

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE
4.00pm 20 SEPTEMBER 2023
COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL
MINUTES

Present: Councillor Williams (Chair), Councillor Czolak (Deputy Chair), McLeay (Opposition Spokesperson), Baghoth, Fowler, Grimshaw, Meadows, Nann, Oliveira and Sheard

PART ONE

15 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

15.1 **a) Declaration of Substitutes:** None for this meeting.

b) Declarations of Interest: Councillors Williams, Czolak, Sheard and Grimshaw declared they were members of Acorn.

c) Exclusion of Press and Public: As there were no Part Two items on the agenda, it was agreed that the press and public would not be excluded from the meeting when any of the agenda items were under consideration.

16 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

16.1 The Minutes of the 21 June 2023 committee meeting were agreed with the following amendment from Councillor McLeay: page 4: response to public question from Charles Harrison: change the date from May to April 2023.

17 CHAIRS COMMUNICATIONS

17.1 The Chair addressed the committee and stated the following:

17.2 Welcome to Housing & New Homes committee. I am delighted to begin with some very good news. Building new council homes is a key priority. This is crucial the city's housing crisis tackled. The New Homes for Neighbourhoods (NHfN) programme is proactively responding to the acute housing need in the city, and to build much-needed new rented homes, NHfN has delivered 269 new homes across 15 sites. A further 264 homes (including 212 on the Moulsecoomb Hub and Housing Project) have Planning approval and are progressing through the development process.

This proposed next phase represents an exciting opportunity to deliver a further 100 homes on four Council owned sites. This could deliver a mix of one, two, and three-bedroom homes. This is so badly needed. There are so many folk out there in desperate need.

Proposals for these sites have been progressed through the Council's feasibility budget and are now at a stage where they can move towards detailed design, and the subsequent submission of Planning Applications. These sites are- The former Hollingbury Library 10 new homes, Portslade Village Centre, 28 homes, Swanborough Drive 39 homes, Oakley House 23 homes – Let hope we will be able to build many more.

I am doubly delighted that a report is finally before us after a very long wait, which recommends that we commence with the statutory consultation this autumn to introduce selective landlord licencing. This is the very welcome first step and we anticipate this consultation will result in the introduction of Landlord licencing beginning with four wards of Kemptown, Moulsecoomb & Bevendean, Queens Park and Whitehawk & Marina and an additional licencing of HMOs city wide.

The significant growth in the private rented sector in Brighton & Hove means just under one in three households in the city are renting privately. While many landlords operate responsibly, there are concerns that some unfortunately do not, issues are raised in relation to the management, standards, quality and health and safety of homes. This will go a long way in addressing these concerns and will improve conditions for private renters on our city. This report outlines the proposed fee structure for the scheme and our approach to the consultation.

The health & safety of all our residents is important to use and those who visit and work on our council homes is a key Housing Management service priority. In light of significant changes in management and maintenance of council housing and in anticipation of forthcoming legislative and regulatory changes impacting social housing landlords, following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the service has undertaken a review of our approach toward health & safety compliance with regard to new legislation affecting council homes. We have now published our action plan addressing the core health & safety compliance areas for review which are asbestos; water safety; fire risk, including fire risk assessments; electrical; gas & fuel safety; and lifts and lifting equipment. We already begun install new fire doors in some block and this work will continue to ensure the safety of our residents.

To further improve standards and tackle repairs, damp and mould issues in our council properties quicker, we seeking to procure contracts to help us achieve this. We know that it is frustrating when you have to wait for repairs to be done and we aim to be more responsive more proactive and more efficient. Everyone deserves a decent home.

In our Corporate Plan we wish to optimise the local benefits and social value of our in-house repairs & maintenance service.

Finally, I want to thank officers and the community engagement team for organising our annual tenants conference which took place on Saturday. Over 130 people attended our Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service, Apprenticeship Experience Event at the Housing Centre in July where they had the opportunity to undertake a range of repairs tasks. As a result, the Service have taken on 6 electrical and 10 property maintenance (with plumbing) apprentices. All 16 apprentices started with us in September 2023.

