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Housing Scrutiny Committee

HSC/1

Tuesday, 4 February 2025

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 February 2025

5.35 - 8.19 pm

Present: Councillors Griffin (Chair), Robertson (Vice-Chair), Gawthrop Wood, Gardiner-Smith, Lee, Martinelli, Swift, Thittala and Tong

Executive Councillors: Bird (Executive Councillor for Housing), Holloway (Executive Councillor for Community Safety, Homelessness and Wellbeing), Best (Leaseholder Representative), Birch (Tenant Representative) and Minns (Tenant Representative)

Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives: Diana Minns (Vice Chair), Diane Best, Harmony Birch

Also present (virtually): Tenant Representative Mandy Powell-Hardy

Officers present in person:

Director, Communities Group: Sam Scharf

Assistant Director, Housing and Homelessness: Samantha Shimmon

Chief Finance Officer: Jody Etherington

Committee Manager: Sarah Steed

Meeting Producer: Boris Herzog

Officers present online:

Assistant Director, Development,: Ben Binns

Cambs HIA Manager: Frances Swann

Strategic Delivery Manager: Sean Cleary

Housing Services Manager: Simon Hunt

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

25/1/HSC Apologies

Apologies were received from Tenant Representative Justyna Ulman-Jaworska and Tenant Representative Mandy Powell-Hardy attended the meeting virtually via Microsoft Teams.

Councillor Lee provided apologies for lateness.

25/2/HSC Declarations of Interest

Name	Item	Interest
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Diana Minns	25/7/HSC	Involved with 'It Takes a City' and was a coordinator of the Women's Homelessness Action Group.
Councillor Robertson	25/7/HSC	Is a trustee of Cambridge Cyrenians.
Councillor Gawthroe Wood		Is a trustee of the Marie Schutt Trust.

25/3/HSC Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

25/4/HSC Public Questions

Question 1 – submitted on behalf of West Coleridge Neighbours Group.

With regard to the Final Survey Report published on 8th August 2024 which sought the views of residents at Davy Road about Cambridge City Council's proposal to redevelop their homes, it seems that the Council were satisfied when they received 15 responses from the 42 households. According to the Council's Assistant Director of Development at the most recent Housing Scrutiny meeting, held in September, 36% (just over a third of residents) is "a reasonable response rate". This is significantly less than half of the Davy Road residents. In our view this falls well short of being a reasonable response rate. We feel that to accurately represent the views of residents, given that these findings are used to inform the Council's decision as to whether to develop a site or not, the majority of views should be gathered at the very least.

This was a postal survey posted through the letterboxes at Davy Road and given out at in-person consultations. Due to work commitments some residents could not attend these consultations. We feel a face-to-face survey would have been more worthwhile and would have ensured a better response rate.

The council survey chose to focus more on the problems with living at Davy Road. For example, it found that 12 responses indicated experience of anti-social behaviour (ASB) issues. At the Housing Scrutiny meeting in question,

when councillors were called upon to vote on the proposed redevelopment, the Executive Councillor took this finding to mean that 100% of respondents think Davy Road has an ASB problem. This is a profoundly misleading inference. Looking at the council survey, only 12 households at Davy Road (out of a possible 42) responded to this question and indicated that there was an ASB issue at Davy Road. By contrast, our survey, conducted face-to-face with 25 households from October 2024 to January 2025, found that only 7 out of these 25 households reported anti-social behaviour at Davy Road. We would conclude from this that just over a quarter of residents think that there is an anti-social behaviour problem at Davy Road.

Could the Executive Councillor for Housing please describe how:

1. the Council could conduct better surveys so as to ensure that each and every household is encouraged and supported to give their views about the possible demolition of their homes?
2. the Council could report more accurately on what residents have said by indicating how many were surveyed, so that the Housing Scrutiny Committee can be reliably informed before voting to approve a development?

