

# BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

## HOUSING COMMITTEE

4.00pm 16 SEPTEMBER 2020

### VIRTUAL MEETING - SKYPE

#### MINUTES

**Present:** Councillors: Gibson (Joint Chair), Hugh-Jones (Joint Chair), Phillips (Deputy Chair), Williams (Opposition Spokesperson), Mears (Group Spokesperson), Atkinson, Barnett, Fowler, Osborne and Hill

#### PART ONE

#### 93 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

**(a) Declaration of Substitutes:**

93.1 None.

**(b) Declarations of Interest:**

93.2 None.

**(c) Exclusion of Press and Public:**

93.3 The press and public should not be excluded from the meeting for any of the items under consideration.

#### 94 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

94.1 The minutes of the Housing Committee meeting held on 17 June 2020 were accepted as a record of the meeting with the following amendment:

10.2 Councillor Atkinson commented: The Councillor also noted that where Rough Sleepers had been accommodated in student accommodation *may require more support than others and they needed to be good neighbours to the local community.*

#### 95 CHAIRS COMMUNICATIONS

95.1 Welcome to the first housing committee under the green minority administration. Whilst the administration has changed, the priorities for the housing committee remain the same. These are set out in the Joint Labour-Green workplan agreed by housing committee a year ago. I would again encourage all those interested to take a look at this programme and hold us to account for achieving it. Progress on this programme is being

reported to committee under item 102 and we shall regularly update committees for information and public scrutiny.

What has changed is that there are joint chairs, Siriol Hugh Jones and me sharing the work and hoping that two heads will be better than one. We are sharing responsibility and will include a list of the different areas we cover in the minutes of this meeting. Housing and homelessness are a huge area and our work will be helped greatly by Cllr Alex Phillips who will be focussing on the high profile and challenging area of homelessness (rough sleeping) and Cllr Martin Osborne who will be focussing on work with the private rented sector.

Following the lockdown and suspension of many activities, this housing committee is moving one step closer to greater normality. In June in the midst of the pandemic there were 3 items on the agenda, thankfully now there are 6 in September and future committees will hopefully be able to make inroads into the backlog of items delayed by the emergency response to the virus.

I should like to thank officers for their hard work. They have often gone well above and beyond in response to the virus. Thanks to this we are pleased to be letting a block of brand-new council housing at Selsfield Drive for 30 households this month. Along with other purchases and new build we have already provided over 80 additional council houses this year, more than the 75 achieved last year and more than the average of 42 achieved in the previous 4 years. This I hope is thanks in no small part to the new approach of Labour and Greens rolling their sleeves up, working together and focussing on a joint programme of delivery rather than party politics. It is what I believe many residents in the city want to see from their elected representatives and it is also the only way we can soften the worst effects of the national housing crisis in the supply of affordable housing fuelled by the failed housing market promoted by national government

In general, our approach is to work together to limit the twin impact of the broken housing market and austerity on residents in the city. One of the reports at today's meeting highlights the continued high numbers of homeless people evicted from emergency accommodation. Eviction is an admission of failure that helps no one and we need to reduce these evictions of vulnerable people further. One step we have taken is to buy our own emergency accommodation and so instead of relying on private landlords we shall manage the housing ourselves and I really hope that we will avoid unnecessary evictions.

In addition to delivering our joint work programme I should like also to report that we have put in a large funding bid to government to enable the council to continue to house, provide move on accommodation and reconnect the 400 + rough sleepers and others at risk of rough sleeping housed in the pandemic. The success of this bid is crucial. I was hoping that we would have heard the outcome by today, but it will be reported to the next housing committee along with the work undertaken under the Homeless reduction board towards the challenge set at April's housing committee of avoiding a return to the streets.

The repairs service, which is the subject of another of today's reports, was reduced to emergency repairs only during lockdown. There were issues with the telephone helpline

while staff were working from home. However, these should now be resolved as new staff have been recruited and are currently undergoing training. As of this week, there should be a normal phone service operating for reporting both emergency and routine priority repairs. More positively, during the last quarter 99.4% of emergency repairs were completed within 24 hours and 97.5% of appointments kept.

Following lockdown, we are gradually returning to a complete repairs service, but due to the backlog created by the pandemic we are having to prioritise repairs in the following order:

- 1) Those that pose a Health & Safety risk
- 2) Repairs required that are having a significant impact on resident and/or that are causing damage to properties
- 3) All other repairs.

The priority is to continue to work to keep residents, staff and contractors safe and to follow Covid-19 guidelines. This includes not attending non-essential repairs where residents are displaying symptoms or have a confirmed case of COVID 19.

In regards, to the housing repairs & maintenance, I should mention that the GMB members of the housing repair team who came in-house in April were on strike last week. There was an unresolved pay claim existing when the service came in-house in April from Mears. The claim concerns a pay increase (8%) and standardisation of sickness and annual leave entitlements.

