

Contact Officer: Carol Tague

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

ECONOMY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS SCRUTINY PANEL

Wednesday 31st October 2018

Present: Councillor Rob Walker (Chair)
Councillor Bill Armer

In attendance: Councillor Julie Stewart-Turner

Observers: Councillor Judith Hughes

Apologies: Councillor Martyn Bolt
Councillor Richard Murgatroyd
Councillor Harpreet Uppal
Mark Mercer (Co-Optee)
Andrew Bird (Co-Optee)

1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

In welcoming attendees, the Chair explained that the meeting was an additional meeting that had been arranged in response to both the Hackitt Review and the Green Paper issued by the Government Social Housing Green Paper: A new deal for social housing. Unfortunately this late addition to the work programme had affected Members' ability to attend and a number of apologies had been received.

It was also noted that given her role as Chair of the West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority, Councillor Judith Hughes would attend the meeting as an observer, but would not take part in the discussion.

As a number of Panel members who attended the previous meeting were not present, it was agreed to defer consideration of the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10 October 2018 to the next meeting.

RESOLVED - Consideration of the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 10 October 2018 be deferred until the next meeting.

2 Interests

No interests were declared.

3 Admission of the Public

It was agreed that all agenda items would be considered in public session.

4 Green Paper - A New Deal for Social Housing Consultation and the Hackitt Review

The Panel received a report regarding the drafting of the Council's response to the Social Housing Green Paper: A new deal for social housing which related to recommendations arising from the Hackitt Review. The report outlined the context,

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 31 October 2018

work required and undertaken in response to the Hackitt Report, as well as plans envisaged going forward.

Councillor Cathy Scott, Cabinet Member for Housing and Democracy, Naz Parker, Service Director for Housing, Helen Geldart, Head of Housing Services and Heidi Thompson, Director of Property, Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) were in attendance.

In introducing the item, Councillor Scott, referred to the Government commissioned review undertaken by Dame Judith Hackitt following the Grenfell disaster in June 2017. The subsequent report, Building a Safer Future: Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety – The Hackitt Review, identified a system built on ignorance and indifference, lack of clarity around roles, responsibility and accountability for fire safety and an inadequate oversight of regulatory enforcement.

With regards to responsibility and accountability, Councillor Scott clarified that the Council was the duty holder and could not pass this responsibility to KNH, who were the building safety manager.

That Panel noted that the Social Housing Green Paper, published in response to the Hackitt Report in August 2018 had 5 key chapters, namely:-

- Ensuring homes are safe and decent
- Effective resolution of complaints
- Empowering residents and strengthening the Regulator
- Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
- Expanding supply and supporting home ownership

The Green Paper also stressed the importance of building a culture of accountability and strengthening the voice of the tenant.

It was noted that the Council broadly welcomed the report, in particular the review of the Decent Homes Standard, giving tenants a greater redress in having their concerns heard and acted on, and the reform of the Housing Revenue Account.

In conclusion, Councillor Scott highlighted the significant amount of work undertaken by KNH since the Grenfell disaster to ensure tenant safety, as well as their proactive approach to tenant communication.

Officers present referred to the Social Housing Green Paper consultation which was linked to the 5 aforementioned chapters and gave a broad overview of each.

It was noted that a key finding from the Hackitt Report was the need for effective resolution of complaints. As part of this, the Government was seeking to empower residents by strengthening the role of the new social housing regulator and this role and remit over Councils as landlords, was part of the current consultation. In response, it was noted that the Council already regulated the housing sector as part of its' statutory obligations, but were willing to explore what role a national government regulator might play.

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 31 October 2018

Attention was drawn to the Hackitt Report's recommendations regarding changes needed to ensure building safety in the occupation and maintenance phase of a buildings life. It was noted that there were currently 23,000 homes, managed by KNH, within that phase.

The partnership work with KNH and West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue was highlighted, as was ongoing work to ensure that tenants had a voice and the alignment of KNH's draft Fire Safety Management Plan with the Council's Fire Safety Policy.