Executive Councillor response:

- i. In February 2024, Council Officers knocked on every door to discuss implications of the estate being added to the Council's development programme. Individual meetings were arranged to discuss this further.
- ii. In June 2024 invitations to consultation events were sent. This was followed up by further door knocking and reminders were left at doors where no one was home.
- iii. On 11 and 13 July 2024, two consultation events were held at Coleridge School. Information was also made available on the consultation website.
- iv. The survey was sent to all addresses and included a broad range of questions to ensure that residents could feedback on issues that were important to them.
- v. All surveys were reviewed prior to them being issued to ensure that they were both accessible and inclusive for residents. Paper copies of the

- survey and consultation documents were made available at the in-person consultation events and council officers were on-hand to answer any questions.
- vi. To offer flexibility, the consultation events were held on a weekday afternoon / evening and on a weekend. Follow up calls were made to residents to encourage responses.
 - vii. To ensure the Committee were able to make an informed decision, the final survey report was included with the Housing Scrutiny Committee papers as Appendix 2 (dated 8th August 2024).
 - viii. The Council was grateful for the further feedback which had been collected from residents.
 - ix. After the decision to proceed with development in September 2024, all households were sent a letter to confirm the decision and to provide guidance on the next steps. A surgery session was held at Coleridge School for residents to come and speak directly to officers on 3 October 2024.
 - x. Dedicated Council support had been available, and individual meetings had been held with residents since the decision.
 - xi. To date, 5 households had moved to properties they chose and a further 5 households were in the process of moving. 21 households had registered on the Homelink system and were now able to place bids on properties.
 - xii. The Council had not received any formal or informal complaints regarding the regeneration process but welcomed feedback to help with continuous improvement.

Supplementary question:

- i. The question was asking how the council could improve on their surveying rather than asking about what had been done.
- ii. Referred to their own residents' survey, which had responses from 23 households, which stated that they were happy living at Davy Road. This was because: it was quiet, close to work and school, flats were spacious, well-built and close to green open spaces.
- iii. Now that their homes had been selected for redevelopment residents had to look to the future. A few households had already moved, one resident felt pressured to move next to neighbours they had previously

- moved away from. Others had moved within the city boundary but were now paying twice as much rent. Others had been actively bidding with no success particularly those looking for 3 bed flats / houses.
- iv. One leaseholder had looked at 47 alternative properties, they had put two offers in, but both had fallen through. They wanted to move so they did not have to pay for repair work to their property.
 - v. Asked how the Council would support Davy Road residents (tenants and leaseholders) to find somewhere affordable to live in the city.

The Assistant Director (Delivery) responded:

- i. Regeneration isn't easy when people needed to move out from their homes. The Development Team had helped move approximately 300 people (leaseholders / freeholders and tenants) into a home of their choice. Referred to the redevelopment scheme at Fanshawe Road as a successful example of this.
- ii. Noted that the decision to proceed with the redevelopment of Davy Road was a relatively recent decision. The process of moving took time and took into consideration the particular requirements of the tenant / leaseholder such as schools and healthcare.
- iii. Officers would meet with people face to face, by telephone or online to discuss any queries that they had.

The Executive Councillor commented that there may be additional benefits which people could claim if their rent increased when they moved.

Encouraged anyone who was worried by the redevelopment scheme to get in contact with her.

Question 2 – Submitted on behalf of the Save Ekin Road Community Group

We are the Save Ekin Road community group, and we are writing to you regarding Cambridge City Council's plans for Ekin Road. We are a group of council tenants and freehold residents living on Ekin Road. We seek an update from you regarding the Ekin Road project, and the status of the estate.

Question 1:

How many current, unresolved cases of damp and mould are there in occupied Council-owned dwellings on the Ekin estate, including Ekin Road, Ekin Walk, and Ekin Close. If there are any such cases, how long does the Council envisage it might take to either resolve these, or rehouse the residents?