During the strike last week, all emergency repairs and some non-emergency repairs were covered by the service and disruption was kept to a minimum. All transferred staff are being offered the opportunity to switch from their current contracts to council terms and conditions, which includes full sick pay and annual leave entitlements. This would see the vast majority receiving significant pay increases and ensures that transferred staff are paid fairly and equitably with other council staff.

A few staff are currently paid above council rates of pay, and their pay will be protected if they choose to stay on their current terms. No-one will be forced to take a pay cut as, under the terms of the TUPE transfer, workers can opt to remain on their existing terms and conditions if these are better than they would get in the council.

We have been notified of further dates for industrial action and are keen to continue discussions to resolve the dispute and progress with harmonisation as soon as possible.

Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the Planned Works procurement was paused on 18 March 2020. Following consultation with the bidders, the process was able to commence again on 15 June 2020. The procurement is due to be completed in November 2020.

The procurement of a multi-contractor framework for major capital works has been impacted by the need to focus resources on the planned works procurement, along with a delay due to Covid-19. We are now working toward the framework being in place for April 2021.

**96 CALL OVER**

96.1 All agenda items were called for discussion by the Committee.

**97 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT****(a) Petitions:****97.1 'Open the mutual exchange NOW so social housing people can move'.**

The following petition signed by 183 people at the time of publication. Lead Petitioner:  
**Nikki Boyd**

We the undersigned petition Brighton & Hove Council to re-open the mutual exchange, so social tenants can choose to move.

Many of us were in the middle of exchanges when they were cancelled in March 2020 due to Covid, everywhere is now getting back to the new normal, work, schools, pubs etc. well everywhere except our council, private tenants renting or buying have been able to move since 4/5/20 but still nothing is happening with Brighton and Hove mutual exchange, I bet I'm not the only person in our city who is desperate for this service to open, and even after contacting 3/4 Labour councillors and lots of other council staff nobody seems to have an answer of when we will be able to move.

**97.2 Response: The following response was read out by the Chair:**

Thank you for the petition.

There is currently a lack of capacity to do the electrical inspections which are a key part of the MEX process and one of our statutory responsibilities. This is coupled with a shortage of staff within the Rehousing team. The MEX work is carried out by the Rehousing Assistants and we have 3 vacant posts out for recruitment currently. Until these staff are in post and fully inducted, we do not have the resources to complete the MEX applications within the 42-day timescale.

For those applications that had been agreed before we suspended the MEX applications, the Rehousing team supported the households to complete and move throughout the lockdown period.

19 Mutual Exchanges were suspended in April. These will be prioritised as the service is resumed. All applicants were notified, and Re-housing have kept in touch with them. We have looked at individual cases and offered a range of advice and support, including financial help where the impact of not moving is causing financial hardship. Tenants whose applications were in progress prior to the lockdown were supported to complete and move throughout the period.

We are currently in the process of ensuring we have enough resource to resume Mutual Exchanges and respond to new enquiries. Recruitment to vacant posts, delayed due to Covid, is in progress. As well as the administration and background checks that need to

be carried out, surveyors need be available and electrical inspections must be undertaken to ensure the property is safe. Once we start the mutual exchange process, we will be on a 42 day deadline. An update on Mutual Exchanges will come back to November's Housing Committee.

In the meantime, we shall reinstate a limited service to process as many cases as current staff capacity can allow.

The Chair went onto inform the petitioner that the council had been stretched in Housing with rough sleepers during the pandemic. There are problems with staffing, although there is a need to keep to deadlines, there is only a limited amount available before the return to full service. The chair noted that this must be frustrating and upsetting and noted that any financial hardship encountered during the lockdown period would be looked at by the Housing team, who are working as hard as possible. The chair apologised as they felt the news could have been better. The council are committed to restarting as much of the service as there is capacity to do. The chair stated they were sorry that there was not a full service at this time.

**(b) Written Questions:**

97.3 **Lara Hockman** (who was not able to attend the meeting or send a representative).

*If the City receives the funding from the Ministry to expand its Housing First provision, what implementation plans have been developed to deliver the expansion? The City's current commitments to expand Housing First have been slow to realise, with some clients still not having been allocated the housing – how does the Committee plan to reduce the waiting times for housing for people who are accepted onto any future expansion of the Housing First service?*

97.4 Response:

Thank you for your question.

This question raises really important points about the challenge to deliver an efficient Housing First service. I accept that the speed with which Housing First clients achieve a secure stable home has been too slow. This needs to be improved, not least because as a result of 'Everyone In' we are now working actively with a large number of homeless people in hotels for whom Housing First is the best solution.

