

Brighton & Hove City Council

Housing Committee

4.00pm 19 January 2022

Council Chamber

Minutes

Present: Councillor Gibson (Joint Chair), Hugh-Jones (Joint Chair), Hills (Deputy Chair), Williams (Opposition Spokesperson), Mears (Group Spokesperson), Fowler, Meadows, Osborne and Platts

Apologies: Councillor Barnett

Part One

47 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

- (a) **Declaration of Substitutes:** There were none for this meeting.
- (b) **Declarations of Interest:** There were none for this meeting.
- (c) **Exclusion of Press and Public:** To consider whether, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, or the nature of the proceedings, the press and public should be excluded from the meeting when any of the following items are under consideration. There were no Part Two items for this meeting, therefore the press and public were not excluded.

48 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 48.1 The minutes from the 17 November 2021 were accepted as a true record of the meeting. Councillor Meadows considered that minutes were improved following the request for more detail regarding Member questions and thanked Shaun Hughes for the improvements.

49 CHAIRS COMMUNICATIONS

49.1 Landlord licensing

Council leader Phelim Mac Cafferty recently wrote to Michael Gove about the importance of introducing a national landlord register in England, particularly given that Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland already have them. The response received stated the Government's commitment to exploring the merits of introducing a landlord register and referred to there being "a range of potential benefits that different models of landlord registration could have." Disappointingly, however, the letter gave no indication of the likely timeframe for introducing a national register. In the meantime, officers are close to procuring the review Committee authorised in September of the national position on selective licensing designations. I am particularly grateful to my colleague Martin Osborne for the research he has conducted into other councils' approach to selective licensing and the evidence base they bring to support their applications.

Private renters

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published in October has estimated that almost 1 million renters are in arrears and almost 4 million are in arrears with their rent and/or other bills such as utilities and debt repayments, up threefold from before the pandemic. We have again written to landlords to make them aware of the council's direct lets scheme and of the funding allocated from the government to local authorities for low-income families in arrears. This is in addition to the government's £500m Household Support Fund which low-income renters can access themselves on the council website. We have written to landlords encouraging them to work with us and urged them to exercise restraint when it comes to tenant evictions.

Voids tracker

High void levels resulting from the pandemic remain a challenge. Some progress has been made and thanks to officers creating better tracking and monitoring we aim to accelerate the progress in the coming months.

We have seen a significant improvement in our lettings activity which is moving back toward pre-pandemic levels. In the first three quarters of 2021/22 there were 363 lets. This compares with 213 lets during 2020/21 and 445 lets during 2019/20.

The current number of voids is 301. In more detail, a snapshot of the situation in December showed that 131 of 293 voids were awaiting repairs, with a further 5 undergoing major work. That left 157 voids, 52 of which were ready for letting, with viewings arranged. A further 62 were advertised or the advertisement date had been set. 38 were empty for a variety of reasons, including the previous tenant having left property there, and five were the subject of extra care requests, and were due to go to a HASC panel. While only a snapshot, I am sure members will agree that the tracker will prove a useful tool in identifying the issues around voids and reducing them over time. I am pleased to report there were 66 lets in November, up from 32 in April. The figures change from day to day, and the latest figure we have for voids is 301 as of 17th January 2022.

Homelessness

Officers are currently in weekly discussions with DLUHC around the Protect and Vaccinate scheme. The government is covering the costs of this until the end of March. The number of homeless households in Emergency accommodation is down to 701 from a peak of 817. This is above pre-pandemic levels. In line with the Homeless Bill of Rights, we continue to offer accommodation to all verified rough sleepers where we have the power to do so and it's good to report that the most recent spotlight count of rough sleepers last week found only 9 people, which is the equal lowest number since the pandemic began. Only one of these people accepted an offer of accommodation, the others preferring to sleep rough despite the cold temperatures - reminding us that there are a few people who are reluctant to move off the streets. The big challenge now is to find and access more sustainable and suitable longer-term accommodation for those who have moved in and for some people overcoming their hesitancy to move on to something more permanent. Our out-of-borough placements are currently down to 63 in Eastbourne and 94 in Lewes.

At this point I should address the death in December of a resident of Kendal Court. Once we became aware of the situation on Monday 13th December, our Welfare Officers called all residents of Kendal Court that afternoon. Our Welfare Officer for Kendal Court was also available to offer support to any residents who we were unable to contact or may have been affected at their usual Kendal Court drop-in session on that Wednesday (15th December). Any resident raising any issues with Welfare Officers were signposted to additional support.

