

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 March 2022

5.30 - 7.54 pm

Present: Councillors Bird (Chair), Sheil (Vice-Chair), Bennett, Dalzell, Gawthrop Wood, Gilderdale, Lee, Pounds and Robertson

Councillor Pounds left the meeting before the vote on 22/19/HSC

Executive Councillor: Todd-Jones (Executive Councillor for Housing)

Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives: Diana Minns (Vice Chair), Lulu Agate, Christabella Amiteye, Diane Best, Mandy Powell-Hardy and Colin Stevens

Officers present:

Director of Enterprise and Sustainable Development: Fiona Bryant

Director of Neighbourhoods and Communities: Jane Wilson

Head of Housing: David Greening

Committee Manager: Sarah Steed

Meeting Producer: Boris Herzog

Officers in attendance virtually:

Assistant Head of Finance and Business Manager: Julia Hovells

Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets: Lynn Thomas

Head of Housing Development Agency: Claire Flowers

Residential Team Manager, Environmental Services: Claire Adelizzi

Property Compliance and Risk Manager: Renier Barnard

Housing Strategy Manager: Helen Reed

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**22/13/HSC Apologies**

No apologies were received.

22/14/HSC Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

22/15/HSC Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair

22/16/HSC Public Questions

A member of the public submitted a question, but it was received outside of the registration period. A response would be provided outside of the meeting.

22/17/HSC Estates & Facilities Compliance Data**Matter for Decision**

The report provided an update on the compliance related activities delivered within the Estates & Facilities Team, including a summary on gas servicing, electrical testing, and fire safety work.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the Council's current position regarding compliance, and the progress of ongoing associated works

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Property Compliance and Risk Manager.

The Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. The low compliance on electrical certification was in part due to the change in time frames, the council had been working on a 10-year programme and had recently changed to a 5-year programme. There had also been considerable issues gaining access to properties which had been detailed in previous reports. Officers were looking to overcome access issues by combining gas and electrical checks as the council achieved better access to properties through gas servicing checks.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

22/18/HSC HRA Revenue Carry Forwards 2021/22**Matter for Decision**

The report presented details of anticipated variances from budgets, where resources are requested to be carried forward into the 2022/23 financial year in order to undertake or complete activities anticipated to have taken place in 2021/22.

The position in relation to rephrasing of any investment as part of the Housing Capital Investment Plan would be reported to Housing Scrutiny Committee in the June 2022 committee cycle, alongside final revenue carry forward requests.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Agreed the provisional carry forward requests, totalling £1,416,280 as detailed in the revised Appendix A, subject to the final outturn position.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Assistant Head of Finance and Business Manager.

The Assistant Head of Finance and Business Manager and the Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. In a number of cases the carry forwards were to complete work which had already begun under an existing contract where there was a fixed price within the contract to complete the work. Any areas where prices weren't fixed were included in the budget process for 2022/23. This included an additional amount for inflation which wasn't allocated out to individual expenditure heads to allow this to be allocated in-year to any areas which were subject to higher than anticipated levels of inflation. Since this provision was made in January, inflation has continued to

increase. Resource would be allocated accordingly to any areas where financial pressure occurred. This would be reviewed with the budget before the Mid-Year Financial Strategy was brought to Committee in September.

- ii. The heat and smoke detector installation delays weren't due to officer/contractor capacity but was due to the ability of the council to gain access to properties. Officers were exploring other ways to gain access to properties, which included for example seeing if works could be undertaken at the same time as gas servicing checks.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

22/19/HSC Private Sector Housing Report

Matter for Decision

The report outlined:

