

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

4.00pm 29 FEBRUARY 2012

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Wakefield (Cabinet Member)

Also in attendance: Councillor Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson - Conservative) and Farrow (Opposition Spokesperson - Labour & Co-op)

PART ONE

74. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

74(a) Declarations of Interests

74.1 There were none.

74(b) Exclusion of Press and Public

74.2 In accordance with section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the Act"), the Cabinet Member considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during an item of business on the grounds that it was likely, in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press and public were present during that item, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information (as defined in section 100A(3) of the Act) or exempt information (as defined in section 100I(1) of the Act).

74.3 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting during consideration of any items on the agenda.

75. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

75.1 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 62.5 which related to the numbers of empty properties outside of the council's ownership. He asked for an updated position. The Head of Housing Strategy and Development and Private Sector Housing replied that 150 empty homes were being brought back into use every year. He would forward a written update on the latest position to councillors.

75.2 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 62.1 – Ainsworth House Update. He asked if there was a timescale for completion. The Head of Housing Strategy and

Development and Private Sector Housing replied that there was a 54 week timescale for completion (contracted period).

- 75.3 Councillor Farrow asked for an update on paragraphs 62.7 and 62.8 – Empty properties – HCA/Co-op bid. The Head of Housing Strategy and Development and Private Sector Housing replied that the Homes and Community Agency had made provision for a 1.3 bid to fund a programme over three years. The council was currently supporting a Brighton and Hove Community Co-op bid which was due in early March. Councillor Farrow stated that other councillors would like to know the progress on this matter. The Cabinet Member stated that information could be sent to councillors.
- 75.4 Councillor Farrow asked for an update on the current position relating to paragraphs 71.4 and 71.5 (Procurement of Housing & Adult Social Care Adaptations Framework Agreement). Meanwhile, he was due to have a meeting with the Head of Property & Investment to discuss this issue.
- 75.5 The Cabinet Member stated that she was committed to equalities and was concerned at the current situation whereby someone with limited mobility could have a new kitchen followed by a new bathroom. However if they had had their bathroom adapted first there was some doubt about whether they could have a new kitchen. This matter was being investigated and a report would be brought back to a future meeting.
- 75.6 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 72.4 and 72.5 – (Additional Licensing for HMO Consultation & Amendment of Standards for Licensed HMO's). He asked if there were examples of revised literature. The Head of Housing Strategy and Development and Private Sector Housing replied that there was an amended questionnaire and draft standard. This could be sent to all members.
- 75.7 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting held on 18 January 2012 be agreed and signed by the Cabinet Member.

76. CABINET MEMBER'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 76.1 The Chair reported that the Innovation Group was ongoing and that she had been attending tenant meetings. She had recently opened a new lift at Tyson Place. The lift programme was being rolled out very quickly.

77. ITEMS RESERVED FOR DISCUSSION

- 77.1 **RESOLVED** – That all items be reserved for discussion.

78. PETITIONS

E-Petition – Hanover/Elm Grove & Student Housing

- 78.1 The Cabinet Member considered the following e-petition from Ms Stephanie Watson. The e-petition was signed by 30 people. Ms Watson was not in attendance at the meeting.

“We the undersigned petition the council to Produce an effective policy that all multiple occupancy landlords and letting agents will have licences to rent to students withdrawn if they do not use a letting contract that prohibits unsocial disturbance (including noise and street rubbish) of other residents in a residential area.

I have lived in Hanover for 9 years and been disturbed each year by a multiple occupancy building close by rented to students. The letting agency say that their hands are tied and the council will only take action if there is a record of complaints/noise measurement etc. This is not acceptable when residents are paying council tax. The council and universities should be working together on this issue and local residents should be given the right to live their lives without this form of disturbance and students should be given better contact conditions/building conditions/fair rent from letting agencies.”

78.2 The Cabinet Member responded as follows:

“We work closely with both Universities as part of our Student Housing Strategy.

This has been developed in response to issues such as those raised by residents of Hanover & Elm Grove and other wards where we have identified the highest concentrations of multi occupied homes, including those occupied by students.

We welcome the many benefits the universities and student population bring to the City.

We support private sector landlords to supply high quality private rented accommodation, including homes occupied by students.

However, we are seeking a more strategic approach to the supply and management of student housing in the city.

In particular, we are:

- Currently consulting on proposals to extend licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) with the aim of improving the standards and management of multi-occupied homes, for the benefit of occupiers and neighbourhoods
- Considering the option of introducing an Article 4 Planning direction to require Planning permission for conversion of family homes into multi-occupied homes
- Promoting the appropriate development of new purpose built student accommodation at suitable locations within the City

We are also working jointly with both universities on:

- Council & Universities head leasing schemes, our social lettings agency approach, where the Council or University lease and manage more homes
- A multi-disciplinary approach to anti-social behaviour, with both Sussex & Brighton University community liaison teams

Additional licensing of multi-occupied homes

We currently licence large multi-occupied homes across the City.