In light of this sad death, we have paused placements in Kendal Court to allow us to review services offered to residents to ensure we are continuing to deliver an appropriate level of support and that they have access to the appropriate primary and other health care to meet their needs.

On 6th October 2021 we requested information from ESCC on Kendal Court cases referred to ESCC Adult Social Care. That information was emailed to us on 21st December 2021.

Now that we have the relevant information, we have suggested a roundtable meeting of senior council officers involving the two authorities' respective lawyers to discuss and seek to resolve Care Act matters.

Leaseholders

There was to have been a leaseholder reunion and AGM at Hove Town Hall on Saturday 29 January. Unfortunately, due to Covid levels, we have again had to move this online but are taking steps to ensure as many leaseholders as want to attend are able to, irrespective of their level of computer literacy.

Housing Committee members are welcome to attend the Leaseholder Reunion on 29th

As Members may have heard from the press release, the police have charged Jugal Sharma, a former Head of Housing for the Council, with various offences. This matter is under consideration by the criminal courts, and I am advised that it would therefore not be appropriate to refer to that in any of the proceedings before the committee today and if anyone does raise it, I will have to ask them to stop.

50 CALL OVER

50.1 Agenda items 54, 55 and 56 were called for discussion by the committee.

51 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

51.1 To consider the following matters raised by members of the public:

- (a) **Petitions:** There were none for this meeting.
- (b) **Written Questions:** One question had been submitted.

Daniel Harris submitted the following:

Question: "Last week I was notified from one resident who is living in emergency / temporary accommodation that they are having to top up their electricity using cards, and these are costing £10 per day. Can the council please outline the current rules around how electricity and energy should be handled by private subcontractors for emergency and temporary accommodation? for example a few years back I had proof one provider was manipulating the rate 1 and rate 2 rates, charging 25% more than they were buying the electricity. which is illegal."

Thank you for your question. Accommodation with card-operated meters should always be set to the lowest tariff. Electricity cards are charged by unit of energy, so if the meter is operating correctly, the cost is directly related to usage. If there are concerns that the meter is defective, this should be highlighted to the accommodation provider and the council's Emergency Accommodation Team to enable this to be investigated. Meters are set by the energy / meter supplier rather than the accommodation provider, so any changes to the tariff would not directly benefit the landlord.

If you wish to share more detailed information regarding the resident (with their consent), the property or the accommodation provider, we can make further enquiries, including the provision of advice on energy consumption.

Do you have a supplementary question?

Daniel Harris informed the committee that the client's meter had been locked and asked that safety inspections of properties included a check of electric meters and whether they are legally compliant. The chair requested that the speaker contact the Housing team and submitted details of the client referred to so the matter can be investigated.

- (c) **Deputations:** One deputation was referred from Full Council on 16 December 2021.

52 ITEMS REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

52.1 Deputation concerning Housing: Spokesperson Jim Deans

On 22nd October 2020 John Hadman's petition came before you (the council), it has been supported by 4,519 signatures. (It now has over 6000) It was agreed by a majority of councillor members that a 24 x 7 shelter for the homeless would be put in place, yet here we are 13 months later with a more fragmented service than ever.

There is plenty council could be applauded for with an increase in many services at a huge cost we must add but genuine increases in service. Many more organisations including from the voluntary sector have committed to providing services in the city for the homeless, rough sleepers and now refugees. Many millions have been spent yet here we are still no shelter, the reason the shelter is so important is pretty straight forward we function as a hospital without an Accident & Emergency dept. there is no triage, people are left to wander the streets, the current answers just do not work. We have a "Secret SWEP" an emergency protocol that does not have a "turn up 27 location" when SWEP is called people cannot just turn up and get life-saving shelter, they need to go into a data system their details need to be recorded, locations should be found prior and then a small search party is sent out looking for them. Already the council has agreed a few may be missed, is there any justification in leaving people to freeze when a much simpler answer was in place.

SWEP was working the council claimed it was far too popular, is that not a success. The public was made aware at around 12noon voluntary groups went out, social media was used the community joined together and supported the Emergency.

John Hadman's petition which had councillors support this was months ago and would be a solution if only we take a more proactive and preventative approach. The shelter would be a triage, regardless of who, when or why. It would be there, a focus for the services to work from a secure area supported by "the city". In the City of Sanctuary" where we are welcoming refugees, men, women and children who have travelled thousands of miles to get safety are finding it in Brighton & Hove yet if you are a victim of domestic violence on a Friday night you have nowhere to run to, this is why so many victims return to the perpetrator or are picked up in a worse state by emergency services.