- The structure of the Council's Residential Team, Environmental Health, Environmental Services.
- The work of the Residential Team in relation to improvement of private sector rented homes within the City in Quarter 1 – Quarter 3 2021/22 for which complete data was available.
- The Teams Operational Plan for 2022/23 in relation to private rented sector homes within the Environmental Health Operational Plan.
- Matters on the horizon in relation to the private rented sector for 2022 / 23 and beyond including Government reform.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the contents of the report, which assessed progress on the work detailed in the report in time for any new bids to be submitted in the budget for the following year.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Residential Team Manager, Environmental Services.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- i. Drew the committee's attention to paragraphs 3.20-3.21 of the officer's report. Noted a reduction in the number of complaints in 2020 due to the pandemic but noted that an increase in the number of complaints was encouraging as it showed residents were beginning to feel confident about reporting complaints and that covid secure visits could now be made. Asked why the number of complaints had increased particularly in Petersfield, Queen Edith's, Coleridge, and West Chesterton wards.
- ii. Noted the private rented sector had grown by 40% based on the 2011 census data. Noted some private rented properties in Cambridge were not well looked after and that the council would take action where required. Asked for the report to contain a full year's worth of information and asked to see the last 4 years' worth of data, including housing complaints, breakdown of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and data on enforcement. Asked what 'HMO specific' complaints were.
- iii. Asked with reference to recommendation D what targeted / pro-active work around HMOs looked like. Asked what anti-social behaviour from tenants referred to. Asked whether tenants could be included in this work. Asked if there could be a webpage explaining tenants' rights if they did not feel that they were living in safe accommodation. Noted that it was mostly commercial landlords who offered short term lets and as the number of short term let accommodation increased this reduced the housing stock available.
- iv. Asked if the 2011 or 2021 census data would detail whether people lived in social rented accommodation or private rented accommodation.
- v. Asked if the housing complaints detailed on page 61 of the agenda were raised by tenants or if some were raised by neighbours or other people in the community. Noted that some tenants may be cautious about raising concerns / issues with the council and often relied on neighbours or others within the community to bring complaints to the council's attention so that they did not get any reprisal from the landlord or the managing agent.
- vi. Noted that student accommodation did not suit all students for example those undertaking teacher training courses / nurses, as these students may not be in Cambridge for the whole year. Some of these students had ended up using Air BnBs, which was an insecure type of

accommodation. Expressed concerns regarding short-term letting accommodation.

- vii. Was keen to see the 2021 census data built into any follow up report and commented that the September Housing Scrutiny Committee may allow time for officers to assess this information and formulate any budget bids to follow up actions as appropriate.

The Residential Team Manager, Environmental Services and the Housing Strategy Manager. said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Believed the reduction in the number of complaints about private sector housing was due to the hesitancy to make complaints during the pandemic. Even when the eviction ban was in place, felt residents were still uncertain about making complaints owing to the perceived need for an inspection of the property and / or any reprisals from landlords. Petersfield, Queens Edith's, Coleridge and West Chesterton wards had a high percentage of student housing which tended to be multiple occupied accommodation. When tenancies changed (when students moved on) there tended to be a heightened number of complaints.
- ii. Would discuss with the Executive Councillor the best way to provide the additional data requested. HMO specific complaints were complaints relating to a landlord's failure to comply with statutory requirements for HMOs including fire precautions and associated management requirement for these properties.
- iii. Had undertaken data mapping work in conjunction with Revenue and Benefits colleagues to identify where suspected HMOs were across the city. The pro-active work would involve inspecting un-licensed licensable HMO properties. A review of the information available for tenants on the council's website could be undertaken, this has been reviewed during the pandemic in-line with associated changes to complaint investigation procedure. The Landlord Steering Group had recently been resurrected but it could be investigated to see if private sector tenant representatives could be represented at this group. Acknowledged short term lettings was a national issue. Noted that local authorities in Scotland had been asked to administer a short term let licensing scheme. Would have to wait and see whether England introduced a similar scheme in response to private sector housing reform and the Levelling Up White Paper.
- iv. Census data was broken down by housing tenure and included whether a property was a council property, a housing association property, shared ownership or if it was privately owned.
- v. Generally complaints were made by tenants but issues could also be raised by neighbours or support workers.

- vi. Her team works closely with the planning enforcement team with regards to short term let accommodation.

The Executive Councillor thanked the officer for their report and noted that the number of comments which had been made showed how seriously the committee took the issue. Agreed that an updated report would be brought back to the committee in the future.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

22/20/HSC Update on New Build Council Housing Delivery

Matter for Decision

The report provided an update on the housing development programme.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the continued progress on the delivery of the approved housing programme.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Head of the Housing Development Agency.