In order to expand Housing First we have submitted a bid to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government's Next Steps Accommodation Programme for additional units of accommodation which, if we are successful with receiving funding, will be delivered by expanding our existing successful Home Purchase Scheme to purchase accommodation, and by working with the existing provider to expand the intensive support we have in place for our existing Housing First programme. If the bid is successful, the resulting units will be ringfenced for Housing First. Housing First properties are advertised via Homemove and prioritised for those in the Councils Interest Queue who have been assessed as requiring Housing First so that only those people can be considered for them. Assessment will be undertaken by our commissioned Street Outreach Service and other stakeholders

During the current Covid 19 Pandemic, we had to suspend lettings due to difficulties ranging from undertaking repairs and viewings, removals had also paused, and many people were shielding or did not wish to move at that time. Restrictions have since relaxed and staff have been working hard to start addressing the backlog of empty properties. In the last bidding round, we had 49 properties advertised in the city. As at 10<sup>th</sup> Sept, of the 24 people accepted onto Housing First before April 2020 we had 9 Housing First clients still waiting for accommodation with a further 2 pending assessment and we are confident that as we get more properties ready to advertise, that we will be able to quickly move on those currently assessed. Progress is reported to the Homeless Reduction Board. If progress is insufficient, there will also be an opportunity to review the allocations plan at November's Housing committee and consider further actions within the policy that can better address the housing needs of homeless people needing housing first accommodation.

### 97.5 Charles Harrison

*Agenda Item 100 - Commissioning of a Housing First Service for Single Homeless People*

*It is good to see that BHCC are taking steps to increase the number of people being supported by the Housing First initiative.*

*Item 1.4 mentions that a bid was made to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for an additional £312,000 to fund Housing First Units.*

*As the outcome of the bid is currently unknown, and that there may be limited scope for making "efficiencies" in the wider Housing related support budget (as item 7.4) what Contingency Plan does BHCC have in place, should the bid to the MHCLG for £312k be unsuccessful, or only partially successful?*

### 97.6 Response:

The bid to the MHCLG was for the funding to enable a rapid expansion of provision to a total of 77 Housing First units of accommodation and support (an increase of 55 units from the current provision).

If successful, the bid would fund 50 units of accommodation and staffing to provide support to an additional 35 people. This would be a brilliant step change in provision. If the bid is not successful, we will continue with our planned expansion of provision using existing funding.

This will fund support staff to meet the needs of a minimum of 20 additional people (i.e. a total of at least 42 people will be supported by Housing First). We will continue with our current process of using properties allocated via Homemove.

The expansion will be slower, as we will be depending on properties arising in the normal way through Homemove, and overall, the expansion would be smaller, but we would still be able to expand.

### 97.7 Supplementary question:

*Items 3.17 and 3.18 indicate the time taken for someone to successfully bid for a property via the CIQ route (e.g. average 8 months or more and that six of the ten Housing First clients nominated in summer last year have not yet been allocated a property).*

*This would seem to be a major obstacle to the success of the Housing First initiative! What steps are BHCC considering, to overcome this issue?"*

97.8 Response:

Thank you for your question and the answer is similar as for the question from Lara. This question raises really important points about the challenge to deliver an efficient Housing First service. I accept that the speed with which Housing First clients achieve a secure stable home has been too slow. This needs to be improved, not least because as a result of 'Everyone In' we are now working actively with a large number of homeless people in hotels for whom Housing First is the best solution.

During the current Covid 19 Pandemic, we had to suspend lettings due to difficulties ranging from undertaking repairs and viewings, removals had also paused, and many people were shielding or did not wish to move at that time. Restrictions have since relaxed and staff have been working hard to start addressing the backlog of empty properties. In the last bidding round, we had 49 properties advertised in the city. As at 10<sup>th</sup> Sept of the 24 people accepted onto housing first before April 2020, we had 9 Housing First clients waiting for accommodation with a further 2 pending assessment and we are confident that as we get more properties ready to advertise, that we will be able to quickly move on those currently assessed. If progress is insufficient, there will also be an opportunity to review the allocations plan at November's Housing committee and consider further actions within the policy which can better address the housing needs of homeless people needing housing first accommodation. In addition to availability of accommodation, we also have to consider whether the homes becoming available are suitable for use as Housing First.

Under the current Allocation Policy and Allocation Plan, up to 10% of available properties are prioritised for the Council's Interest Queue. People who need Housing First support are placed in this queue with other eligible people nominated by Health & Adult Social Care and Families Children & Learning directorates. The allocations plan will be reviewed in November and can be adjusted. On average 70 properties are released to this group every year. To provide context roughly 700 social housing properties are available to let each year in the city and just under 9,000 households are on the Housing Register.

Having said this I accept that the speed with which housing first clients achieve a secure stable home under the Council Interest Queue has been too slow. This needs to be improved. The council is undertaking the following actions:

- 1) Progress reducing the delays be monitored by the Homeless Reduction Board.
- 2) Bid for government funding to massively expand through home purchase the supply of available accommodation for housing first by up to 50 units (if successful).
- 3) As mentioned there will also be an opportunity to review the allocations plan at November's Housing committee and consider actions within the policy which can more efficiently address the housing needs of homeless people needing housing first accommodation.