A few days on the street are all it takes to introduce you to cheap drugs or even cheaper alcohol anything to take the mental anguish away for a few hours. Make no mistake every professional I have ever spoken with understands the importance of early intervention, preventing one night is the solution and we must go further.

So, Brighton and Hove City Council we urgently call upon you again to ask that you live up to those commitments made toward John Hadman's petition and to your agreement to open a 24 x 7 shelter of safety. As the founder of Sussex Homeless Support, and as a Founder Member of the Brighton & Hove Housing Coalition I will be taking your response back to these organisations and every other Professional & Voluntary groups to mobilise them and achieve what was promised all those months ago.

Response:

Thank you for your Deputation. The Council has significantly expanded provision for rough sleepers. At the start of the covid 19 pandemic, the council followed government guidance to provide accommodation for every rough sleeper and those in congregate accommodation. Over 800 people were accommodated during this period of which over 730 have moved on with the remaining people still being assisted.

Following the ending of the Everyone In provision, rough sleepers who were accommodated were assisted to move on to more settled accommodation and that work is still underway. This is reported to the Homeless Reduction Board and Housing Cttee on a regular basis.

Since April 2021 we have also expanded the provision for rough sleepers from 45 to 80 rooms with support, to enable people to continue to move away from the street. This is through our No Second Night Out and Off the Street offers.

In addition, under the government winter fund provision, we have been providing emergency accommodation for 25 people with no recourse to public funds, and a further 18 beds for rough sleepers alongside our Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) provision.

Following the government announcement on 20th December, we are now using all 42 units of designated winter fund provision to provide "Protect & Vaccinate" accommodation for verified rough sleepers, to encourage the uptake of vaccinations and reduce the spread of the Omicron variant. We have put additional support in place at this accommodation to enable this cohort to move away from the street and are working with our local health partners to deliver an outreach vaccination programme across our homeless services.

In addition to the above provision is SWEP. In light of the Protect & Vaccinate initiative, we are providing additional accommodation in the city for SWEP.

Questions on the access to this SWEP provision have been responded to at a number of previous Housing Committees (Housing Committee on 18 November 2020, 20th January 2021, 17 March 2021 and 17th November 2021).

Following the Covid 19 pandemic, Government and Public Health advice has changed, and the use of shelters and shared facility accommodation is not recommended due to the issues of managing infection control. With rising cases of the latest mutation of coronavirus, we cannot support provision of that style of accommodation at present.

53 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

- (a) Petitions: None
- (b) Written Questions: Two were received for this meeting.

53.1 From: Councillor Pissaridou

As I understand it when a resident is made homeless, the Council has a housing responsible for them. The current practice seems to be that the homeless residents (and their children) are housed firstly in "emergency" accommodation and then into "temporary" accommodation.

I understand that the majority of both emergency and temporary accommodation are privately owned and leased to the Council. Is this correct? The council then “sub-lets” the accommodation to the resident/tenant. Can you tell me what the contractual arrangements are between the Council and their landlords and what the contractual arrangements are between the Council and the council resident?

I have also been informed that some of these properties do not meet the appropriate standards we would expect in our own council owned properties.

Some of my residents have experienced many issues with the condition of the “emergency” accommodation provided and have then had difficulties getting these problems addressed and are worried and confused as to whom they then need to ask that the necessary repairs are carried out.

Some residents have also expressed concerns that they will be moved out of the City if they complain about their housing conditions.

Please can the council confirm whose responsibility it is to ensure that these tenants do have decent living conditions and a safe home environment for themselves and their families to live.

Response:

Thank you for your question regarding accommodation standards. We take our obligations to provide our residents with safe, good standard, well managed homes very seriously.

I have responded to each of your questions below.

It may be the case that if eligible and in priority need, the Council will have a duty to provide accommodation under housing law or owe respective duties to accommodate under the Children’s Act or Care Act.

If an eligible client approaches as homeless on the day, it is likely that they will be placed into shorter term “emergency” accommodation, and then moved on into accommodation that will be more suitable to their needs in the longer term.

I can confirm that the majority of both emergency and temporary accommodation are privately owned and leased to the Council. The council and landlord enter into a lease, or lease and management agreement, with clearly defined covenants detailing the responsibilities between the parties. This will include maintenance and repairs timeframes and liabilities.

The council and resident enter into a tenancy agreement or licence agreement, which again sets out the respective responsibilities.

The contract specification meets the same standard as council owned stock and is compliant with current legislation and industry standards. If a property is damaged or has been subject to wear and tear over time, these issues will be addressed as part of the empty property (Void) turnaround within the timescales for responsive repairs detailed in the lease agreements.