18 CALL OVER

18.1 All the items on the agenda were called for discussion by the committee Members.

19 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

19.1 **a) Petitions:** There were none for this meeting.

b) Written Questions from Members of the Public: There were six for this agenda:

1. From: Charles Harrison

Question: Provision of New Build Council Homes

Following the Council's response to my question at the previous (June) Committee meeting, I am pleased to see that the Council is undertaking a review of the housing supply pipeline, to inform the anticipated numbers and confirm whether the supply of 1,000 homes inherited from the previous administration plus the 800 homes pledged by the current administration will be achieved (or hopefully exceeded!) in the period 2023 to 2027?

Would the Council please state what progress is being made with the pipeline review and when a construction tracker schedule will be made available to the public?

Response: Thank you for your question. The council continues to review opportunities for new build schemes to come forward to build our longer-term pipeline. Targets for our in-year delivery are available through our quarterly performance report which is available on the council's website. The next phase in the council's development programme, New Homes for Neighbourhoods, is outlined in a report being considered at this committee today. It provides details on four new schemes which will deliver c100 new homes. This is alongside previously agreed schemes. As other sites are identified they will be brought to this committee for consideration.

Supplementary Question: Please supply a spreadsheet of schedules. Some 4,671 households are waiting to be housed according to the Government.

Response: The chair confirmed that reports on these matters were coming to committee, and they are on course.

2. Daniel Harris:

Question: As you discuss HMO licensing, I'm deeply concerned about tenants in lower EPC-rated properties (D to G) facing high energy costs and poor living conditions. I'd be interested to know what consultation tenants have received around the introduction of a minimum standard at, say, EPC Rating of C or above. Do we know how much extra in energy bills tenants stuck in the worst energy-efficient homes pay compared to those in C-rated homes? Can you not take the initiative here to explore introducing a minimum EPC rating requirement to protect our community's well-being and net zero targets. The incentive scheme is hardly an incentive for slum landlords.

Response: Thank you for your question. The Private Sector Housing Team has undertaken a proactive project to enforce conditions under the Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Amendment) Regulations 2015. These are designed to tackle the least energy-efficient properties in England and Wales – those rated F or G on their Energy Performance Certificate. 740 properties were found to be in breach of the regulations and contact was made with all landlords. The majority of these properties subsequently met the requirements without the need for formal enforcement. However, where enforcement has been necessary, we have taken action. 5 fines have been levied on G rated properties totaling £23,500 with a further 6 properties due to receive final notices prior to fines totaling £28,200. In addition, final prompt letters have been sent to 25 landlords with F rated properties prior to enforcement action being considered. The government has introduced legislation to ensure social housing meets a C or above rating by 2030 and also completed a consultation on tightening minimum energy efficiency rules in private sector homes. The regulations on this are still pending. As part of our licensing conditions, we continue to ensure that legally required EPC ratings are met and in recognition of the impact of a higher EPC rating (C or above) can have on a property we are proposing a reduction in future licensing fees for landlords who meet this standard. The council's Warm Safe Homes Grant also provides a further opportunity for private tenants to apply for funding to have energy efficiency measures put into their home to reduce fuel poverty. There is no data available to local authorities to indicate the impact energy efficiency measures in residential accommodation affects energy bills.

Supplementary Question: The council target for 2030 and the government target are not aligned. Please consult on the matter. Residents should receive £500 in support.

3. From: Hermione Berendt

Question: Housing Minister Felicity Buchan is attempting to deregulate multiple occupation (HMO) accommodation for asylum seekers. Specifically, the government is pushing regulations through Parliament to exempt landlords who are renting HMOs to asylum seekers from needing a licence. We know that there is currently limited access to homes in our city for both people seeking asylum and those who have got a positive decision on their asylum claim. Whilst we welcome an influx of new homes for people in the city, we are concerned for the safety and wellbeing of people if HMO licensing is overlooked.

What are BHCC's plans around increasing housing for people seeking asylum in the city and ensuring this housing has an HMO license and is safe and fit for purpose?