We are currently consulting on proposals to extend licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) with the aim of improving the standards and management of smaller multi-occupied homes, including those occupied by students.

The proposed scheme would cover smaller HMOs of two or more storeys and three or more occupiers in the wards of Hanover & Elm Grove, Moulsecoomb & Bevendean and St Peters & North Laine, Hollingdean & Stanmer and Queen's Park.

The proposed scheme would require landlords / lettings agents to:

- Meet appropriate personal and professional standards of conduct
- Ensure poorer buildings meet minimum health and safety standards including fire and electrical safety
- Exercise appropriate management and supervision of the buildings to help reduce any adverse impact of the HMO on the neighbourhood.
- Meet current council standards for licensable HMOs

We propose to include your petition as part of our consultation process.

We would also invite petition signatories to complete our consultation portal questionnaire which you can access via the Council website.

<http://consult.brighton-hove.gov.uk/portal/bhcc/housing/hmo/proposed-additional-licensing-hmos>

Our consultation on additional licensing of HMOs ends on 31 March 2012. Following this a report will be brought back to Housing Cabinet for decision.

- 78.3 Councillor Farrow stated that the petition raised certain worries across the city. Many students were worried that when changes were introduced the council would have powers to close student housing and that if landlords had to make improvements they would pass on costs to students.
- 78.4 The Chair replied that the worries outlined by Councillor Farrow were balanced by concerns about standards/conditions. These matters were all being taken into consideration. A report would be submitted to Cabinet on Article 4 directions. The legal situation would be fully set out in the report.
- 78.5 Councillor Farrow stated that all councillors needed a further briefing as it was a crucial matter. He considered that councillors needed the information before the report went to Cabinet.
- 78.6 The Chair stated that information could be sent to all ward councillors across the city.
- 78.7 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to the specific point in the petition which stated that "the letting agency say that their hands are tied and that the council will only take action

if there is a record of complaints/noise measurement etc.” He asked how many cases of disturbance were happening in the Hanover Ward and wondered if the situation had been over emphasised. He stressed that there were noise patrols that registered levels of noise.

78.8 The Chair replied that officers could find out this information. She asked officers to prepare a report on the number of incidence of noise disturbance.

78.9 **RESOLVED** – That the petition be noted.

79. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

79.1 There were none.

80. DEPUTATIONS

80.1 There were none.

81. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

81.1 There were none.

82. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

82.1 There were none.

83. NOTICES OF MOTIONS

83.1 There were none.

84. MINUTES OF THE ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

84.1 The Cabinet Member considered the minutes of the Adult Social Care & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on the 12 January 2012.

84.2 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes be noted.

85. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

85.1 The Cabinet Member considered the minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Committee meetings held on the 19 December 2011 and the 6 February 2012.

85.2 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 63.3 of the minutes of 19 December 2011. He had not yet received a report on asbestos removal. The Chair replied that this matter would be investigated.

85.3 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 67.1 of the minutes of 6 February 2012. This stated that a final report of the Innovation Group would be presented on 21 March 2012.

He was not aware that a notice of that meeting had been sent out. He believed councillors should be invited to the meeting.

85.4 The Chair said she would chase this matter.

85.5 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 74.7 in relation to Decent Homes. He had not yet received the A4 paper clearly setting out the main points of the policy.

85.6 The Chair stated that the paper would be prepared.

85.7 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes be noted.

86. LETTING AGENTS ACCREDITATION SCHEME

86.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which sought a general authority for the Strategic Director to develop and launch a Letting Agent's Accreditation scheme in the city in partnership with local letting agents which would seek to recognise and reward letting agents who consistently offered a high standard of service to their tenants.

86.2 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked how officers could ensure that letting agents submitted to the council's ethics. The Acquisitions & Accreditation Manager explained that a Private Sector Development Officer would seek reconciliation. The agreement to allow tenants surveys could not be carried out without the tenant's permission.

86.3 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to the section on Managing Repairs. He was worried that some of these standards were extremely stringent. He asked how they would be monitored. The Acquisitions & Accreditation Manager explained that the standard for repairs had been agreed by agents. The standards would be monitored by feedback. A great deal would be done on landlord trust.

86.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to the section on the tenancy agreement fee. He asked if this there would be a written document. The Acquisitions & Accreditation Manager explained that all fees should be transparent in marketing. Councillor Peltzer Dunn stated that marketing should be printed.

86.5 The Acquisitions & Accreditation Manager explained that any fees would be stated in writing. The holding fee was slightly different from a deposit. It was a down payment.

86.6 The Chair stated that the local accreditation scheme would be very reassuring to parents of students coming to the city.

86.7 **RESOLVED** – Having considered the information and the reasons set out in the report, the Cabinet Member made the following decisions

(1) That the creation and launch of the Letting Agents Accreditation Scheme be approved.

(2) That authority be delegated to the Strategic Director, Place to confirm the accredited status of Lettings Agents, upon achievement of the criteria for accreditation.

The meeting concluded at 4.50pm

Signed

Cabinet Member

Dated this

day of