If residents face issues with the condition of the accommodation, in the first instance, the resident should notify the accommodation provider of a disrepair issue. All our providers are aware of their responsibilities and have caretakers and tradespeople who complete the vast majority of works within the terms of the contract.

If the issue has not been attended to or the timeframe provided for completion of works has been exceeded, this can be escalated through the council's Emergency Accommodation Team.

The movement of residents within the city (or to locations outside the city) is agreed and arranged by the council's Emergency Accommodation Team. Contracted accommodation providers have no input into decisions regarding move-on pathways. The council's criteria for placement is based purely on client need. Raising complaints about a repair issue would have no bearing on any future placement. Indeed, we would always encourage residents to raise repair issues as soon as they are identified.

For accommodation leased by the council, the overarching responsibility for standards remains with the council. Our contractors also have responsibilities under their leases and management agreements, which are reviewed as part of contract compliance & performance monitoring.

If any specific case is brought to your attention, please let the Housing Service know and we can address both the repair issue at hand and also whether the matter should be raised with the contractor to help improve the customer's experience.

- Supplementary Question: *"How many residents and families are currently in emergency accommodation? And how long have they been housed in this accommodation? And how many are in temporary accommodation and what is the average stay in the temporary accommodation?"*

Officers to respond in writing post meeting.

53.2 From: Councillor Platts

A recent presentation to Area Housing Panels outlined an investment of £4.457m to deliver on various priorities including addressing fuel poverty concerns for tenants. In light of the recent news reports that households can expect to see a severe increase in energy costs as the UK's energy price cap is reassessed, with suppliers due to increase prices in line with costs; can the Council confirm whether this figure needs to be increased? Will the Chair consider writing a joint letter to Government Ministers supporting the removal of VAT on fuel?

Response:

Thank you for your question raising the expected rise in household energy bills over the coming months, this is certainly concerning and something officers across the Council have been working on with key partners across the city over recent months. The multi-agency Fuel Poverty & Affordable Warmth Steering Group has been meeting regularly to plan for and identify additional support for residents through this period.

The £4.457M referred to is capital funding for a range of programmes including boiler replacements and low carbon heating and hot water provision, and a solar PV programme due to start in 2022/23. This funding is at an appropriate and deliverable level for immediate plans and will assist residents to reduce the impact of the increase in energy costs. For example, the solar PV programme specifically, will focus on the least energy efficient homes, those with electric heating and where the householder is more likely to be living in fuel poverty. As the HRA carbon neutral energy plan is developed for our own housing stock further funding will be identified in future budget setting, linked to specific plans and projects.

In addition to the investment in our own housing stock there is further support for residents struggling to pay their energy bills and we have been signposting to these through our established channels, these include:

- Money advice and hardship grants through the Council's annual Warmth for Wellbeing programme with additional funding provided through the Household Support Fund until the end of March, offering small grants for fuel bills and debt and benefits advice and casework.
- Signposting to the national Warm Homes Discount and Winter Fuel Payment schemes, as well as promoting local sources of support.
- Home energy efficiency improvements, such as through the Disabled Facilities Grant funded Warm, Safe Homes grant and further schemes in development that will be launched in the coming months for households in the private sector.
- Working with Brighton & Hove Energy Services Coop to offer households small energy saving measures, energy saving advice in their homes and emergency support for fuel poverty such as oil-filled electric heaters.

Sources of help are:

Help is available this winter for households in Brighton & Hove struggling to pay for food, fuel and other essential costs. The council can offer vouchers or find another way to help access essential goods and services.

To access this support, go to www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/household-support-fund or call the Community Hub on 01273 293117 (option 2).

Moneyworks

This service is provided by a partnership of community advice agencies across the city and can help with all money issues, including:

- *fuel bill payments and vouchers*
- *debt and benefits help*
- *foodbank referrals*
- *getting a bank account*
- *getting online*

To access the service, contact either:

Moneyworks Adviceline on 0800 988 7037 (open Mondays 1-5, Tuesdays 9-1, Wednesdays & Thursdays 12.30-4.30, and Fridays 10-2)

Citizens Advice Helpline on 08082 78 78 15 or go to <https://www.cabrightonhove.org/get-advice/>

(c) **Letters:** There were no letters for this meeting.

(d) **Notice of Motion:** One was referred from Full Council.

