

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 June 2020
5.30 - 8.45 pm

Present: Councillors Todd-Jones (Chair), Bird (Vice-Chair), Hadley, Sheil, Thittala, McGerty, Martinelli and Porrer

Executive Councillor: Johnson (Executive Councillor for Housing)

Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives: Diane Best (Vice Chair), Lulu Agate, Christabella Amiteye, Kay Harris, Diana Minns

Officers:

Strategic Director: Suzanne Hemingway

Assistant Head of Finance and Business Manager: Julia Hovells

Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets: Lynn Thomas

Project Officer (Private Rented Sector): Philip Winter

Head of Housing Development: Claire Flowers

Committee Manager: Toni Birkin

Others Present:

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

20/15/HSC Apologies

Apologies were received from tenant representative Jean-Louis Ayivor.

20/16/HSC Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

20/17/HSC Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the 15th January 2020 were agreed and signed as a correct record subject to the addition of Lynn Thomas, Head of Housing and Will Barfield, Asset Manager.

Oral Presentation on the role for the Leaseholder and Tenant Representatives role

Diana Minns (Tenant Representative) Vice Chair gave the Committee an overview of the role and responsibility of the Tenant and Leaseholder representatives.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their hard work and commitment to the role.

Kay Harris was retiring from the role and not seeking re-election. The Chair and Senior Officers thanked her for her dedication and involvement with the various iteration of Housing Scrutiny and Tenant Involvement over a period of over 35 years.

Jean-Louis Ayivor, another resident representative, was also standing down. The Chair expressed thanks to Jean-Louis for the experience he had brought to the committee and the contribution he had made to committee discussions.

Thanks were also expressed to Committee Manager Toni Birkin who is retiring from the Council.

20/18/HSC Appointment of Vice-Chair (Tenant/Leaseholder Rep) for 2020/21

The tenants and leaseholders representatives agreed to defer the election of a new Vice Chair until the following meeting when the new tenant representatives were in post.

20/19/HSC Public Questions

There were no public questions.

20/20/HSC Housing Revenue Account Revenue and Capital Outrun, Carry Forwards and Significant Variances

Item chaired by Diana Minns, Vice Chair / Tenant Representative.

Recommendation 2a (decision i) was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair / Tenant Representative) and recommendations 2b (decision ii) was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones.

Matter for Decision

The report presented, for the Housing Revenue Account:

- i. A summary of actual income and expenditure compared to the final budget for 2019/20 (outturn position)
- ii. Revenue and capital budget variances with explanations
- iii. Specific requests to carry forward funding available from both revenue and capital budget underspends into 2020/21.
- iv. A summary of housing debt which was written off during 2019/20.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

Under Part 1 of the Housing Scrutiny Committee Agenda, the Executive Councillor Housing Scrutiny Committee:

- i. Approved carry forward requests totalling £1,431,300 in revenue funding from 2019/20 into 2020/21, as detailed in Appendix C of the Officer's report.
- ii. Approved a delegation to the Head of Finance to make the necessary changes to the 2020/21 base budgets to remove the impact of inflation in all non-pay and non-contractual revenue budgets.

Under Part 2 of the Housing Scrutiny Committee Agenda, the Executive Councillor for Housing agreed to recommend to Council:

- iii. Approved carry forward requests of £6,560,000 in HRA and General Fund Housing capital budgets and associated resources from 2019/20 into 2020/21 and beyond to fund re-phased net capital spending, as detailed in Appendix D of the Officer's report and the associated notes to the appendix.

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 Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- i. Expressed disappointment at the failure to deliver the Decent Homes Standards to all tenants and the associated underspend.
- ii. Sought clarity on the council tax liable on void properties.

- iii. Suggested that some underspends could be diverted into energy efficiency measures.
- iv. Welcomed the progress made with disabled adaptation.

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

- i. Explained that tenants had the right to refuse improvement work such as kitchen or bathroom refits. Some had taken good care of existing facilities and did not want the disruption of replacement work.
- ii. Confirmed that the authority is liable for the majority of the Council Tax on void properties, with homes vacated for redevelopment causing the majority of spend. Confirmed that only short-term discounts or exemptions are available (one month in most cases).
- iii. Confirmed that there had been no change in policy of discretionary repairs. However, there had been a change in procedures with council staff no longer undertaking works which were the tenant's responsibility.
- iv. Clarified that carry forward requests this year were higher than last, but that so were the budgets, so that proportionally the capital carry forwards were not hugely different. Highlighted that Covid-19 is delaying repairs and planned works in 2020/21 and may affect the ability to appropriately invest funds carried forward. Further details on the catch up process would be available later in the year.

The Committee resolved by 10 votes to 0 with 3 abstentions to endorse part 1 of the recommendation

The Committee resolved by 5 votes to 0 with 3 abstentions to endorse part 2 of the recommendation.

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.

20/21/HSC Estates & Facilities Review and Compliance

This Item was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair / Tenant Representative)

Matter for Decision

The report provides an update on the Estates & Facilities Service Review and information on compliance related work within the service, including a

summary on gas servicing, electrical testing, recent audit actions and fire safety.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the progress of the service review and compliance related work detailed within the report.
- ii. Agreed that an update report on the progress on the works to be brought to the September Housing Scrutiny Committee.

Reason for the Decision

As set out in the Officer's report. the progress of the service review and compliance related work detailed within the report.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee received a report from the Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets.