Question 2:

How many Council-owned dwellings on the Ekin estate are currently unoccupied, and how is the Council planning to secure these dwellings and manage the estate as it becomes progressively more vacant over time?

Question 3:

We note that in Agenda Item 10 of this meeting, on page 50, it states that there are 19 dwellings due for retrofitting on Ekin Road. Given there are only 7 Council-owned dwellings on Ekin Road being retained in the project, this presumably implies that the Council will be retrofitting dwellings due for demolition. Which dwelling types are these (flat, bungalow, house), what sort of retrofitting will be occurring between now and the demolition of those dwellings, and when will it occur?

Question 4:

When will residents be shown the final design plans for the Ekin Road redevelopment, and will those final plans be brought back to the Housing Scrutiny Committee for approval before being submitted for planning permission?

Question 5:

Can the Council confirm whether the 6 houses in the north-east corner of the estate (odd numbers 13-23 inclusive) will definitely be part of the redevelopment? If so, we wish to express our continued opposition to the demolition of those 6 houses, due to extreme upheaval it will cause to the longstanding Council tenants living there.

Executive Councillor response:

- i. There were currently three reported cases of damp condensation and mould (DCM) on the Ekin Road estate. Direct contact would be made with the tenants and a visit carried out to assess the extent of the DCM and advice would be provided regarding the most appropriate treatment. In line with the Council's Regeneration Policy, all households with reported DCM were given additional priority when placing bids on Homelink.
- ii. There were currently 47 unoccupied properties on the Ekin estate. As discussed at the Liaison Group meeting in December 2024, the Council would be placing hoardings on these properties to protect against any vandalism and unauthorised access.
- iii. The numbers provided within brackets next to each location referred to the number of DCM reports and not the number of dwellings.
- iv. The planning application was anticipated to be submitted in May 2025, at which point local residents would be notified by the Greater Cambridge Planning Service. All details of the application including the final design and plans would be available to view on the planning portal. It was not intended for the details of this redevelopment scheme to be presented to Housing Scrutiny Committee again.
- v. A consultation update letter was sent to all residents on 18 September 2024. This confirmed that, as design work evolved, the inclusion of the eastern properties was considered to be essential to the design of the scheme from a delivery, design and financial viewpoint. This meant that the planning application for the redevelopment of 108 homes at Ekin Road would include the six houses to the north-east.

25/5/HSC Quarterly Housing Performance Report

Matter for Decision

The report provided:

- An update Housing Scrutiny Committee on the progress towards meeting performance against indicator targets that support the delivery of the Council's vision: "One Cambridge, Fair for All" (Appendix A).
- Briefed Members on the regular programme of statutory and regulatory returns currently being submitted by the Housing Service (Appendix B)
- An update on damp, condensation and mould recorded in HRA stock (Appendix C)
- An update on the rent review project (Appendix D)

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the Housing Service's results in operational delivery, health and safety and customer focus performance, plus the current pressures on

- service delivery and the impact this may have on reaching targets laid out in this report.
- ii. Noted the recent reports of damp, condensation and mould received by the service, and the measures being put in place to help combat DCM in tenant's homes.
 - iii. Noted the update on the rent regulation project
 - iv. Considered any further measures of performance that would be beneficial to be included in these reports, going forward.

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 Communities Director.

The Communities Director, Assistant Director of Housing and Homelessness and Strategic Delivery Manager said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Advised that Housing Officers were allocated particular parts of the city as their 'patch' and tenancy audits were undertaken on properties within their patch. Each Housing Officer was responsible for approximately 1200-1300 properties.
- ii. Acknowledged that it was important for tenants to update the Council regarding any change in their circumstances which could impact their needs. Customer Service Advisors always checked contact details when Tenants called the Council. The Council was going to undertake a 'Tenant Census' and would undertake a procurement exercise to appointment a company to carry out this work.
- iii. Officers noted Tenant Representative's concerns regarding the Council's new Governance proposals and noted that a decision hadn't been made on the proposals yet. Officers believed that transparency would be enhanced by the proposals as there would be a dedicated focus on housing under the proposals and more timely reporting to Members.
- iv. Advised that the number in brackets contained within agenda item 10 page 50 of the agenda referred to the number of damp, condensation and mould (DCM) reports and not the number of dwellings due for retrofitting at Ekin Road.
- v. The Council was 100% compliant in undertaking fire risk assessments in accordance with the Housing Regulator's standards. Officers would look