53.3 Subject: Council placement of Homeless People and Rough Sleepers

Notice of Motion from the Conservative Group

Proposer: Councillor Mears
Secunder: Councillor Meadows

This Council:

- a) Notes that Housing Committee has reported receiving Government funding totalling £21,272,376 million to address homelessness and rough sleeping (see link 1);
- b) Has placed homeless people and rough sleepers in accommodation without adequate support, including:
 - i. At Kendal Court, significant failings of the Council have been identified in an Independent Report titled 'Returning to Kendal Court', September 2021 (see link 2)
 - ii. At Eastbourne, there have sadly been a number of fatalities in out-of-area placements;
- c) Further notes, that a resident fleeing from unsafe accommodation provided by Brighton & Hove City Council in Eastbourne, pitched a tent at Old Steine Gardens for several weeks to escape the situation;
- d) Calls on Audit & Standards Committee to commission a report to audit all Government funding received to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping through the pandemic; and
- e) Calls on the Administration to send an urgent report to Housing Committee to take emergency action to ensure homeless people and rough-sleepers placed in accommodation by Brighton & Hove City Council have proper 24-hour support to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

Supporting Information:

Link 1: Questions and answers – Housing Committee 22 September 2021
<https://www.brightonhoveconservativecouncillors.com/news/questions-and-answers-housing-committee-22-september-2021>

Link 2: Report – Returning to Kendal Court – September 2021
<https://www.brightonhoveconservativecouncillors.com/news/returning-kendal-court-independent-review>

- 53.4 Councillor Mears proposed the Notice of Motion to the committee and stated that the 2018 reports highlighted the concerns from previous boards. The councillor noted that placements out of the city were often detrimental to mental health and sometimes lives. It was considered that the issues lie with Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex and Eastbourne Borough Council. It was noted that an MP and other bodies had asked for the Kendal Court to be closed.
- 53.5 Councillor Meadows seconded the motion.
- 53.6 Councillor Gibson proposed a joint Labour Group and Green Group amendment to the notice of motion.

GREEN AND LABOUR GROUPS AMENDMENT

That changes are made as shown in ***bold italics*** and strikethrough below:
 This ***Committee*** Council ***notes that***:

- a) ~~Notes that Housing Committee has reported receiving Government funding and totalling £21,272,376 million~~ ***received over the last year*** to address homelessness and rough

sleeping, **including funding for the “Everyone In” programme and Housing First, has been reported to Housing Committee, and that in recent years funding has been inadequate to address the growing issue of homelessness in our city caused by years of Conservative austerity policy and lack of social housing;** (see link 1);

- b) **The tragic deaths of residents at Kendal Court and other sites are deeply concerning and this Committee vows to continue to work towards improving the standards and services provided in order to help avoid such tragedies in the future** placed homeless people and rough sleepers in accommodation without adequate support, including:
- i) ~~At Kendal Court, significant failings of the Council have been identified in an Independent Report titled ‘Returning to Kendal Court’, September 2021 (see link 2)~~
 - ii) ~~At Eastbourne, there have sadly been a number of fatalities in out-of-area placements;~~
- c) Further notes, that a resident fleeing from unsafe accommodation provided by Brighton & Hove City Council in Eastbourne, pitched a tent at Old Steine Gardens for several weeks to escape the situation; **homelessness is a consequence of the “broken housing market” and it is urgently needed**
- i) **to improve the supply of truly affordable council homes by government investment and ending subsidies under the right to buy**
 - ii) **to revoke the provision of insecure deregulated tenancies (introduced in the 1988 Housing Act) and returning to a fair rent model in the private rented sector; and**
- d) **requests that officers bring** ~~Calls on the Administration to send an~~ **update** urgent report to Housing Committee **following the current review** ~~to n the~~ **take emergency action proposed** to ensure homeless people and rough-sleepers placed in **emergency** accommodation by Brighton & Hove City Council have proper 24-hour support to ensure their safety and wellbeing
- e) **requests the Chief Executive of the Council write to the Government urging it to tackle the shortage of affordable rented housing and help the council reduce homelessness by abolishing section 21 with immediate effect, reimbursing councils for the £7b of additional national debt taken on by HRAs across the country as part of the self-financing settlement to be invested in new council homes at social and living rents.**

Proposed by: Cllr Gibson Seconded by: Cllr Williams

Recommendations to read if carried:

This Committee notes that:

- a) Government funding received over the last year to address homelessness and rough sleeping, including funding the “Everyone In” programme and Housing First, has been reported to Housing Committee, and that in recent years funding has been inadequate to address the growing issue of homelessness in our city caused by years of Conservative austerity policy and lack of social housing;

