

**HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

14 March 2023

5.30 - 7.43 pm

**Present:** Councillors Thittala Varkey (Chair), S. Baigent, Holloway, Howard, Lee, Porrer, Pounds and Carling

Councillor S.Baigent joined the meeting from item 23/19/HSC  
Councillor Pounds left the meeting before the vote on item 23/20/HSC

**Executive Councillor:** Best (Leaseholder Representative), Powell-Hardy (Tenant Representative), Minns (Tenant Representative) and Bird (Executive Councillor for Housing)

**Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives:** Diana Minns (Vice Chair), Diane Best, Mandy Powell-Hardy

**Officers:**

Director of Enterprise and Sustainable Development: Fiona Bryant

Director of Neighbourhoods and Communities: Jane Wilson

Head of Housing Development Agency: Claire Flowers

Senior Housing Development Manager: Jim Pollard

Committee Manager: Sarah Steed

Meeting Producer: Boris Herzog

**Officer present virtually:**

Assistant Head of Finance and Business Manager: Julia Hovells

Head of Housing: David Greening

Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets: Lynn Bradley

Housing Services Manager: James McWilliams

Property Compliance and Risk Manager: Renier Barnard

**FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL****23/13/HSC Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillor Gawthrop Wood and Councillor Carling attended as alternate.

Apologies were also received from Tenant Representatives Lulu Agate, Colin Stevens and Christabella Amiteye.

**23/14/HSC Declarations of Interest**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Interest</b>
Councillor Porrer	23/20/HSC	Personal: The subject matter of the report fell within their Ward and was also a member of the Planning Committee. Discretion unfettered.
Councillor Lee	23/19/HSC	Personal: The subject matter of the report fell within their Ward.
Councillor Howard	23/20/HSC	Personal: Was a member of the Planning Committee. Discretion unfettered.

### **23/15/HSC Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **23/16/HSC Public Questions**

#### Question 1

- i. Was a resident of Ekin Road and wanted to speak to agenda item 9 – Update on New Build Council Housing Delivery.
- ii. Was speaking on behalf of ‘Save Ekin Road’ community group which had over 60 members.
- iii. ‘Save Ekin Road’:
  - a. Continued to oppose any proposals to demolish their estate.
  - b. Wanted the council to investigate and pursue an upgrade and refurbishment plan.
  - c. Felt that limited / no progress or update had been provided by the council since September 2022.
  - d. Noted the Hanover and Princess Court report which was also on the agenda had a completion timeframe of 4 years. Felt the Ekin Road project may take the same amount of time or longer.
  - e. Asked the council to provide a timeline to residents including consultation steps.
  - f. Felt the project was affecting the life stability and mental health of the residents.

The Director of Enterprise and Sustainable Development responded:

- i. Appreciated for schemes like this that it created uncertainty for residents, but the council did its best to keep residents informed. A Residents Liaison Group had been set up and officers had responded to feedback submitted by residents both at the Liaison Group meeting and from other engagement.
- ii. At the Residents Liaison Group in December 2022, Officers provided an indicative timeline for progression of the project.
- iii. Officers had spent time addressing the immediate needs of residents (including repairs and other issues) since the Liaison Group meeting in December 2022.
- iv. Advised that the Residents Liaison Group would meet quarterly, and it was unlikely that much information could be provided to residents in between meetings. Minutes of the meetings were available on the council's website.
- v. Had responded to email communication from the public speaker and noted that a significant number of points had been raised.
- vi. Noted that a further Residents Liaison Group meeting was due to take place in 2 days' time. The timeline for the project would be discussed at that meeting, including the impact on the timeline of the various options being considered for Ekin Road.

#### Supplementary question

- i. Asked for a high level timeline for the project as residents were worried and wanted to be able to plan their lives and have a level of certainty about the proposals.

The Executive Councillor reassured the public speaker that they would be kept informed about the progress of the matter and that residents should continue to live their lives as no decision had been taken on the project yet. The project was still in the early stages and no detailed design had been produced.

#### Question 2

- i. In relation to the Hanover and Princess Court report, was a resident leaseholder for thirty years.
- ii. Did not question the Council's valuation on their home but felt it was nothing near other neighbouring properties off the estate.