Response: Thank you for your question. The proposed new regulation would exempt new accommodation occupied by asylum seekers from having to have an HMO license. Existing HMOs are not impacted, so the licence would still remain and would be enforceable. Any new properties, or where the licence has expired, could be exempt. We would expect this to be a small proportion of previously licensable properties, although the extent at this stage is unknown. Accommodation for Asylum Seekers is a responsibility that sits with the national government through the Home Office. This is not a local authority function. However, when a person or household is granted, leave remain, we will work with them in providing housing assistance so that they have

appropriate options for accommodation when their Home Office accommodation is terminated.

4. From: David Gibson

Question: The minutes for June Housing committee omit the answers to some of the supplementary questions, for example in response to my supplementary question the chair of housing stated that “bringing seaside homes back in house was a priority for the administration” and yet no words appear in the minutes please can the response to all the supplementary questions from the recording of the meeting be added and the minutes corrected accordingly?

Response: Thank you for your question. Following the decision of Policy & Resources committee in December 2022, minutes are agreed to be substantially shorter, and the request goes beyond the bare bones of what was agreed to be necessary. Minutes will include the subject matter description, the names of those who spoke on the matter and the committee resolution.

Supplementary Question: Please include answers to supplementary questions if possible.

5. From: Beata Janik

Question: What is the standard for suitable housing allocation, does the standard for suitable letting include hot running water, working electrics, a roof that doesn't leak, heating, and windows that open and close and are not boarded up, and how does the council check that these standards are met?

Response: Thank you for your question. All of the areas listed are covered by the council's lettable standard. We always check to ensure that all elements are at the required standard when the property becomes empty and is being prepared for letting. Any failure in any of these elements following letting should be reported as a repair and they will be responded to, based on urgency.

Supplementary Question: Recent example included boarded up windows and running water. How does the council deal with this?

Response: The chair stated the council were working with housing associations. The chair was happy to be contacted after the meeting on this matter.

6. From: Jo Tomkins

Question: Where are residents across the city to receive housing support and housing advocacy when living in housing associations, when they don't offer that help and current criteria and charities say you must be “imminently homeless”?

Response: Thank you for your question. Support and housing advocacy will vary depending on what support and advocacy is required, and the individual circumstances. If a person (or household) is homeless or threatened with homelessness, the 'criteria' in

terms of what assistance is provided is set out in legislation (Housing Act 1996; Homelessness Reduction Act 2017), not by charities or local authorities. If a person (or household) believe they are homeless or threatened with homelessness they can email the council via: dutytorefer@brighton-hove.gov.uk. Housing associations are entirely independent from local authorities. If a tenant of a housing association is not satisfied with the service (including support and advocacy) they are receiving from their social landlord, they can raise the issue through that landlord's complaint processes. These are usually advertised on their website.

Supplementary Question: For persons with a home there is no support across the city from housing associations.

Response: The Executive Director - Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities stated that council residents are offered help, however, housing associations vary on this matter. It was not possible for the council to influence housing associations. It was noted that there are charities you may be able to help. The chair stated that they would be happy to talk regarding this matter after the meeting.

c) Deputations: There were none for this meeting.

20 ITEMS REFERRED FROM FULL COUNCIL

20.1 **a) Petitions referred from full Council:** None for this agenda.

b) Deputations referred from full Council: None for this agenda.

21 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

21.1 **a) Petitions:** None for this meeting

b) Written Questions: Four questions from Councillor McLeay: For this agenda Councillor McLeay asked the following questions and agreed, in the interests of time, that only question number 2 be read out in the meeting and the other 3 would receive a response from officers.

1. Theobald House needs attention. Ahead of the May election I was led to understand that there is major investment capital proposed for the block's improvements this year. Is there a plan in place for when these major works will start, and if so, what will be involved, how will residents be involved and how will that apply to residents wanting a playground?

Response: Thank you for your question, your question will receive a response from officers.

2. As evictions are a major contributing factor to homelessness, we should strive to keep a closer eye on the numbers and trend indicators. Can there be a report on evictions in emergency accommodation to a future Housing & New Homes Committee, within the next 6 months?