- b) The tragic deaths of residents at Kendal Court and other sites are deeply concerning and this Committee vows to continue to work towards improving the standards and services provided in order to help avoid such tragedies in the future
- c) homelessness is a consequence of the “broken housing market” and it is urgently needed
 - i) to improve the supply of truly affordable council homes by government investment and ending subsidies under the right to buy
 - ii) to revoke the provision of insecure deregulated tenancies (introduced in the 1988 Housing Act) and returning to a fair rent model in the private rented sector; and
- d) requests that officers bring an update report to Housing Committee following the current review on the action proposed to ensure homeless people and rough-sleepers placed in emergency accommodation by Brighton & Hove City Council have proper 24-hour support to ensure their safety and wellbeing
- e) requests the Chief Executive of the Council write to the Government urging it to tackle the shortage of affordable rented housing and help the council reduce homelessness by abolishing section 21 with immediate effect, reimbursing councils for the £7b of additional national debt taken on by HRAs across the country as part of the self-financing settlement to be invested in new council homes at social and living rents.

- 53.7 Councillor Gibson proposed the amendment to the Notice of Motion and stated that the amendment was to focus on the wider causes of homelessness. The councillor expressed concerns that the sad situation had been made political. It was noted that some actions were taken following the 2018 Public Health report, however the councillor still had concerns regarding the level of support for the homeless. The council has suspended lettings at Kendal Court whilst the situation is looked at. The councillor considered that more positive steps were needed, and homelessness needs to be prevented and the housing market was broken. Temporary accommodation was considered a challenging move for people and there was a failure of supply of affordable housing. It was noted that a joint programme of building affordable homes is underway and ongoing, and the fair rent act was being phased out. The amendment asks action at all levels. The councillor would welcome a letter from the Chief Executive asking the government for more affordable housing and to abolish section 21.
- 53.8 Councillor Williams seconded the amendment to the Notice of Motion and stated that it was good to recognise the tragic death and pause and review the situation.
- 53.9 Councillor Meadows stated they were shocked that the Labour Group and Green Group were more concerned with the review than the death. The councillor requested that the homeless were not exploited.
- 53.10 Councillor Mears considered it was disgraceful for party politics to use a person’s death and noted that there had been reports since 2018 to the present on Kendal Court and stated they did not support the amendment to the Notice of Motion.
- 53.11 Councillor Gibson stated that the amendment was not about point scoring and housing outside the city was not good. Placements are currently lower than before the pandemic and there was no quick fix to the situation. The councillor noted that bus passes for those placed outside the city was currently under negotiation.
- 53.12 Councillor Williams stated that the amendment was not about party politics.

Vote

- 53.13 A vote was taken, and the committee agreed by 7 to 2 to accept the amendment to the Notice of Motion.
- 53.14 A vote was taken, and the committee agreed by 7 to 2 to accept the Notice of Motion as amended.

54 HOUSING COMMITTEE WORKPLAN PROGRESS UPDATE AND HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 2 2021/22

- 54.1 The Head of Strategy & Supply introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

- 54.2 Councillor Meadows raised questions relating to the 0.22% decrease in the collection of rents, the 273 empty properties awaiting works, with a forecast of an £1m overspend for the HRA, Homeless Reduction Board reports coming to committee, incentivise households to relinquish council tenancies as an alternative to right to buy, 89.1% of leaseholds having a gas safe certificate, total rent reserve of £1.233m, and of those claiming Universal Credit, where is the total rent arrears information from? The councillor was informed that the increase in rent arrears is slight, and the council is performing well against other bench marked authorities. Also, there is 'policy and practice' to identify those in need. The officer noted that empty properties would be back in the black within a year. The Homeless Reduction Board reports have come to committee, and there were no figures as yet on the incentive for households to relinquish tenancies. The council are working with landlords get 100% of leasehold properties to have a gas safety certificate. The total rent reserves supports keeping the rents down and increases housing supply, which helps balance homes and rent levels. The rent arrears information is obtained from Department of Work and Pensions and 57% of tenants are claiming Universal Credit.
- 53.3 Councillor Meadows continued and raised further questions relating to stage three disputes, appendix 2 and ethical loans for homes. The councillor was informed that the next step for stage 3 disputes was not necessarily court action, the best way forward for the leaseholder is considered first. It was noted that appendix 2 of the report was linked to the joint programme and performance report and was a reminder to committee of the items discussed in 2019/20.
- 53.4 Councillor Platts raised questions relating to complaints, turn round time for adaptations, and average re-let times. The councillor was informed that the complaints response times are good, and the council were looking at speeding up the turn around and re-let times. It was noted that many job posts have been filled, around 60% of those outstanding, with a contractor coming on stream for adaptations.
- 53.5 Councillor Mears raised questions relating to £1m overspend snapshot and communal lift parts and repair. The councillor was informed that the snapshot was taken at the end of December 2021, lift repairs were ongoing and replacement parts were an ongoing challenge and the situation was constantly being reviewed.
- 53.6 Councillor Williams raised questions relating to mutual exchange programme, empty homes strategy and number of AirBnB's. The councillor was informed that the AirBnB numbers would be sent later after the meeting, the empty homes strategy was as responsive as