The key areas of the Panel's discussion and responses to questions are summarised below:-

- The Panel welcomed the Council's positive and proactive response to both the Grenfell tragedy and Hackitt report and were reassured that both the Council and KNH had moved quickly to assure that residents were safe.
- Kirklees had 4 tower blocks above 10 storey and a fire risk assessment had been undertaken on each block to ensure there was no aluminium composite material (ACM) material in place.
- The Council was satisfied with the safety of the 4 tower blocks within its' ownership and had sought assurance that public buildings in the ownership of other public sector bodies were also safe and fire risk managed. Members were informed that all buildings above 10 storey were compliant, with the exception of 1. Negotiations were ongoing with that private sector owner as to what was required and enforcement powers would be used if necessary.
- There had been an increase in budget to KNH to address the issues mapped out. Provision had also been made in the 5 year capital plan to ensure that there was a buffer for any compliance issues that might arise as a result of in-year surveys.
- In response to debate as to whether sprinkler systems in high rise blocks enhanced resident safety, Councillor Scott confirmed that provision for the implementation of sprinkler systems had been built into the budget and was being considered. Councillor Scott also referred to the secondment of a fire safety officer to the Council for a period of 2 years from the Fire and Rescue Service, as an example of the partnership working that was taking place.
- Members noted a summary of the work undertaken in response to the Hackitt Report. This included a full review of fire risk assessments and the development of a new fire safety policy, which would be revisited once the Government's full response to the Hackitt recommendations had been published.
- With regards to student accommodation, Members were assured that the Council was doing as much as the legislation and policy environment enabled within the planning function. The Council had previously made representations to Government as to the potential risk of housing developers

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 31 October 2018

using private building inspectors and this had been identified as an issue by Dame Hackitt. This issue would also be raised as part of the Council's response to the Green Paper consultation.

- The importance of the tenants' voice was highlighted and Members were informed of the Tenants' Involvement Strategy and a range of communication and engagement strategies, in addition to digital platforms, including face to face contact wherever possible.
- If Government adopted the proposed recommendations, it was likely that if a complaint was not resolved through the complaints process, tenants would have redress not only through the Ombudsman, but also the Regulator. A negative finding from the Regulator would impact on the landlord rating, particularly in terms of governance and consumer standard.
- With regards to the potential to involve tenants in the Working Group referred to in the report, it was confirmed that the Group had been established and the remit was being scoped. It was noted that as part of the Tenants' Involvement Strategy, KNH were recruiting to a new Tenant Panel, which would be part of the new governance arrangements. Once established, it was intended to seek the Panel's involvement with the Working Group in shaping the new system. Consideration was also being given to the role of partners such as the Fire Service in the Group.
- With regards to other housing providers, it was noted that whilst the Council had an influencing role, they did not have powers to dictate their response to the Hackitt Report and the Social Housing Green Paper. However, there was a strong regulator within the sector and the Council would continue to work in partnership with providers on this agenda. Moving forward, the Council would examine housing association regulatory judgements and a risk based approach would be taken if a downgrade or governance issue was related to fire safety.
- Issues in relation to stigma and the perception of social housing were acknowledged, as was the media's role in this. The importance of the look and feel of neighbourhoods and ensuring that people felt safe was key in challenging that perception.

It was noted that as part of the new Asset management Strategy, KNH were working with services across the Council to enhance communities and ensure that people were part of the solution. Members noted that KNH had introduced daily safety checks on high risk properties following the Grenfell tragedy and these had continued. This included clearing obstructions and fly tipping and had seen a real enhancement of area.

- With regards to housing allocation policy, it was clarified that allocation was based on need and income was not considered.
- It was acknowledged that changes would arise from both the Hackitt Report and the Social Housing Green Paper and these were viewed as positive for

Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel - 31 October 2018

the tenant. The Hackitt Report was clear that the Council as property owner and landlord was accountable for tenant safety. Governance and maintenance operations would need to be reviewed, as would reporting and complaints systems. The Council would continue to be proactive in moving forward beyond compliance and to invest in quality and safety.

The Panel expressed their thanks to the Cabinet Member and officers present for their contribution and welcomed the work that had been carried out to date and acknowledged the scale of the work ahead.

The Panel were keen to follow the progress of the Working Group, which had been established to work through the detailed implications of the Review and to prepare associated action plans. Other potential areas for future consideration included:-

- the success of the Council in involving residents in the management and monitoring of social housing stock;
- the ability to provide more social housing and manage effectively; and
- an examination of neighbourhood working and how the Council could manage and improve neighbourhoods and work with residents to tackle their concerns.

RESOLVED -

- 1) The Panel thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing and Democracy, Service Director for Housing, Head of Housing Services and Director of Property, Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing, for attending the meeting.
- 2) The Panel welcomed the work that had been carried out in response to the Hackitt Report and requested that an update on the progress of the Working Group, established to work through the Hackitt Report's detailed implications, be brought to a future meeting.

5 Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED - That the next meeting of the Panel will take place at 10.00am on Wednesday 7 November 2018, in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Huddersfield.