Response: Thank you for your question. A report on evictions from both emergency and supported accommodation over the past year is being compiled. Once complete, this will be published on the Council's website.

Supplementary question: What steps can be undertaken by the council to stop residents be evicted.

Response: As this is a personal case, the Assistant Director Housing Needs & Supply will talk with the councillor after the meeting.

3. What rent collection rate is budgeted for 23-24 from council tenants and how much rent is this? What were the actual collection rates for 2022-23 and 21-22?

Response: Thank you for your question, your question will receive a response from officers.

4. When will the annual report for 22/23 of the homeless reduction board and homeless reduction operational board be presented to housing committee? Given the abolition of the homeless reduction board which was a key part of the homelessness and rough sleeping strategy agreed in June 2020, will it be reviewed and rewritten to reflect this?

Response: Thank you for your question, your question will receive a response from officers.

c) Members Letters: None for this agenda.

d) Notices of Motion: One for this meeting: Notice of Motion submitted by Labour Group

This committee notes:

1. Private Rent in Brighton & Hove is one of the highest in the country, with an average rent of £1,100 which accounts for 50% of the average monthly income and this causes distress and poverty.
2. The Labour Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan has called on the Conservative Government to grant him powers to freeze rents in the city. The Labour Mayor of Bristol, Marvin Rees, has also called for powers to intervene in the rental market.

This committee will take action to:

3. Request an officer report to be brought to the Housing & New Homes Committee assessing private rental costs in the city and analysing the impact that rental controls would have on affordability and our local housing market, should such powers be granted by an incoming Labour Government.
4. Explore how we can develop a long-term strategy to improve conditions and affordability for private renters in our city.

Supporting evidence:

On 16th March 2022 a motion was passed at Housing committee requesting that the Chief executive Write to the Secretary of State to ask that powers to implement rents controls are given to the city of Brighton and Hove. This has had absolutely no effect on the plight of renters.

This administration will act and take steps to initiate a report to assess private rental costs in the city and analyze the impact of rent controls should such powers be granted by an incoming Labour Government. We will explore how we can develop a long-term strategy to improve conditions and affordability for private renters on our city.

[Why is renting in Brighton so hard? MP and union respond | The Argus SN06760.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/housing/Why_is_renting_in_Brighton_so_hard_MP_and_union_respond_The_Argus_SN06760.pdf)

- 21.1 Councillor Sheard presented the Notice of Motion to the committee and was seconded by Councillor De Oliveira.

Debate

- 21.2 Councillor McLeay considered the costs and officer time relating to the motion.
- 21.3 Councillor Grimshaw considered the motion to be excellent and supportive of residents.
- 21.4 Councillor Meadows considered that private landlords were under extreme pressure and this motion could lead to less properties being available to rent, as landlords are pushed out of the city.
- 21.5 Councillor Nann considered that some landlords may disappear, but builders would stay and work with efficient landlords.
- 21.6 Councillor Czolak considered rent controls to be good with competition in the city the less fortunate are excluded from bidding on properties.
- 21.7 Councillor Fowler noted families are leaving the city as the rents are too high.
- 21.8 Councillor Baghoth noted from Health Watch that Doctors cannot afford to live in the city.

Vote

- 21.9 A vote was taken, and by 9 to 1 against the committee agreed to accept the motion. (Councillor Meadows was against the motion).

22 NEXT PHASE OF NEW HOMES FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS PROGRAMME

- 22.1 The Regeneration Programme Manager (Housing Supply) introduced the report to the committee.

22.2 Following questions the committee were informed that: the affordable housing would be shared ownership and affordable rents in a joint venture project; ward councillors are to be invited to any events and consultations; the right-to-buy spend receipts will be re-laid to Members after the meeting; the Moulsecomb Hub report will hopefully be coming to the next committee meeting; bio-diversity expectations on all schemes will need to be met; tenants at Oakley House are being supported by the council and alternative accommodation is being looked into, whilst the council work with residents.