- at how information could be reported to the Committee regarding fire risk actions (for e.g. what items had had to be removed from certain areas).
- vi. Would provide outside of the meeting the percentage figure for the number of people who were awaiting a refund under the Rent Regulation project who were on Universal Credit. Officers were currently testing systems to ensure that payments could be made to tenants who were on other benefits such as Housing Benefits. A recruitment exercise was being undertaken to recruit officers to undertake the Rent Regulation work; a Project Manager was now in post. An online form was also being created to assist tenants to contact the Council about the Rent Regulation project. Officers were mindful that not all tenants wanted to use online forms and tenants were still able to contact the Customer Services Centre for assistance. This work would need to be done in stages to manage the workload and the plan was to contact current tenants first. Further communication with tenants would follow in due course.
 - vii. Officers would provide a response outside of the meeting explaining why there was a decrease in the completion of completed DCM claims this year compared to last year.
 - viii. Officers would also pick up the point previously raised at the September meeting regarding DCM figures and their accuracy.
 - ix. Noted concerns raised that residents didn't understand the DCM process. Advised that the Council's website had recently been updated to provide timescales for each individual process for DCM for tenants. A video providing guidance on DCM was also due to be published on the council's website.
 - x. Tenancy Audits covered a range of issues including checking that properties weren't being sub-let, picking up on additional support needs of tenants and also picking up on repairs which hadn't been reported.
 - xi. Encouraged tenants to report instances of bikes blocking doorways so that Enforcement Officers could investigate. Concerns could be reported by emailing HousingOfficers@cambridge.gov.uk or by calling the Customer Service Centre and asking to be put through to a Housing Officer.
 - xii. Would look to include more information in the Council's magazine for tenants 'Open Door' around processes regarding responsive repairs and planned repairs.
 - xiii. In response to Councillor Thittala's comments regarding his personal experience regarding an emergency repair and bathroom repair; Officers apologised for the level of service received from the Council and advised that there was an emergency repairs process in place which appeared to have failed. Advised that as part of the complaint process compensation

could be payable to recognise the inconvenience experienced due to service failure. The Council would not always get the process right and that was why this report was important. Would investigate the matter after the meeting.

- xiv. Noted Member concern regarding target setting below the lower benchmark quartile (referred to Appendix A on page 42 of the agenda and the graph titled 'Satisfaction with most recent repair'). Acknowledged the target could be higher; there was a balance to be struck between setting a target and it being achievable, it was likely that the target would be set higher in the coming year.
- xv. Agreed to investigate whether the data included within Appendix C DCM report, Table 3, Category 'Other' could be broken down further.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor for Housing 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.

25/6/HSC HRA Budget-Setting Report (BSR) 2025/26

Matter for Decision

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Setting Report (BSR) was presented to Housing Scrutiny Committee to allow scrutiny of proposals for the review of rents and service charges, revenue bids and savings, and the Housing Capital Investment Plan, which includes capital bids and all associated funding proposals.

Comments made by the Housing Scrutiny Committee will be reported to the Executive meeting taking place on 10 February 2025.

The Executive will then recommend the budget for Full Council approval at its meeting on 24 February 2024.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

To refer the recommendations below to the Executive to:

- i. Recommend that full Council approve that council dwellings rents for all social rented and social shared ownership properties be increased in line with government guidelines, with an increase of 2.7%, being inflation as

measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) at September 2024 of 1.7%, plus 1%. Rent increases will take effect from 1 April 2025. This equates to an average rent increase of £3.37 per week.

