

## MINUTES

### Community Services Scrutiny Panel

7<sup>th</sup> May 2008

**Present:** Councillors Howarth (in the Chair), Crooks, Lightley, McDonnell, Mavin, Norman, Walton and Young.

**Also Present:** Councillors Bell and Kelly.

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

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Laverick and D Smith.

#### **2. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2008, were confirmed as a correct record.

#### **3. Unauthorised Encampments – Feedback on Report**

The Chairman advised Members that in view of comments made regarding the recommendations in the Panel's report on Unauthorised Encampments, she had included an additional recommendation:-

- 5.8 That this report and the report on Gypsy and Traveller Permanent Encampments, approved by Cabinet in September, 2007, together with all recommendations, be brought to the attention of the Unitary Authority with a view to them being endorsed within the context of the County Council's overarching scrutiny of Gypsy and Traveller Provision. In particular we strongly recommend that the permanent site at Adventure Lane, West Rainton, should be included in any programme of refurbishment implemented by the new Authority.

This additional recommendation had been agreeable to the Scrutiny Committee who, subject to the Panel's approval, had referred the report to Cabinet for consideration.

Panel Members considered this recommendation to be acceptable, and the report would therefore be reported to the next meeting of the Cabinet.

#### **4. Decent Homes Standard**

The Head of Property Services was in attendance at the Meeting to update Members with progress made towards achieving the Decent Homes Standard.

Copies of an internal audit report from 2005 on the DHS, an audit from 2007 on planned maintenance, performance figures for 2007/2008 and an extract from the Unitary Authority Transition Plan had been circulated in advance of the Meeting for Members' information.

Members were informed that, generally speaking, the Council was on course to meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010/2011. This year however, there had been a shortfall in funding for planned maintenance as a result of the capital receipts being lower than expected. If this situation occurred in future years, there would be an impact on the amount of works that were able to be carried out, and not all homes would therefore meet the DHS in time.

When the Council had balloted tenants over whether to transfer the housing stock to either a housing association or ALMO, tenants had voted to remain with the City Council. During the course of this, the Council felt it was able to meet the targets of the DHS while retaining the housing stock itself. In fact, during the ballot of tenants, the 'Durham Standard' had been

introduced which set standards in excess of those laid out in the DHS. The Council remained committed to refurbishing properties to the 'Durham Standard'.

Where tenants refused to allow modernisation/improvement works to their homes to be carried out, e.g. rewiring, due to the disturbance and disruption that would be caused, the necessary works would be carried out if the property subsequently became void.

Every effort was made to make an appointment to carry out work. This included telephone and/or house calls. The department had a good record of keeping such appointments once made.

Members expressed their hope that the new Unitary Council would respect tenants' wishes to retain the housing stock within the District, particularly as this provided a direct link between tenants, Councillors and the Council and allowed problems to be rectified more easily. The Council's repairs workforce also had a huge amount of local knowledge which it was considered contributed to the success of the maintenance programme and the repairs service in general.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Property Services for attending the Meeting and indicated that a draft Review Report would be prepared on this topic for consideration at the next Meeting.

**Note:** Councillor Lightley left the Meeting at 6.10pm

## **5. Any Other Business**

The Chairman advised that the Allocations Policy would be considered at the next Meeting, and that copies of the application form for Council housing would be circulated to Members with the Agenda papers.

The Meeting terminated at 6.15 pm