Vote

22.3 A vote was taken, and by 9 to 1 against (Councillor Meadows) the committee agreed the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

2.1 That the Housing & New Homes Committee:

2.1.1 Authorises the Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities to progress the design development and submission of full plans planning applications for the proposed redevelopments of the Former Hollingbury Library site, Portslade Village Centre, Oakley House, and Swanborough Drive.

23 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING: DISCRETIONARY LICENSING SCHEMES – PROPOSED FEES AND CONDITIONS

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

23.2 Following questions, the committee were informed that: during the process for applying for a new Housing of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) the fitness of the applicant will be looked at; the council are not allowed to make a profit from the licensing system of applications; residents are contacted by the local authority and informed of the online surveys, and are also contacted via postcard drops, posters and social media; meetings are online and in person; the benefits for residents are better managed properties; the schemes are fixed term, and the current scheme has finished and a new one started; application needs to be made to the Secretary of State, and if approved can start in early 2025; actions are taken against landlords that do not react to mould in properties; the cost of the scheme is guaranteed to cover the outlay.

Vote

23.3 A vote was taken, and by 9 to 1 against (Councillor Meadows), the committee agreed the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That Housing & New Homes Committee:

2.1 Approve for consultation the proposed fee structure for a Selective Licensing Scheme and Additional HMO Licensing Scheme.

- 2.2 Approve the updated fee structure for the Mandatory HMO Licensing Scheme.
- 2.3 Note the draft Selective Licensing Scheme conditions and updated Additional HMO Licensing Scheme conditions attached at Appendix 1 and 2.
- 2.4 Note the updated conditions for the Mandatory HMO Scheme attached at Appendix 2.

24 HOUSING, HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATE, REPORT AND ACTION PLAN.

- 24.1 The Assistant Director Housing Management introduced the report to the committee.
- 24.2 Following questions, the committee were informed that: new homes have sprinkler systems and existing homes are being looked at, this was a work in progress; support from ward councillors was welcomed; application 1 is on track for December 2023, however, works are ongoing; the legislation offers some areas of challenge and consequently the preparation is huge, Councillors will be kept informed.

Vote

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

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Housing & New Homes Committee note the Housing health & safety update and Action Plan and that further updates will be brought back for Committee consideration following the outcome of current Government and Regulator consultation.

25 HOUSING MAJOR CAPITAL WORKS FRAMEWORK REVIEW OF PROCUREMENT OPTIONS

- 25.1 The Head of Housing Investment & Asset Management introduced the report to the committee.
- 25.2 Following questions, the committee were informed that: legal and procurement process are followed, and although difficult on larger projects, local businesses are used; a social values condition is included in contracts to encourage contractors to use local workers.

Vote

- 25.3 A vote was taken, and by 9 to 1 against (Councillor Meadows) the committee agreed the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Committee delegates authority to the Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities to procure a Framework Agreement for major works over £300,000 and to enter into call-off contracts for works under that Framework Agreement.
- 2.2 That Committee grants delegated authority to the Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities to procure and award contracts for major works over

£300,000 using other routes to market where the use of a Framework Agreement is not available or appropriate.

26 HOUSING REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE, PROCUREMENT OF CONTRACTORS

26.1 The Assistant Director Housing Management introduced the report to the committee.

26.2 Following questions the committee were informed that: the apprenticeship scheme had been a great success with 16 new starters in September and contractors will be encouraged to take on apprentices; the procurement advisory board no longer sits - however the procurement team are working closely with officers.

Vote

26.3 A vote was taken, and by 9 to 1 against (Councillor Meadows) the committee agreed the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

2.1 That Housing & New Homes Committee delegate authority to the Executive Director, Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities to procure an additional specialist contractor resource to support the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service repairs recovery plan.

2.2 That Housing & New Homes Committee delegate authority to the Executive Director, Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities to procure new and replacement contractors to the existing Contractor Framework as follows:
 Lot A Empty Properties,
 Lot B General Building,
 Lot E Damp and Condensation,
 Lot H Floor Fitting.

27 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL

27.1 There were no items referred to full council.

28 PART TWO

29 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

29.1 There were no Part Two items on the agenda.

The meeting concluded at 5.50pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