- iii. Hoped to exercise the right to return, would need a home to be genuinely affordable.
- iv. As a pensioner could not raise a new mortgage or take on a costly part-buy, part-rent option.
- v. Asked if the committee would approve compulsory purchase to remove leaseholders.

The Senior Development Manager responded:

- i. Officers had been working closely with residents of Hanover and Princess Court and had had contact with 114 / 127 residents.
- ii. Recommendations were detailed in a report which was due to be considered by the Committee later that evening. If the recommendations were approved there was the potential for compulsory purchase of flats within the development. The process would be carried out in accordance with the adopted Housing Regeneration Policy.
- iii. Did intend to retain the right to return, and the resident was right to raise the issue of affordability. Discussions with residents would take place on a case-by-case basis.

### **23/17/HSC E&F Compliance Update**

This item was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice-Chair Tenant Representative).

#### **Matter for Decision**

The report provides 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 progress of the service review and compliance related work detailed within the report.
- ii. Noted the status of the compliance dashboard with reference to Electrical Inspection Condition Reports.

#### **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 Property Compliance and Risk Manager and the Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. With reference to the table in paragraph 3.2 of the report advised that compliance with fire safety regulations required a fire risk assessment to be carried out. Actions arising from risk assessments would be subject to a programme of works. Regular meetings with Heads of Service took place to discuss these.
- ii. Confirmed that a letter was proposed to be sent to neighbouring properties where damp, mould and condensation (DMC) had been identified to raise awareness about DMC. The proposed wording for the letters would be circulated for comment to tenant / leaseholder representatives as well as councillors on the Housing Scrutiny Committee.
- iii. If a tenant reported a leak in their property, this would be responded to as an urgent repair. If the leak also caused DMC but this wasn't reported by the tenant, this should be picked up by the operative when they undertook their visit and would be passed to the Condensation Team to respond to.
- iv. Agreed to check the script provided to the Customer Services Team to see if there was a prompt / question about DMC when a leak was reported to try to join up and improve the service provided to tenants.
- v. Work undertaken on DMC was being met within existing resources. If it was found that this work could not be undertaken within existing resources, the matter would be discussed with the Executive Councillor and a budget bid would need to be made.

The Committee resolved by 9 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.

**23/18/HSC HRA Provisional Carry Forwards 2022/23**

This item was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice-Chair Tenant Representative).

### **Matter for Decision**

The report presented details of anticipated variances from budgets, where resources were requested to be carried forward into the 2023/24 financial year in order to undertake or complete activities anticipated to have taken place in 2022/23.

### **Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Agreed the provisional carry forward requests, totalling £440,840 as detailed in 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 Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets said the following in response to a Member's question:

- i. The delay with the Water Conservation Project was due to a member of staff leaving and a procurement exercise being carried out. The request to carry forward funding was to allow the project to conclude. The Net Zero Retrofit Project Officer was now undertaking the work with consultants. An interim report was expected at Easter with a final report two weeks later. It was hoped that water conservation trialling measures would be started in May.

The Committee resolved by 10 votes to 0 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.

### **23/19/HSC Report on Proposal to deliver modular (POD) Housing**

This item was chaired by Councillor Thittala Varkey (Chair).

### **Matter for Decision**

The report sought approval for the delivery of a further 4 pod homes at an identified site on Hills Avenue, Queen Edith Ward, to be delivered by the Council in partnership with It Takes A City (“ITAC”).

### **Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Approved the use of the land at the corner of Hills Avenue and Baldock Way as a site for delivery of modular (pod) housing to serve former rough sleepers.
- ii. Approved that a budget of £25,000 be allocated out of the approved new build housing budget to support the delivery of the Hills Avenue Pod housing scheme.
- iii. Delegated authority to the Head of Property Services in consultation with the Assistant Head of Finance to approve the terms of lease to a third-party charitable organisation.