- ii. Recommend that full Council approve that affordable housing rents, inclusive of service charge, are also increased by 2.7% in line with the increase for social rents. This equates to an average rent increase of £5.06 per week.
- iii. Recommend that full Council approve that rents for affordable shared ownership properties are increased by RPI as at September 2024, 2.7% plus 0.5%, as allowed for in the lease requirements for these properties.
- iv. Recommend that full Council approve that garage and parking space charges for 2025/26 are increased by inflation at 2.7%, in line with dwelling rents, and approve changes in charges for parking permits, as set out at table 10 on page 28 of the attached Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Update and Budget Setting Report 2025/26.
- v. Recommend that full Council approve the proposed service charges for Housing Revenue Account services and facilities, as shown in Appendix D of the attached Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Update and Budget Setting Report 2025/26.
- vi. Recommend that full Council approve the proposed leasehold administration charges for 2025/26, as detailed in Appendix D of the attached Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Update and Budget Setting Report 2025/26.
- vii. Recommend that full Council approve that service charges continue to be recovered at full estimated cost, as detailed in Appendix D of the attached Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Update and Budget Setting Report 2025/26, recognising that local authorities should endeavour to limit increases to inflation as measured by CPI at September 2024 (1.7%) plus 1%, wherever possible.
- viii. Recommend that full Council approve (with any amendments) the revenue savings, pressures and bids set out at Appendix F of the attached Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Update and Budget Setting Report 2025/26.
- ix. Recommend that full Council approve the resulting Housing Revenue Account revenue budget as summarised at table 5 on page 20 of the attached Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Update and Budget Setting Report 2025/26.

- x. Recommend that full Council approve the capital bid set out at Appendix F of the attached Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Update and Budget Setting Report 2025/26.
- xi. Recommend that full Council approve the updated Housing Capital Investment Plan as shown at Appendix E of the attached Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Update and Budget Setting Report 2025/26.
- xii. Recommend that full Council approve the proposed approach to financing the Housing Capital Investment Plan as set out at table 11 on page 31 of the attached Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Update and Budget Setting Report 2025/26.
- xiii. Recommend that full Council approve the revised need to borrow over the life of the Business Plan, to sustain the proposed level of capital investment, which includes delivery of the 10 Year New Homes Programme.
- xiv. Recommend that full Council recognise that the constitution delegates Treasury Management to the Chief Finance Officer (Part 3, para 5.11), with Part 4F, C16 stating; 'All executive decisions on borrowing, investment or financing shall be delegated to the Chief Finance Officer, who is required to act in accordance with CIPFA's Code of Practice for Treasury Management in Local Authorities'.
- xv. Recommend that full Council recognise that the decision to borrow significantly to build new homes impacts the council's ability to set-aside resource to redeem the HRA Self-Financing debt at the point at which the loan portfolio matures, resulting in a need to re-finance debt at the point of maturity.
- xvi. Recommend that full Council approve inclusion of a capital budget for Disabled Facilities Grant expenditure and associated grant income from 2025/26 onwards, based upon 2024/25 net grant awarded, with delegation to the Chief Finance Officer to approve an in year increase or decrease in this budget in any year, in direct relation to any increase or decrease in the capital grant funding available for this purpose, as received from Cambridgeshire County Council through the Better Care Fund.
- xvii. Recommend that full Council approval of delegation to the Chief Finance Officer, as Section 151 Officer, to determine the most appropriate use of

- any additional Disabled Facilities Grant funding, for the wider benefit of the Shared Home Improvement Agency.
- xviii. Recommend that full Council approve delegation to the Director of Communities to review and amend the level of fees charged by the Shared Home Improvement Agency for Disabled Facilities Grants and repair assistance grants, in line with any recommendations made by the Shared Home Improvement Agency Board.
- xix. Recommend that full Council approve delegation to the relevant Director, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, to draw down resource from the ear-marked revenue reserve or capital reserve for potential debt redemption or re-investment, for the purpose of open market land or property acquisition or new build housing development, should the need arise, in order to meet deadlines for the use of retained right to buy receipts or to facilitate future site redevelopment.
- xx. Recommend that full Council approve delegation to the Chief Finance Officer to make any necessary technical amendments to detailed budgets in respect of recharges between the General Fund and the HRA.