The proof of the pudding will be in the eating, so we will need to monitor average waiting times over the coming months and our aim is to reduce them significantly to provide the stability that is an essential basis for the recovery of a homeless person with multiple and complex needs being housed under housing first. Thanks so much for your important question. Please continue to hold us to account on this.

#### 97.9 Daniel Harris

*The evictions report states a massive number of those in emergency accommodation have been assessed with needs for supported type accommodation, we have clients revealing the support is simply not there. £250k spent on welfare officers who are dealing with disrepair issues, this committee has heard the horror stories in the past.*

*Will the council admit the privatisation model for homelessness accommodation has been a massive headache and failure?*

#### 97.10 Response:

Thank you for your important question. I agree that replacing private provision of emergency accommodation makes both financial sense and most importantly enables the provision of a better standard of service. I have long argued for this and am pleased that under the joint green-labour programme we have recently purchased flats to house 38 homeless households in house to do just this. In addition, we have and continue to deliver a number of properties for longer term temporary accommodation through our home purchase policy, and we are also completing redevelopment of ex housing offices into a block of temporary accommodation that is also scheduled for completion late Autumn. All our in house emergency and temporary accommodation is of a standard that it can be converted to permanent accommodation when if it is no longer needed for emergency use.

However, the transition to in house provision will take time and we also need to improve standards in existing provision. Following a committee decision last year, the new contracts will be requiring higher standards of accommodation and facilities. This includes no service charges and modern day basics such as wi fi. I was pleased to note at a recent temporary accommodation action group meeting that some private providers are already looking to incorporating these higher standards in their facilities and would encourage other providers to follow their lead. We also need to ensure that providers contact the council when they plan to evict beforehand as they should do in the contract. Their failure to do this highlighted in today's committee report has resulted in underreporting of evictions to council in the past and we as the council need to ensure providers keep to this contractual commitment in future. In addition, committee today is being asked to support measures in future contracts for emergency and temporary accommodation to minimise the risk of evictions and continue to monitor rates of eviction. Eviction damages often fragile and unsettled people and we must do what we can to minimise it.

Welfare officers are not privatised or arms length but are directly employed and managed by the council. It is our responsibility to ensure they offer the best possible support. Part of the reason for the report to housing committee to today is for members to understand the role they play and consider how we may make best use of this resource. I look



forward to hearing any thoughts the committee may have on this and am certainly keen that the Homeless Reduction Board oversee a consideration of how this precious support resource for homeless people can be made as effective as possible. As at 10<sup>th</sup> Sept this was 11 people in emergency accommodation assessed as needing supported accommodation. In addition to those 11, there will be households who need floating support over and above what the Welfare Officers can provide. It is believed that this number is probably an underestimate and will increase as we work through the assessments of people accommodated following Covid 19. On a separate matter just for clarity, when people move into supported accommodation that support is not provided by Welfare Officer service but by the commissioned support provider.

Notwithstanding the role of the welfare Officers or the assessment of people needing supported accommodation, we recognise that the issue, as para 3.23 of the report notes, is that we need a different approach to homelessness, including prevention, rapid reconnection and consider how we can quickly more people into alternative accommodation suited to their needs, so that emergency accommodation can revert to its intended purpose i.e. providing an emergency response to when a household has no other options and is for a short period.

97.11 There was no supplementary question.

97.12 **Steven Robinson**

*For a long, long time, 6 years in fact, I feel I've been forgotten. I live in emergency accommodation provided by baron homes and would like to state on public record in order to get a question submitted today I have been asked to significantly change the nature of my question, which I agree to in the hope my case is resolved and changes happen to help others in my position.*

*I've had enough of being bitten at night by bedbugs at my accommodation, this is a long running issue. If it's not disrepair issues, its being prevented from receiving my own personal care support, this affects us all.*

*Can the council please provide an explanation why we have to live like this?*

97.13 Response:

Thank you so much for your question and I am really sorry to hear about your situation. I am sorry that your original question was not accepted. This was because it exceeded the maximum number of words under the council rules. It also very bravely shared difficult personal circumstances and public committee responses are not provided concerning peoples individual circumstances, but officers will send a full response to you the full range of matters you have raised separately, and I shall be copied into this response.

That said your question raises general points of relevance for this committee around an unacceptably long stay in emergency accommodation which is supposed to be short term, I really appreciate you feeling forgotten for all those years. You also raise points about the quality of the accommodation, and it is important that the housing committee hears the following response to that also.

We are currently reviewing everyone who has been in emergency accommodation for over a year with a view to enabling people to move on to more suitable accommodation. This is irrespective of whether we have a Housing duty or whether accommodation has been provided under the Care Act or Children Act duties where emergency accommodation has been necessary.

Our current accommodation contracts contain clear timescales for providers to attend to repairs. If they do not respond accordingly this is managed through our regular contract management. In addition, this is something the Welfare Officers can support you with and we will be following this up.

