

## COUNTY COUNCIL

23 JULY 2014

### QUESTION FROM MR HEPPLER

In November 2012, an investigation report was produced into allegations made in relation to the PRU in early 2014. A redacted version of that report was released under Freedom of Information Act requirements. The executive summary made recommendations that:

- governance arrangements be strengthened to ensure closer monitoring of functions within the PRU;
- that policies and procedures to safeguard children be reviewed and adopted by the staff team;
- that staff recruitment should be of the highest quality; and
- that the review codes of conduct, behaviour policies and procedures should be reviewed.

Is the executive able to reassure the public and the council that those recommendations have been accepted and advise on the changes that have been implemented since the report was received?

### Response

#### **Actions on Recommendations from 2012**

#### ***Governance Arrangements need to be strengthened to ensure close monitoring of functions within the PRU***

1. The Constitution of the Management Committee has been revised to both reflect new statutory guidance and strengthen membership of the PRU.
2. The full Committee meets on a termly basis as a minimum and meetings reflect high levels of attendance, with more frequent sub-group meetings to address specific issues relating to the work of the PRU.
3. The Management Committee has undertaken a review of its responsibilities for governance of the PRU and takes an active role in the operations of the Unit.

#### ***Support to the Senior Management team of the PRU***

4. The local authority continues to provide high levels of support to the team including:
  - Representation at SMT meetings, staff meetings and training for staff at the PRU
  - Support from the Education Development Partners and subject specialist inspectors from the Education Development Service

- Coaching and additional leadership support from a highly successful secondary school head teacher in Durham who is a National Leader of Education.

***Policies and Procedures to safeguard children should be reviewed and adopted by the staff team***

5. The list of policies that relate to safeguarding of children and young people has been reviewed and are now subject to a 2 year review timetable.
6. Key safeguarding policies have been revised to embrace the overall ethos of the PRU. Examples include:
  - Behaviour Management of children and young people
  - Conduct of Staff
  - Restorative Approaches
  - Child Protection
7. All policies have been disseminated to staff through staff meetings and this will continue as new policies are developed.
8. Staff adherence to agreed policy and procedure will be monitored through the performance management process and by day to day observation of practice.
9. All policies are ratified by the Management Committee after review

***Staff Recruitment Should Be Of the Highest Quality***

10. The PRU's Management Committee is now fully responsible for the recruitment of staff.
11. The PRU has a Single Central Record for all staff working in the PRU including temporary staff. This includes all information on recruitment checks, DBS clearance and training including Safer Recruitment training has been undertaken.

***The review codes of conduct, behaviour policies and procedures should be reviewed***

12. As explained earlier reviews have taken place in respect of behaviour management of children and young people, and conduct of staff.

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### QUESTIONS FROM MR LIIV

Once again we are coming to the Council unprepared as no answers have been received to questions asked of the council? Is this because we are garage tenants?

From Councillor Tomlinson "We acknowledge investment in the council's garage stock in the east Durham area has been limited in recent years" maybe this is a follow on from that as we are being marginalised and ignored.

#### **Question one**

Who is responsible for the former garages owned by Easington council and now owned by you and can you answer questions put to them instead of wasting time? Do not say East Durham Homes - they only manage them on your behalf.

#### **Question two**

East Durham homes has been working towards becoming a private company, please clarify when this was decided on conception of the company, Unification or another date?

#### **Question three**

When was the last review on council policy regarding the sale of garages in a block to long standing tenants - Date?"

#### **Response**

I'd like to thank Mr Liiv for the question posed to council.

Following Local Government Reorganisation in April 2009 the council took ownership of, and are now responsible for, around 1,600 garages in the east Durham area. As Mr Liiv has referenced, these assets are let, managed and maintained by East Durham Homes on the council's behalf.

Following an extensive and robust two year stock options appraisal exercise to consider the future ownership and management of all council housing, the council agreed in December 2012 to pursue the large-scale voluntary transfer of all of its homes and associated assets to a group structure of its existing housing management organisations – namely Dale & Valley Homes, Durham City Homes & East Durham Homes. The council's proposal received Government and Ministerial support in March 2014 and has recently been subject to extensive consultation with all existing housing tenants.

On Wednesday 16 July 2014, the council's Cabinet considered all of the responses received by tenants as part of the consultation and agreed to proceed to a formal ballot of all secure and introductory housing tenants in the coming weeks. The

council cannot transfer its homes unless a majority of tenants voting in the secret ballot, vote in favour of the proposal.

If transfer does not proceed, or a majority of tenants do not support transfer in the secret ballot, the council has agreed to disband its existing housing management arrangements and establish a single arms-length management organisation that will manage council homes and associated assets on the council's behalf.

In either event, the future ownership and management of council housing will be implemented by the 31 March 2015 and garage tenants will be advised of any new arrangements impacting upon them in early 2015.

And finally in response to Mr Liiv's closing question I can advise the council last reviewed its policy in relation to the letting, management and disposal of council owned garages in October 2011. This strategy was approved and endorsed by the council's joint Housing Revenue Account Board and was subsequently implemented from 1 January 2012. The policy is due to be reviewed after a three year period ending March 2015 to consider whether any amendments or policy updates are required.

I would like to close by thanking Mr Liiv once again for his questions to council and trust my answers provide some assurance.

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### QUESTION FROM MR AND MRS LEONARD

We have rented a garage for thirty years and in that time there has been very little maintenance carried out apart from the doors which have been painted only once a number of years ago.

We have applied to buy the garage as the rent has gone up year on year, but we have been told by Stuart Timmiss head of planning and assets by letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> June 2014 that we cannot buy as this would maybe set a precedence when, as to date, there are at least three garages that are privately owned in this block of nine.

1. I would like to ask the council why there is an agenda to demolish these garages with no consultation with those who have rented those garages for so long?
2. Also why are these garages likely to be demolished when we have such a problem with parking in this area of Seaham harbour due to the recent building of the new council contact centre, the health centre and the location of the parish church, plus the shopping centre?

### Response

I'd like to thank Mr and Mrs Leonard for their question to council and would take this opportunity to reassure them we have no agenda to demolish garages in the east Durham area without good cause, or without full consultation with tenants.

Following Local Government Reorganisation in April 2009, the Council agreed to harmonise garage rents over a three year period ending March 2014 to ensure consistency across the three former districts in which we retained housing management responsibilities (namely Durham City, Easington and Wear Valley).

Since that time, the council has also elected not to sell individual garages (to existing tenants or other interested parties) in a garage block as previous initiatives to sell garages produced management and maintenance issues and its therefore something we have elected not to do.

We acknowledge investment in the council's garage stock has been limited in recent years in the east Durham area, primarily because we have sought to ensure our available resources are directed towards bringing all homes in our ownership up to the Decent Homes standard. East Durham Homes, on our behalf, have however continued to address urgent repair needs and significant structural defects with garages during this time, particularly when raising immediate health & safety concerns, and are currently working with the county council to review and prioritise future investment needs. Full structural stock condition surveys have recently been commissioned and work is also underway to map and assess demand levels.

Once full stock condition surveys are received, and area by area demand analysis undertaken, East Durham Homes will be asked to make recommendations to the council about the most effective investment plans for garage stock in the east Durham area. Before any decisions are taken, the council and East Durham Homes will consult fully with both existing garage tenants and neighbouring residents about any proposals.

I would like to reassure Mr and Mrs Leonard that our initial structural survey work has not raised any health and safety concerns or major structural defects that could cause us to consider the immediate future of council garage stock in the Seaham area. We have no plans to demolish these garages at the current time.