
SCRUTINY PANEL A
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 January 2014

Present: Councillors Burke (Chair), Claisse (Vice-Chair), L Harris, Lloyd, McEwing, Mintoff and Vinson

COUNCILLOR CLAISSE IN THE CHAIR

4. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING)**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Scrutiny Panel held on 28th November, 2013 be approved as a correct record.

5. **ARTICLE 4 AND HMO SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT**

The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive relating to the Council's Article 4 and Houses in Multiple Occupation Supplementary Planning Document (HMO SPD).

Janet Hawkins gave an overview of the HMO licensing schemes in the City. She indicated that the purposes of the schemes were to improve the quality of the HMOs for the occupiers and also to improve matters for the local communities.

The team had a good working relationship with Legal Services and Planning.

The scheme details had been presented and discussed at the Landlord Consultative Forum. And they were in the process of organising a Stakeholders Forum.

The scheme only covered part of the City and they would be looking at possibly increasing this in the future.

Chris Lyons outlined the HMO SPD. He stated that it was only a guidance document. He gave details of specific points with regards to the spread of HMOs, demand and limits within area and how the radius works.

He stated that if it was decided that the SPD needed to be changed it was important that it was clear on what was acceptable for future purchasers, planners and local residents.

Previously decisions have referred to the character of the area, however, currently the HMO SPD does not cover this.

It was noted that there was no income generated from HMO applications.

Questions were asked why there were currently tow tiers for the percentage of HMOs in different areas. Discussion also took place concerning recent applications that the Planning Committee members have decided to reject and therefore go against the officer recommendation for approval, in line with the SPD.

Various stakeholders were in attendance and presented their main points relating to HMOs.

Highfield Residents' Association (HRA). Information was attached to the papers at Appendix 3 and further information was circulated at the meeting together with a response from the East Bassett Residents' Association:-

- Need for residents to have a commitment to the City.
- Please that there was an intention to take enforcement action against those landlords that do not licence their HMOs.
- Need to consider the quality of life for existing residents.
- If the 10% threshold had been reached then no new ones should be created.
- If more HMOs were to be allowed Southampton would become a transient city.
- More purpose built accommodation for students however there were still high levels of students living in HMOs.
- Felt that temporary stop orders could be used.
- Hoping that as staffing levels had been addressed that the backlog of enforcement could be resolved.

Following on from the points raised by the HRA the following comments were made:-

- The Residents Action Group in Polygon stated that 10% and 20% levels were very low. They live in an area with almost 100% and this causes many problems.
- Many cases were resolved without the need to issue enforcement notices.
- Each of the 3 officers deals with approximately 40-50 cases.
- Need figures showing numbers of HMOs per ward.
- Need to be aware of the different issues relating to HMOs and HMO student accommodation.
- It was questioned whether it would be legal to have a different policy for HMO student accommodation as opposed to HMOs for other types of residents.

Southern Landlords Association. Information was circulated at the meeting:-

- Understood that the introduction of SPD was to spread the number of HMOs across the City.
- With current earning levels demand for HMO accommodation would increase.
- Concerns about the low increase in the number of HMOs in the City over the last year.
- SPD has effectively stopped any new HMOs.
- Concerns that applications supported by officers in line with policy were then refused at Planning Committee. And have also been dismissed at appeal on grounds that were not set out as part of the policy.
- Need a solution to meet the aims of the SPD or change the aims.
- Comparisons were made about areas with different levels of HMOs and the impact that it had on the house prices in the area and were the "tipping" point was.
- Their view was that students often did not want to remain within purpose built accommodation after their first year.
- Need for affordable housing for people in the City, not just for students.
- Need for good landlords that provide good HMOs.
- Registration scheme should improve the situation.

National Landlords Association. Information was circulated at the meeting:-

- SPD has not delivered its aims.
- HMOs were needed by certain parts of the population and always would be.
- Policy often not followed so not clear for landlords.
- In areas where HMOs were restricted, student accommodation has been allowed. Many of the issues relating to HMOs was directly linked with students and these issues would also be present in purpose built accommodation.
- Suggested that the policy be removed completely as it had failed or clarify standards in each ward and give details of current numbers already in areas.

Following on from the points raised by the Landlords' Associations the following comments were made:-

- That bad landlords exploit the rules, however it was felt that many of the issues would be addressed once the licensing scheme was fully in place.
- Information was given relating to students and Council Tax and what was claimed backed from Central Government.
- There was discussion as to whether it was agreed about students not wanting to remain in halls after their first year.
- Questions were asked why HMO applications were not received for wards on the east of the City. It was felt that there was no demand in these areas by working residents wanting these areas and they were too far from the educational establishments for students.
- Suggestion that the Landlords' Associations and the Residents' Associations met. Working together would be a better way to resolved issues.
- Issue of the visual impact of some areas that were not maintained. Need to place some of the responsibility with the landlords.
- It had been predicted that due to the changes in benefits there would be a need for more HMOs but it was felt that nothing had changed. And that the focus always seemed to be on student HMOs.