks to officers for the progress and improvements made, and agreed a review date of February/March 2008 following the installation of the new computer software.

A report for Scrutiny Committee would be prepared on this topic and would be circulated to Panel Members prior to being submitted to the Scrutiny Committee.

#### **4. Gypsy/Traveller Sites**

Sue Green from the Travellers Education Service at Durham County Council had been in attendance earlier in the Meeting. Regrettably, due to another commitment, she had had to leave before the Panel had had the opportunity of speaking to her. She had left some useful information which the Chair advised would be made available in the Members' Room, with selected parts being circulated to Members. The Chairman indicated that she would contact Sue Green thanking her for her attendance and the information she provided, and inviting her to a future Meeting of the Panel.

**Note:** *Information regarding the number of caravan sites within the District, and details of unauthorised encampments, which had been requested by Members at a previous Meeting, had been prepared and circulated with the Agenda papers for this Meeting.*

#### **5. Any Other Business**

- (a) The Chairman advised Members that the Housing Manager would be in attendance at the next Meeting to review the Scrutiny of Council Garages.
- (b) There was a request for Housing Allocations to be reviewed. The Chair reminded members that a presentation on choice based lettings had been requested by the Panel and that this had been agreed. She suggested that any decision on further scrutiny of Housing Allocations would be best left until after that presentation.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing advised that if possible, a presentation would be arranged in the New Year.

The Meeting terminated at 6.30 pm