The increase in bedbug infestations is a problem throughout the country and eradication is very difficult. We work with providers to address this, but it sometimes takes a long time to deal with and remain on top of in accommodation which has a high turnover. For treatment to be successful the whole building generally has to be treated including all personal clothing, bedding and anywhere bugs could be secreted. (It would be helpful if councillors could be advised about which of the emergency accommodation properties have had difficulty eradicating bed bugs).

You will be contacted separately so we can discuss how best to resolve your current personal situation.

**(b) Deputations:**

**Topic:** Emergency Accommodation

**Presenters:** **Rebecca Rieley** (Systems Change Lead, Fulfilling Lives South East Partnership), Martin Coll (Team Manager, Justlife).

**Housing Committee:** Housing Committee, 16 September 2020

**Deputation Summary**

**Introduction**

This charter has been developed to ensure a reasonable standard of accommodation is provided to homeless households who have to spend time in emergency accommodation. This document sets out expectations, aspirations and commitments to achieve this and has been developed in collaboration with a number of organisations. We want to see the Charter adopted by Brighton & Hove City Council and emergency accommodation providers who house Brighton and Hove residents experiencing homelessness, and for this Charter to be embedded into provider contracts.

**Context:** Emergency accommodation is accommodation used by Brighton & Hove City Council to house people who they have a legal duty to house, or while they investigate that legal duty, under the Housing or Care Acts. It is part of the broader temporary accommodation used in the city but is predominantly large units of between 12 and 60 rooms, many with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities.

We recognise that providing accommodation to homeless people can present significant challenges given the vulnerability often experienced and the disruption to their lives that homelessness brings. We are keen therefore to ensure that the accommodation and support provided in Brighton & Hove to homeless households meet reasonable standards to ensure the best outcomes for people.

It is recognised that a significant proportion of people placed in emergency accommodation will have multiple and complex needs and as a result will require additional support. Multiple and complex needs is defined by the Public Health Joint Strategic Needs Assessment steering group ('JSNA') as people aged 16+ experiencing combinations of housing issues/homelessness, substance misuse, offending, mental health and domestic abuse issues, with an overarching focus on complex trauma and inequalities.

**Why now:** We feel this Charter complements the current vast developments in the City to prevent rough sleeping and end homelessness in Brighton & Hove.

**Vision:** We want emergency accommodation placements to be seen as an opportunity to support somebody away from homelessness and towards long term accommodation, and access to the support they identify and need. The Local Authority should work in collaboration with the support services and emergency accommodation providers to keep peoples stay in emergency accommodation to a minimum, ensuring they are as safe and healthy as possible.

**Support for this Charter:** Fulfilling Lives and Justlife have developed this Charter following their work with hundreds of people placed in emergency accommodation over the past 7 years. We hope the Local Authority, accommodation providers and other third sector organisations will support this Charter. The Charter also has broad support from the Temporary Accommodation Action Group members.

(Appendix I is attached to Housing Committee agenda addendum 1).

#### 97.14 Response:

Thank you for highlighting the charter and positive standards and aspirations set out in it. The deputation asks that we support the charter. Pleasingly many of the asks in the charter are part of council practice.

To adopt the charter would involve a decision of the full council upon the recommendation of housing committee. Before Housing committee decides on recommending the charter, Legal & Finance advice will be needed.

I therefore propose that one or two meetings are organised between representatives of the Temporary Accommodation Action Group, council officers, a joint chair of housing and legal advisers to firm up agreed wording that can be recommended to a future housing committee. This was agreed.

#### 98 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

**98 Issues raised by Councillors****a) Petitions:**

98.1 None

**b) Written Questions:**

98.2 None

**c) Letters:**

98.3 None

**d) Notices of Motion:**

98.4 None

**99 HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY – UPDATE ON NEXT STEPS FOLLOWING COVID-19 RESPONSE**

- 99.1 The Head of Tenancy Services introduced the report which was to provide the committee with an update on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025 in the context of the response to the Covid-19 emergency.
- 99.2 Councillor Atkinson considered the information given in appendix 1 to the report was good and supported the recommendations. The councillor was informed that the number of incomers to the city who were rough sleeping was a challenge, with the number of reconnections lower than usual due to the pandemic. The minutes of the Homeless Reduction Board for August 2020 will be published soon. The Head of Tenancy Services confirmed that the increase in single persons presenting to Housing Options during the pandemic was due to job loss, with associated accommodation and back packer accommodations being closed. It was noted that people 'sofa surfing' had also come forward requesting accommodation, and these were mostly in a younger age range of 18 – 25 years old. The court system not being in operation was also having an effect with less evictions. To agree a way forward it was noted that the authority will be meeting with private and social landlords.
- 99.3 The Head of Housing Needs stated that the Ministry of Housing will cover the cost of housing during COVID-19 and the government funding figures will be sent to the committee Members. The committee were informed that the Brighton Housing Trust were not part of the accommodation time scale.
- 99.4 Councillor Hill was informed that in an emergency response to the pandemic, in order to move some people from temporary accommodation, the priorities under the Allocation Plan were revised temporarily to create some movement and free up temporary accommodation. Numbers in temporary accommodation had swollen from 1700 pre COVID-19 to 2000 at the start of September, due to a combination of lettings being paused during lockdown and more people approaching as homeless. Lettings have

recently re-commenced, so the authority has temporarily revised the percentage of properties advertised as priority to accepted homeless to 80%. This will release the pressure on housing and associated budget. The agreed priorities of the Allocation Plan are to be retained. This will be achieved by reducing percentages later in the year. The percentage before lockdown was 40%.

