

EQUALITIES PANEL

12 December 2012

4.30 - 5.48 pm

PANEL MEMBERS BRIEFING

Chair: Antoinette Jackson

Public Members: Graham Lewis and Nicky Wrigley

Elected Members: Councillor Abbott, Councillor Bick and Councillor Bird

Staff Members: Ari Henry and Karen Hobbs

Officers:

Director of Customer and Community Services – Liz Bisset

Head of Strategic Housing – Alan Carter

Head of Human Resources – Deborah Simpson

Strategy and Partnerships Manager - David Kidson

Committee Manager – Glenn Burgess

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**12/21/EP Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Brown, Norah Al-Ani (public member), Jo Obe (staff member) and Jackie Hanson (staff member)

12/22/EP Introduction

The Director of Customer and Community Services introduced the item and confirmed the following:

- i. Two new Affordable Housing Schemes (Aylesborough Close and Water Lane) had been brought to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee in October 2012 and, as a result, members questioned whether adequate Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIA) had been undertaken.
- ii. The EqIA's had now been reviewed and the Director of Customer and Community Services concluded that:
 - whilst full EqIA's had been completed they required updating and consolidating.

- improvements could be made to the Housing Development Programme (AHDP) consultation process.
 - the introduction of new data and an annual review process could improve the EqIA process.
- iii. The current AHDP EqIA was therefore a consolidated version of various EqIA's produced between 2009 and 2012.

12/23/EP Review of Affordable Housing Development Programme EqIA

It was noted that the Equalities Panel were being asked to review the consolidated EqIA and related Action Plan and raise any further concerns or comments.

The Director of Customer and Community Services confirmed the following:

- i. The consolidated EqIA took account of people looking to access housing, as well as those that were already City Council tenants.
- ii. Acknowledged the need for more family housing, and less one bedroom properties in Cambridge.
- iii. In order to meet future housing needs the Council would need to both improve existing stock and build new stock.
- iv. Acknowledged the impact that moving house had on, not only the old and vulnerable, but all residents.
- v. From re-housing over 250 residents the City Council had experience in dealing with and reducing this impact.

In response to Panel Members questions the Director of Customer and Community Services and the Head of Strategic Housing confirmed the following:

- i. Acknowledged the potential impact of the new bedroom tax and confirmed that this was being taken into account when developing new schemes.
- ii. Agreed to check if the new bedroom tax applied to both 1 bed 1 person properties, and 1 bed 2 person properties and report back to Panel Members.
- iii. Recognised that moving to a sheltered scheme would not be suitable for everyone and highlighted new modernised supported schemes (such as Brandon Court) as an alternative.
- iv. Encouraged potential tenants to visit new schemes prior to making a judgement on their suitability.

- v. When looking at new housing for older people the City Council took into account both present and future needs.
- vi. The City Council was looking to increase the number and standard of its accessible housing stock.
- vii. The full impact of the welfare reform was not yet known but all City Council tenants had been written to in order to obtain their views.
- viii. Acknowledged the poor quality of the 1 bedroom housing stock but highlighted that improvements were being made.
- ix. Highlighted the 'HAPPI' report that cited good practice on housing for older people and reflected that the City Councils strategic 'direction of travel' was in line with the report.
- x. When moving out of schemes being refurbished people were given the option of returning when the work is complete. However, due to a variety of reasons, many chose to stay in their new properties.
- xi. Acknowledged that maintaining friendships and keeping residents together during moves was beneficial and, where possible, the City Council supported this.
- xii. Acknowledged the need to take into account anonymity and location issues when re-housing or relocating residents.
- xiii. Confirmed that people moved out of properties go straight to Band A and acknowledged that this could put pressure on the housing list.
- xiv. Older people tend to get re-housed quicker – with 40% moved in the first quarter compared to 7% of all applicants.
- xv. Having over 600 re-lets each year eased the pressure on the housing list.
- xvi. The housing list is now a 'choice' system and not necessarily based on who is at the top/bottom of the list.
- xvii. The threshold for older people is set at 60 as this is when people tend to move out of the workforce and/or change their lifestyles.
- xviii. Housing officers undergo training on mental health issues and this is also rolled out wider to all City Council Staff.
- xix. Few private landlords are prepared to accept homeless or potentially homeless households due to the demand for private rented housing in Cambridge. This, in turn, drives the cost of rents in the private sector up beyond local housing allowance rates in most cases.
- xx. Whilst people approaching the City Council after being evicted by private landlords did put pressure on the housing list a significant rise (due to the bedroom tax) was not expected.
- xxi. 'Choice based letting' is a sub regional system that can be accessed across the region.

- xxii. Agreed that consultation was an important part of the process but noted that it was important to strike the right balance with the timing. A long consultation process causes stress and uncertainty whereas too short a process is inadequate.
- xxiii. As this was the first time that the City Council had undertaken a new build and refurbishment programme simultaneously good communication with residents would be vital. Regular meetings were being held tenant and leaseholder representatives.
- xxiv. Whilst EqIA's identify the *broad* need, the benefit of a second stage looking at *individual* need was highlighted.
- xxv. Acknowledged the benefit of developing a 'needs and requirements checklist' to aid the process.
- xxvi. Whilst a baseline for fully wheelchair accessible units had been set at 2% (of the total housing stock) the list was constantly evolving.
- xxvii. The overall accessibility of UK housing stock would improve as more homes are built to the 'Lifetime Homes' standard.
- xxviii. The current AHDP EqIA was more clearly evidence based and had a more robust rationale.
- xxix. The revised EqIA format makes it easier for staff to highlight possible equalities issues and was beneficial to the decision making process.
- xxx. All new schemes are measured against 'Housing Quality Indicators', which take into account location and the accessibility of local facilities.

The Head of Strategic Housing tabled a chart indicating the estimated property mix as of 11 December 2011 (see appendix A).

The Chair summed up the main points raised by the Panel:

- i. In addition to broad equalities impact there is a need to take into account the individual needs of each person when re-housing or relocating residents (for example the anonymity or location needs of those fleeing domestic violence or undergoing gender reassignment).
- ii. The need to take into account the maintaining of existing support networks when re-housing or relocating residents (for example: older people and/or those with mental health issues)
- iii. The benefits of moving groups of residents together in order to maintain friendship networks.

- iv. The need for a careful balance when looking at the timing and length of any consultation.
- v. The benefit of developing a 'needs and requirements checklist' to aid the re-housing of individuals.
- vi. The need to carefully balance the new build programme to ensure a sufficient amount of accessible properties.

The meeting ended at 5.48 pm

CHAIR