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

- i. Confirmed that two council properties were non compliant with gas safety certificates. This was a result of the occupants shielding. Those properties would re visited as a priority as soon as the occupants felt comfortable with other people inside their homes.
- ii. Fire Risk Assessments had been undertaken in respect of a number of maisonettes that are above ground floor level and necessary work identified would be undertaken as soon as possible.

The Committee raised concerns regarding the recent fire at Kingsway Flats. It was suggested that residents had reported problems with communal lighting, lack of internal fire doors, communal alarms not working and blocked stairwells. The Head of Housing Maintenance and Assets responded and stated that the emergency lighting had been tested regularly and no faults had been found. All tenanted flats entrance doors will be replaced with fire doors that meeting current standards and orders have already been placed with contractors. There was no requirement for a communal fire alarm. The fire was under investigation and more information would be available at a future date.

The Asset Manager stated that there was an on-going program to install heat detectors. Additional funding is likely to be required as this three-year programme also requires work to existing smoke detectors in dwellings.

The Committee thanked housing staff for their prompt and caring approach to rehousing victims of the fire.

Councillor Porrer proposed and Diana Minns seconded an additional recommendation as follows:

That an update report on the progress on the works to be brought to the September Housing Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee supported the additional recommendation.

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.

20/22/HSC Update on the Programme to Build new Council Homes Funded Through the Combined Authority

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The report provides an update on the programme to deliver 500 Council homes with funding from the Combined Authority.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the continued progress on the delivery of the Combined Authority programme.
- ii. Noted the funding structure for the Combined Authority programme.
- iii. Noted the risks and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the 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 Housing Development.

In response to the report the Committee commented that it was disappointing that the Kingswat project was delayed by UK Power Network (UKPN). The Strategic Director (FB) explained that these delays were unavoidable as UKPN were dealing with Covid 19 emergency works. Council staff were currently working on new ways to engage with them to ease the progress of future projects. The Head of Maintenance and Assets explained as this was a refurbishment the issues with the cabling were not known before works started.

In response to a question about the risk ratings in the report the Head of Housing Development explained that these related to the specifics on the projects not the overall programme which even with potential for delays was low risk in terms of achieving the March 2022 SOS target for the funding.

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

- i. Confirmed that the first Housing Pods to ease rough sleeping are to be installed across three sites around Cambridge. Four more Pods were available and would be installed as soon as suitable sites had been identified.
- ii. Suggested that staff would be monitoring how the Pods worked for individual users.

The Committee resolved by 5 votes to 0 and 3 abstentions 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.

20/23/HSC Cambridge City Council's response to homelessness during Covid-19 - an update on progress and next steps

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

- i. At the end of March 2020, and in line with lockdown measures introduced at the time, the Government asked local authorities to ensure that rough sleepers were provided with emergency accommodation to help reduce the risk of transmission of the Covid-19 virus. The City Council, along with partner organisations, working in the homelessness sector, and the County Council had worked in partnership tackle the significant logistical task of identifying those rough sleeping and at immediate risk and securing accommodation offers for all of them. The Government gave an initial financial commitment (see 8a of the Officer's report) and an invitation to apply for further funding as required.
- ii. The report updated members on progress to date, broadly outlines phase two of the council's plan - to secure longer term housing options for those currently accommodated on a temporary basis – and explains how officers would manage the process. It explained why the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, previously due for publication this month, had been delayed and will now be brought before Housing Scrutiny Committee in January 2021.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the progress the Council has made on rehousing rough sleepers during the Covid-19 pandemic and endorse the proposed principles for delivering the phase two action plan.
- ii. Noted that a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy will be brought to Housing Scrutiny Committee in January 2021.
- iii. Agreed that a monthly update report on the progress of the Phase 2 action plan will be circulated to members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee for the critical time period between now and September.

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.

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

- i. Welcomed the report and thanked officers for their hard work in achieving the temporary housing of so many rough sleepers under difficult circumstances.

- ii. Expressed concerns about the stress on staff and sought an assurance that staff were being fully supported.
- iii. Sought assurances that those housed in hotels would not be evicted back onto the streets now that hotels are about to re-open.

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

- i. Confirmed that staff would be attempting to assist all those temporarily housed. Most people had complied with support arrangements and had behaved in an acceptable way. However, assisting those whose behaviour was unacceptable, or criminal was more problematic.
- ii. When the Police were involved an individual's licence could be ended quickly. A multi-agency approach was used, including management of prison release.
- iii. Housing and support had been set up very quickly and lessons would be learnt for the longer term.
- iv. There were some concerns over the longer-term funding for this initiative.
- v. Confirmed the individuals housed had a range of vulnerabilities, including one with a registered disability.
- vi. The new pod housing was currently not in use but might be suitable for some of those in temporary housing.

Councillor Martinelli proposed and Councillor Porrer seconded an additional recommendation as follows:

A monthly update report on the progress of the Phase 2 action plan will be circulated to members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee for the critical time period between now and September.

The Committee supported the additional recommendation.

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.

20/24/HSC To Note Decision Taken by the Executive Councillor for Housing

10a Confidential Decision: Sale of Shared Ownership Property

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

The Committee noted the decision without debate and therefore no exclusion of the press and public was necessary.

10b Confidential Decision: Disposal of Housing Revenue Account Property
This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

The Committee noted the decision without debate and therefore no exclusion of the press and public was necessary.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm

CHAIR