possible and supportive with funding where possible. The Head of Tenancy Services informed the councillor that the mutual exchanges were mostly under a year, around 9 months to complete, with often 12 at one time, to be completed within the 42 days statutory deadline. Urgent needs are addressed first with each property being inspected and repairs carried out. There is always a balance to be struck with other Voids from other social landlords.

- 54.7 Councillors Williams, Mears and Hugh-Jones requested an update on the current situation for Mutual Exchanges. The Head of Tenancy Services stated they would update the committee.
- 54.8 Councillor Fowler raised questions relating to common reasons for rent arrears, who benefits from solar panels, how can pigeons be deterred from roosting under panels and are apprentices being recruited? The councillor was informed that the reasons for rent arrears were often furlough, loss of job, or reduction income. The tenants are supported and informed of ways to maximise incomes, access government funds through programmes and discretionary housing payment. Tenants get a reduction in running costs when Solar panels are installed. Pigeons can be moved away from panels by 'scarecrows' on the roof. Apprentices are being recruited and will be ongoing.
- 54.9 Councillor Gibson stated that they were proud of the work done to achieve additional council homes and wished for more. It was noted that the pandemic had impacted on achievements and targets may need to be revised with input from Housing panels across the city.
- 54.10 Councillor Osborne noted council are behind on the private rented sector affordable housing, however, meetings are being held and robust monitoring put in place. The private rented sector covers around 40,000 properties in the city and the council need to look at future working plans with a selective licensing review upcoming. Government support was received in 2019 and a letter has been sent to the government about a national licensing scheme. The councillor stated they would welcome licensing of AirBnB's.

Vote

- 54.11 A vote was taken, and the committee agreed unanimously to note the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Housing Committee notes the report and comments on the priorities for the work programme going forwards.
- 2.2 That a revised workplan is presented for consideration at Housing Committee in June 2022.

55 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2022/23 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

- 55.1 The Principal Accountant introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

- 55.2 Councillor Mears raised questions relating to capital investment, social housing white paper, housing stock survey and the investments table. The councillor was informed that the capital investment covers ICT systems that support tenants with good data. No revenue is included,

and the youth grant will be £255,000 for next year. No comments are allowed on the social housing white paper at this time. The housing stock survey will be sent to the councillor. The investment table covers identified priority areas for investment and is spread over two pages.

- 55.3 Councillor Mears expressed concerns regarding the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget and considered more needed to be given towards recruitment of staff, noted the cost of the set up and considered that the solar panel roll out was good to note, although it could have been started years before.
- 55.4 Councillor Williams raised a question relating to social rents and was informed that there a number of schemes the maximum use was being gained from each one.
- 55.5 Councillor Meadows raised questions relating to accessible tools, harmonisation of staff contracts, budget table, HRA shortfall details, sufficient HRA reserves and is HRA reserves set aside to support homes and ending April 2022 ongoing. The councillor was informed that the council can help tenants in many ways and the councillor will be sent a detailed description of accessible tools, the cost of harmonisation was a one off cost, the Revenue Contribution to Capital was shown to be within expenditure. The shortfall in the HRA was matched with an increase in revenue fund and included in funding streams and this was considered a manageable way forward. The £3m HRA reserves are considered acceptable. The rent reduction costs are a one off and not ongoing.
- 55.6 Councillor Meadows continued raising questions relating to the flexibility to switch resources, costs of Voids, projected reserves of £247m and reasons for tenant's service charges increase. The councillor was informed that the increases in service charges was to protect tenants from price rises. Switching resources will require Policy & Resources committee for some decisions and any changes will be reported to the tenants. Appendix 1 shows the year on year increases reflecting the high inflation rates across the board, which are then reflected in costs of Voids. The projected reserves are considered acceptable in the 30 year forecast. The repair and maintenance costs is managed as well as possible.
- 55.7 Councillor Gibson commented that they recognised the rent policy increase in income which backed the costs absorbed this year. The councillor considered the revenue capital funding was insufficient. The council needed to invest in energy efficiency. The social rents programme at Bristol Estate is seen as a good move forward. The rent help for tenants is being reviewed and this is ongoing. The report is good, showing how the repairs and Voids coming back to pre-pandemic levels, £3m additional funding to buy existing builds, and additional reserves against carbon reductions are welcomed. The budget aims for recovery, additional homes, increasing affordable homes and easing pressures whether possible.
- 55.8 Councillor Williams raised a question relating to tenant service charges and was informed that the charges were different for each building.
- 55.9 Councillor Hugh-Jones welcomed the s106 sites and noted that the Tourism, Equalities, Communities and Culture Committee (TECC) report was good. It was noted that consultations with tenants regarding retro fitting of heating systems was important and the investment in repairs, Voids and staff were also supported as the where the opportunities to combine fire safety works with the retro fitting programme.