- 99.5 Councillor Gibson requested that the review of the allocations plan be submitted for discussion to the November 2020 Housing Committee meeting.
- 99.6 Councillor Mears was informed that the budget details, including private and government funding for the 6 months of lockdown would be available as soon as possible. The councillor received an apology as the report had been concluded close to the committee meeting. It was a concern that the Homeless Reduction Board should take actions and not be a 'talking shop'. The Head of Housing Tenancy confirmed that the 5 year local connection was still in place for those seeking accommodation and this did not apply to those already on the housing register. The Councillor asked for a review of the allocations policy.
- 99.7 Councillor Barnett was informed that the figures for the number of rough sleepers for the last year would be forwarded to all the committee Members.
- 99.8 Councillor Williams thanked the officers for the report and agreed that a review of the applications policy would be beneficial.
- 99.9 The Chair put the recommendations to the vote, and they were agreed unanimously.

**RESOLVED:**

- 2.1 That Housing Committee note the report.
- 2.2 That Housing Committee note the work that has gone into the response to the Covid-19 emergency.
- 2.3 In the light of the pandemic and the motion responding to it (30 April), that the Homeless Reduction board along with the Homeless Operational Board give priority to:
- a) Monitoring progress and developing actions needed to achieve the aim of providing long term sustainable housing or safe reconnection for all rough sleepers housed under the "everyone in" response;
  - b) Ensuring the priorities and actions of the Homelessness Strategy respond to the changed circumstances;
  - c) Exploring ways of sustaining the current offer of shelter for all who find themselves without a roof and report back to Housing Committee any recommendations.
- 2.4 That Housing Committee notes the temporary adjustments made within the Allocations Plan in response to the pandemic whilst aiming to achieve the overall agreed percentages in the Allocation Plan.

2.5 That Housing Committee recognises that the review of the Allocation Plan has been delayed due to the pandemic and subsequent pressures on the department but that this will be considered at the November Housing Committee.

## **100 COMMISSIONING OF A HOUSING FIRST SERVICE FOR SINGLE HOMELESS PEOPLE**

100.1 The Commissioning & Performance Manager introduced the report which was to seek approval from Housing Committee for the tender of a contract to deliver a Housing First Service for single homeless persons to be procured in accordance with Public Contract Regulations (PCR) and Contract Standing Orders for a period of five years with the option to extend for a maximum of two further years from January 2021 to December 2028.

100.2 Councillor Williams thanked the officers for the report and considered the information good news and stated their support.

100.3 Councillor Atkinson requested that the committee support the report and noted that the research into universal credit needs to be part of the strategy.

100.4 Councillor Mears expressed concerns regarding the following financial implications in the report: 7.4: The commissioning lead officer has advised that if there is any reduction in the currently identified funding streams over the course of this contract then it will be necessary to make efficiencies within the wider Housing related support budget to ensure ongoing funding for the Housing First contract; 7.5: From a financial perspective there is a significant ongoing risk from awarding a 5 year contract when there is insufficient permanent funding and; 7.15: There are risks if the short term funding from MHCLG or the council ends. These risks have been assessed and there is a plan in place to sustain the contract from existing resource if this became necessary. Other services would have to be ended to meet these costs. The Councillor expressed further concerns that a plan B did not seem to be in place. The Commissioning & Performance Manager informed the councillor that the financial position was difficult with the contract ending in January 2021 and Housing First needed to be sustained. The Councillor stated they would be abstaining from the vote on the recommendations.

100.5 Councillor Hill was informed that the figures in the report could be quantified by looking at past figures and these would be passed onto the committee.

100.6 Councillor Osborne considered the report a good news story for the council and more ambition would be good. The councillor was informed that the housing team were working hard to reduce the 55 still in COVID-19 accommodation and timescales were already in place.

100.7 Councillor Hugh-Jones considered that the title interim should be deleted from the Executive Director Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities as this would cover a future where the executive director was not interim.

100.8 A motion to remove the word interim was proposed by Councillor Hugh-Jones and seconded by Councillor Gibson.

100.9 The Chair put the motion to the vote, and it was agreed unanimously.

100.10

The Chair put the recommendations to the vote, and they were agreed by a majority vote of 7 to 2 abstentions. (Councillor Phillips was not able to vote due to technical difficulties).