### **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 Housing Development Agency.

The Housing Services Manager (Housing Advice), Head of Housing and Programme Manager said the following in response to Members’ questions:

- i. Modular housing was meant to provide a landing stage for people who found themselves homeless. It was anticipated that this type of housing may be used for up to a 2-year period; it was not intended to provide a permanent home. Some people could stay longer as each case was determined on a person’s individual circumstances.
- ii. The selection process for modular housing was undertaken by a Panel comprising Council officers and representatives from Jimmy’s and It Takes a City.
- iii. Each person allocated a modular home would have their own dedicated support worker.
- iv. Noted that the use of the site as a community garden was on a short-term basis and the site had been ear marked for development. Would try

and off-set biodiversity net gain on adjacent sites and retain trees on the site as far as this was possible.

- v. There were no plans for a sexually segregated modular home site.
- vi. Acknowledged that modular housing was movable if this became necessary or desirable in the future.
- vii. Noted that an update on this project could be included within a future Housing First report.

The Committee unanimously resolved 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.

### **23/20/HSC Update on Hanover and Princess Courts Options Appraisal**

This item was chaired by Councillor Thittala Varkey (Chair).

#### **Matter for Decision**

The report presented the outcome of the options appraisal that had been carried out in accordance with the decision taken at Housing Scrutiny Committee in January 2022 on the future of Hanover Court and Princess Court.

#### **Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Approved the redevelopment of Hanover Court and Princess Court (Option 4 in the Options Analysis).
- ii. Approved that delegated authority be given to the Executive Councillor for Housing in conjunction with the Strategic Director to enable the site to be developed through Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP), subject to a value for money assessment to be carried out on behalf of the Council. Development would be through the transfer of the site to CIP and the purchase of completed affordable homes from CIP.
- iii. Delegated Authority to the Strategic Director acting on behalf of the Council as the landowner to enter into and complete any planning obligation under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 which is required by the Council in its capacity as the local planning authority, pursuant to the planning application for the development of the site.

- iv. Authorised the Strategic Director in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing, Chair and Spokes to approve variations to the affordable housing units to be purchased including the number of units and mix of property types, sizes and tenure.
- v. Delegated authority to the Strategic Director to commence Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) proceedings on leasehold properties to be demolished to enable the development, should these be required.
- vi. Delegated authority to the Strategic Director to serve initial Demolition Notices under the Housing Act 1985.

### **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 Housing Development Agency.

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

- i. There were 82 tenants at the start of the process and 55 tenants had moved or were in the process of moving. It was anticipated that the remaining tenants may need further help and support to move. There were 45 leaseholders and 22 were in the process of moving. Half of the leaseholders who remained were resident leaseholders.
- ii. Subject to discussions with the Planning Department, expected there to be between 40-60% provision of affordable housing on site.
- iii. The timeframe within the Regeneration Policy for commencing compulsory purchase proceedings was 3 months from the date of the decision however each case would be considered on its own merits.

Councillor Porrer requested an amendment to recommendation 2.4 to include the Chair and Spokes as part of the consultation (additional text underlined).

Authorise the Strategic Director in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing, Chair and Spokes to approve variations to the affordable housing units to be purchased including the number of units and mix of property types, sizes and tenure.

The amendment was agreed unanimously.

The Committee resolved by 7 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.

### **23/21/HSC Update on New Build Council Housing Delivery**

This item was chaired by Councillor Thittala Varkey (Chair).

#### **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.
- ii. Noted the inclusion into the new build delivery programme of housing to serve the needs of Afghan and Ukrainian Refugees, part funded through DLUHC, as per the out of cycle decision approved by the executive council in February 2023.

#### **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 Housing Development Agency.

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

- i. In response to a query regarding the Mill Road development noted that there was a 12-month defect rectification period and the properties would also benefit from a 12 year NHBC guarantee.
- ii. In response to a query about the St Thomas Road scheme advised that the responses from the consultation were being reviewed and

discussions were taking place with Planning Officers about Open Space requirements and how this land could be adapted and still delivered as a net zero carbon scheme.

The Committee unanimously resolved 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 Committee asked to record their thanks and best wishes to Claire Flowers, Head of Housing Development Agency and James McWilliams, Housing Services Manager (Housing Advice) who were leaving the authority and taking on new positions elsewhere.

The meeting ended at 7.43 pm

**CHAIR**