Vote

- 55.10 A vote was taken, and the committee agreed by 7 to 2 to agree the recommendations.

RESOLVED: That the Housing Committee:

- 2.1 Approves a rent increase of up to 4.1% in line with government legislation as detailed in paragraph 4.9 of the report.
- 2.2 Approves the service charges and fees as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.
- 2.3 Notes the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and 30-year financial projections shown in Appendix 4 to the report.

That Housing Committee approves and recommends to Policy & Resources Committee:

- 2.4 That the updated HRA Revenue Budget for 2022/23 as shown in Appendix 1 to the report be agreed and recommended to full Council for approval.
- 2.5 That an earmarked reserve of £1.500m for the Covid-19 recovery work required to clear the backlog of responsive repairs and voids be set up as per paragraph 5.1 of the main report.
- 2.6 That a contribution to the rent reduction reserve of £1.200m be made from the general reserves held by the HRA as per paragraph 5.1 of the main report.
- 2.7 That a contribution to the Sustainability and Retrofit reserve of £1.200m be made from the general reserves held by the HRA as per paragraph 5.1 of the main report.
- 2.8 That the Capital Programme Budget of £85.077m for 2022/23 be agreed and notes the 3-year programme as set out in Appendix 4 to the report and recommended to full Council for approval; and

That Full Council:

- 2.9 Approves the updated HRA Revenue Budget for 2022/23 as shown in Appendix 1 to the report.
- 2.10 Approves the Capital Programme Budget of £85.077m for 2022/23 and notes the 3-year programme as set out in Appendix 3 to the report.

56 NEW HEATING AND HOT WATER CONTRACT (HRA)

- 56.1 The Housing Sustainability & Affordable Warmth Manager introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

- 56.2 Councillor Platts raised questions relating to concerns raised by the procurement board and the five years plus 2, plus 2 extension options. The councillor was informed that the procurement of contract would be continually reviewed, and any extensions would come back to committee for approval and the procurement board concerns regarding a full 9 year contract have been removed. In the first 5 years the movement from gas to low carbon will be tested and if necessary, come back to committee after approximately 3.5 years.
- 56.3 Councillor Williams raised questions relating to monitoring of contract and consultations. The councillor was informed that all contracts are monitored for performance which starts at the beginning of the procurement process. The contract will contain conditions relating to underperformance and termination. Consultations are not specific to key indicators; however, performance does is a key indicator. There have been high levels of consultation so far and the importance of feedback from tenants is very important and the contractor would need to understand this.

- 56.4 Councillor Mears stated they were nervous regarding the recommendations, and they agreed with the Procurement Advisory Board (PAB) who requested a clearer link between the future Committee approval to extend the contract and the performance of the contract specifically in relation to its role in delivering our Carbon Neutral ambition.
- 56.5 Councillor Osborne raised a question relating to the percentage of quality and was informed that the PAB noted the balance of percentages with 55% quality and 45% cost and discussed the possibility of increasing the quality percentage to 60%. The Housing Sustainability & Affordable Warmth Manager stated they would look into the matter and get back to the councillor.

Vote

- 56.6 A vote was taken, and the committee unanimously agreed the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Housing Committee delegate authority to the Executive Director for Housing Neighbourhoods and Communities to procure and award a contract for the services described below for a term of 5 years with the option to extend for a period of up to two further periods of two years following the initial five year term (5+2+2), subject to satisfactory performance by the contractor and further approval described below.
- 2.2 That Housing Committee note that a report will be presented to Housing Committee updating on the performance of the contract, including its contribution towards our Carbon Neutral ambition, prior to the end of the initial 5 years, seeking authority to extend the contract beyond the initial term.

57 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL

- 57.1 There were no items referred to full council.

58 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

- 58.1 There no Part Two items on the agenda for this meeting.

The meeting concluded at 7.16pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of