**RESOLVED:**

That Housing Committee:

- 2.1 Approves the procurement and award of a contract for the provision of a Housing First Service for single homeless people for a period of five years with the option to extend for a maximum of two further years.
- 2.2 Grants delegated authority to the Executive Director for Health & Adult Social Care or the Interim Executive Director Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities to carry out the procurement of the services referred to in 2.1 above including the award of the contract.
- 2.3 That the Executive Director for Health & Adult Social Care or the Executive Director Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities seek authority of the Housing Committee prior to the expiry of the initial contract period of 5 years if it is recommended that the contract be extended under the extension provisions exercisable by the council under the terms of the contract.
- 2.4 Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Health & Adult Social Care or the Executive Director Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities on confirmation of the award of funding by the MHCLG in response to a bid made by the Council for the purposes of financing Housing First units of accommodation, to increase the value of the procurement and subsequent contract award to reflect the amount of grant awarded (maximum of £312,000.00) and to enable the provision of a minimum of number of additional units pro-rated to the value of the grant awarded on the basis that the maximum grant of £312,000.00 will fund a minimum of 35 additional units.
- 2.5 To report regularly to Homeless Reduction Board on the progress and outcomes of the service.

**101 HOUSING MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4 2019/20**

- 101.1 The Head of Income Involvement & Improvement introduced the report which informed the committee that the housing management performance report covers Quarter 4 of the financial year 2019/20 alongside end of year results.
- 101.2 Councillor Atkinson was informed that information on how the council compares to other authorities with regard to cost indicators on new builds will be reported back to the committee with caveats on different areas.
- 101.3 Councillor Mears expressed dissatisfaction with the recent area housing panel meeting where all areas met at once and requested a return to separate area meetings where residents would have a chance to speak. The councillor was informed that the Housing

Management costs were compared to other authorities, however, other councils included some of the same elements in calculations and not others. Comparing was therefore a challenge. It was noted that Universal credit applications accounted for some of the reasons for rent arrears. It was also confirmed that support for residents with rent arrears included mental health support. The gas certificate checks were confirmed as being yearly from the time of placement into the building. It was noted that some checks were started at 10 months as this gave buffer time for check to be carried out before the 12 month deadline. The external concrete coating of Leach Court was not included in the original contract and did not form part of the initial works. The costs for the external coating include paint and final finish it was confirmed.

- 101.4 Councillor Osborne was informed that the council were moving away from fitting gas boilers, however no programme was in place yet. With regard to rent arrears, the council were working to the process agreed by the courts. During COVID-19 pandemic residents in arrears had not been visited. Officers were contacting residents by phone, using text and calling to remind residents when rent was due. It was noted that redundancies were having an impact on residents and some were resisting applying for Universal credit. The councillor was informed that during lockdown the restrictions on courts prevented evictions. It was considered that this would change once the courts reopen.
- 101.5 Councillor Hill considered that Universal credit was having a damaging impact on residents in arrears.
- 101.6 Councillor Hugh-Jones was informed that the council will only be informed once a Universal credit application has been submitted. The council are not aware before this unless a resident informs the council. It was noted that the first Universal credit payment could take 5 to 6 weeks and on occasion the payment has been used for food rather than rent. The councillor was informed that sickness surgeries have been held throughout the year in the housing team to understand the high level of sickness and how to reduce this in the department. It was also noted that an energy efficiency report will be coming to committee.
- 101.7 Councillor Williams expressed concerns relating to eviction notices and requested that they were not issued. The Councillor was informed that the council were not currently issuing notices of eviction. It was noted that the council sometimes need residents to understand the nature of their arrears and serving a notice can be a way of flagging the seriousness of the situation and instigating a conversation with the council. The councillor was assured that the city has the lowest number of evictions compared to other authorities. It was noted that those tenants with mental health conditions and served a notice of eviction for rent arrears needed support.
- 101.8 Councillor Fowler was informed that the number of empty homes has increased as no home inspections had taken place during the pandemic lockdown and this had created a backlog. The councillor was also informed that the repairs service was currently carrying out emergency repairs only. The return to full service was currently being looked at.
- 101.9 Councillor Mears requested that the wording on the evictions notice letter be revised to reduce mental health impact.



101.10

The Chair put the recommendations to the vote, and they were agreed unanimously.