The Head of the Housing Development Agency said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. The housing development programme was a 10-year programme to deliver 1000 homes. The Council had been fortunate to secure £70 million of funding from the Combined Authority for the previous '500

- council homes' programme. Would report back on further discussions she had with Homes England regarding further funding bids.
- ii. A planning application for housing development had been granted at Fen Road. This was one of the schemes Homes England grant funding had been sought for. If successful, the council hoped to begin the development in the summer. An assessment of the need for accessible homes had been undertaken, larger accessible homes were required. Accessible homes have generally be provided as 1-2 bed properties.
 - iii. The Executive Councillor had met with the organisation 'It Takes a City' to discuss the provision of more modular homes. It was hoped that more modular homes could be provided once appropriate land had been identified.
 - iv. Properties built through the council's housing development programme were built to M42 standard which meant that they could be adapted in the future. Accessible properties tended to be 10metres larger and therefore cost more to build. Discussions about suitable locations for modular homes took place with Ward Councillors. Welcomed a visit with councillors around the new developments.
 - v. New housing development sites were assessed through the planning process in accordance with the Housing Sustainable Design Guide. This included an assessment regarding the use of water.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

22/21/HSC First Homes Interim Statement

Matter for Decision

First Homes is a new form of affordable home ownership aimed at first time buyers. National Guidance states that 25% of all new affordable housing provided as developer contributions on section 106 sites should be provided as First Homes (with a few exceptions). Other requirements also apply although local authorities are allowed some limited flexibilities in how they bring First Homes forward.

This report recommends how the national policy should be implemented locally through a proposed First Homes Interim Position Statement for Greater Cambridge which is attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved the First Homes Interim Position Statement at Appendix 1 to the officer's report, in particular that:
 - a. The preferred split between affordable housing tenures will be: 25% First Homes; 5% shared ownership or other intermediate tenures; and 70% social/affordable rent.
 - b. The price cap for a First Home, once the discount has been applied, will be £250,000 in line with the maximum cap allowed within national guidance.
 - c. The discount applied to a First Home will be 30% of market value in line with the minimum discount allowed within the national guidance.
 - d. The household income cap for eligible applicants for First Homes will be up to £80,000 in line with the maximum income allowed with in the national guidance.
 - e. For developments which cross the boundary into South Cambridgeshire, and/or where joint nominations on the affordable homes have been agreed, any purchaser of a First Home will need to have a local connection to either Cambridge City or South Cambridgeshire District Council; this will apply for the first three months of marketing in line with national guidance.
 - f. For developments within Cambridge City which do not cross the boundary into South Cambridge or where no joint nominations on the affordable housing have been agreed, any purchaser of a First Home will need to have a local connection to Cambridge City. This will apply for the first three months of marketing in line with national guidance.
 - g. The First Homes local connection criteria to be applied will be as detailed in paragraphs 4.21 to 4.27 of the First Homes Interim Position Statement shown at Appendix 1 to this report.
 - h. No specific priority will be given to 'key workers' but the council may work with developers and employer organisations to ensure that marketing is targeted towards particular employers where appropriate.
 - i. Where developers wish to bring forward a First Homes exception site in Cambridge City they will need to demonstrate that the availability of First Homes or other affordable home ownership

tenures is insufficient within Cambridge City to cater for the needs of first-time buyers.

- j. The First Homes Interim Position Statement at Appendix 1 to this report will only be used when a development proposal includes reference to First Homes as part of affordable housing provision. If a development proposal does not refer to First Homes, the affordable housing split detailed in Annexe 5 of the Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy 2019-2023 (or successor document) will apply.
- k. Any subsequent minor amendments and editing changes to the First Homes Interim Position Statement and/or the First Homes Issues & Options paper, that do not materially affect the content, be delegated to the Director of Housing & Communities in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing, the Executive Councillor for Planning and relevant Chairs and Spokes.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Housing Strategy Manager.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- i. Expressed concerns with the concept of 'First Homes' and noted that in Appendix 1 paragraph 4.13 that a household would need an income of £55,000 per year to be able to afford a First Home in Cambridge and that average salaries are much lower than that. Queried how many people would be able to benefit from this new scheme.
- ii. Supported comments made in i. above. Felt the way in which Central Government had developed the scheme that it may do more harm than good. Queried recommendation h which stated that no specific priority would be given to key workers. Noted that the Mayor in London had created a definition for key workers. Asked if any data had been gathered regarding housing need in certain key areas / jobs. Would welcome a definition of 'key worker' going forward.

The Housing Strategy Manager said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Noted in relation to the query regarding recommendation h that Addenbrookes had undertaken a piece of work looking at gaps in housing need for their workers. Officers had also had discussions with Cambridgeshire County Council about their workers; they had said that they would provide evidence around housing need and the impact on their services but this had not been provided to date.

The Executive Councillor drew attention to a letter which had been sent to Michael Gove on pages 125-130 of the agenda which set out the council's concerns regarding First Homes.

The Committee resolved by 6 votes to 0 to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

The meeting ended at 7.54 pm

CHAIR