**RESOLVED:**

2.1 That the Housing Committee notes the report.

**102 HOUSING COMMITTEE WORKPLAN PROGRESS UPDATE AND HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 1, 2020/21**

- 102.1 The Head of Income Involvement & Improvement introduced the report that illustrates how progress against Housing Committee work plan 2019-23 priorities and targets, as well as other Housing service targets, could be reported to residents and to committee. It was agreed at Housing Committee on 15 January 2020 that a small group of Housing Committee members and officers would meet to look at how any report might look. This small group met on 1 September 2020 and progress has been made on a document for discussion. The report covers Quarter 1 of the financial year 2020/21.
- 102.2 Councillor Hugh-Jones supported the new report and requested that items from the older style report not be lost. The councillor was informed that several items in the report deserved their own reports. The new report has some 'meaty' and 'chunky' bits. It was noted that some of the information will be relayed to the relevant Housing area panels. The feedback was for less paper heavy documents.
- 102.3 Councillor Hill considered that information was lacking regarding the building of 800 new homes and the stages the builds were at. The number of sites identified since 2017 was requested as were the details of selective licensing scheme proposal to improve the management and standards of private rented sector homes in the City and information relating to requests for assistance covering repairs and how the advice hub will run. It was considered by the councillor that Rent Smart could be used instead of a new advice hub. The work with tenants to develop a 'decent environment' standard was considered a good move forward.
- 102.4 Councillor Mears considered the report to be the result of a coalition between the Green group and the Labour party, and thereby could not be scrutinised by these groups properly.
- 102.5 Osborne considered that collaboration was good for the city and liked the new format report, which was considered to be clear, transparent and good for residents.
- 102.6 Councillor Gibson noted that regular reports would come back to the committee on the format and the working group would look at suggestions and improvements.
- 102.7 Councillor Osborne noted the rise in temporary accommodation figures and was informed that the figures did include COVID-19 affected households. The councillor considered the emissions totals to be good and this showed to the battle against emissions the council faced ahead.
- 102.8 The Chair put the recommendations to the vote, and they were agreed unanimously.

**RESOLVED:**

2.1 That the Housing Committee notes the report.

**103 REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE TO COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK**

103.1 The Senior Programme Manager introduced the report which updates the Committee on the Housing Repairs & Maintenance service following the insourcing of the service which took place on the 1 April 2020. This was in line with the recommendations approved, following extensive consultation, at a special Housing & New Homes Committee meeting held on 28 September 2018 and Policy, Resources & Growth Committee on 11 October 2018 that, following expiry of the contract with Mears: a Customer service and quality assurance services are brought in-house; and a responsive repairs and empty property refurbishment works to council housing stock are brought in-house. The report updates the committee on how the service has been operating during the pandemic and outlines the ongoing work which the programme will be carrying out over the next year.

103.2 Councillor Mears was informed that the budget of in-house repairs will be supplied to the committee Members.

103.3 Councillor Hugh-Jones was informed that Members of the task and finish group needed expertise and knowledge and the key performance indicators will be looked at. There will be a lease holder consultation over the next couple of weeks. The councillor was informed that the business case to assess the options for out of hours call handling, including procuring a new supplier, and also how the service could be delivered directly by the council is sign off reliant at this time. It was noted that the new works management system timescale would be 2-3 years.

103.4 Councillor Williams was proud of the work done and considered that the unions should be involved whenever possible and not bypassed.

103.5 Councillor Gibson considered it important to maintain the 'right to strike' and the council will remain open to talks.

103.6 The Chair put the recommendations to the vote, and they were agreed unanimously.

**RESOLVED:**

2.1 That the Committee notes the progress with the programme and the Housing Repairs & Maintenance service as outlined in the body of this report.

**104 REVIEW OF EVICTIONS FROM EMERGENCY AND SHORT-TERM TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION**

104.1 The Head of Housing Needs introduced the report. In February 2019 Policy, Resource & Growth Committee agreed that £0.250m be added to the council's 2019/20 budget proposals for one year only in order to expand the options for providing support for people in emergency and temporary accommodation to have a positive impact on evictions which were at a high level. In

February 2020, Budget Council approved an on-going budget of £0.260m for this welfare support service. It was requested that the performance of the support team (Welfare officers) in relation to the impact on the rate of evictions is regularly reported to Housing Committee. On average the team have been involved in helping avert the potential eviction of 35 people each month. They are supporting an average of just under 500 households at any one time, but this has risen to over 600 during Covid 19. The preventions have been where residents have been served a warning notice due to service charge arrears or other breaches of the licence agreement which the welfare officer team have then resolved. The report sets out the performance to date.

104.2 Councillor Atkinson considered the Monthly average performance matrix to support around 500 households (pre-Covid 19) to be good and felt the welfare officers were doing a good job. The councillor was informed that where a serious assault had occurred the assailant would not normally return to the assault residence and a risk assessment would be undertaken. It was noted that the 10% of evictions completed would be measured against other authorities and the findings feed back to the committee.

104.3 Councillor Gibson considered that outside providers should inform the council of any intentions to evict. The councillor considered that the council needs to protect residents against being evicted for the wrong reasons. It was noted that the welfare officers are doing a good job and looking forward to seeing the rate of evictions reduced. The Homeless Reduction Board will be looking at the eviction rates and will give feedback to the Members.

104.4 The Chair put the recommendations to the vote, and they were agreed unanimously.

**RESOLVED:**

2.1 That Housing Committee notes the performance and evictions reported.

2.2 That Housing Committee supports the measures the council is incorporating in future contracts for emergency and temporary accommodation to minimise the risk of evictions and intends to keep this matter under annual review.

**105 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL**

105.1 None.

**106 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS**

106.1 None.

The meeting concluded at 7.53pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