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 Chief Finance Officer.

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

- i. Tenant and Leasehold Representatives expressed concern that they were not able to vote on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget amendment recommendations, which they had been able to do so previously.
- ii. Noted the budget savings figure which was expected to be delivered following the redesign of the Housing Service but understood further detail about this would be provided in the third week of February.
- iii. Was disappointed to see the proposed removal of the under-occupation incentive scheme in the report. Believed there should be some incentive available for tenants in under-occupied properties.

- iv. Asked if there was other funding available to support tenants who wanted to move due to the under occupation of their property. Asked if funding was available, whether this could be publicised more.
- v. Queried the reduced budget for 'target hardening work' for people suffering domestic violence.
- vi. Noted within the Executive Councillor's Foreword to the BSR that tenancy audits identified cases of domestic abuse and that further tenancy audits may identify further instances of domestic abuse so queried whether from a budget point of view, the Council may need to spend more in this particular area than it currently did.
- vii. Asked how the committee could be assured that adequate funding was within the HRA budget to deliver services.
- viii. Asked if Central Government would consult with councils about financing for retrofit schemes.
- ix. Queried if 'Right to Buy' (RTB) funding could only be used for shared ownership schemes.
- x. Asked what work had been undertaken to assess the impact of the proposed rent increases on residents.
- xi. The group design restructure for the service made it difficult to scrutinise the budget. It was not clear how the council's restructure would impact the delivery of frontline services. More information and explanation should have been provided.
- xii. Asked if there was sufficient officer capacity to deliver resident engagement taking into consideration the requirements required by the Housing Regulator. Queried if there was sufficient resource available to pay for communication with tenants and leaseholders.
- xiii. Referred to previous decisions discussed by the Committee in 2013 and 2019 which agreed that the Council would not process housing arrears action resulting from issues with Universal Credit and the Spare Room Subsidy payments. They would have liked to have proposed an amendment to the BSR to request that this approach be extended to include the two-child benefit cap and the benefit cap itself. Asked whether work had been undertaken to see whether a tenant in an affordable rented property may be disproportionately affected by the benefit cap than a tenant in a socially rented property.
- xiv. Referred to concerns which had been raised about value for money / deterioration in standards for services charges in blocks of flats and sheltered housing schemes in relation to building cleaning / window cleaning and grounds maintenance charges (detailed in appendix D on page 75 of the BSR).

The Assistant Director for Housing and Homelessness, Director of Communities said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. The decision for the Executive Councillor at this meeting was to recommend the HRA budget to the Executive. Comments from the Scrutiny Committee would be minuted and tabled at the Executive meeting. The main reason for the change in the HRA budget process was to reflect best practice within the Local Government sector so that revenue and capital budget was approved by Full Council. The HRA budget process was therefore being brought in-line with the General Fund budget process. Tenant and Leaseholders were able to submit public questions (in accordance with the requirements set out in the Public Speaking Scheme) to the Executive and Full Council meetings.
- ii. The figures regarding the group redesign proposals had only recently been collated.
- iii. The council needed to set a balanced budget, unfortunately this meant that difficult decisions had to be made regarding what services were provided. This was why the under-occupation incentive scheme was proposed to be removed.
- iv. Funding was available for tenants who wanted to move due to the under occupation of their property. If a tenant was actively looking to move and they were in receipt of benefits, discretionary housing payments were available to top up rent to assist with moving fees etc. Advised that tenants could seek support from the Council's Financial Inclusion Officer to make sure that they were claiming all the funding that they were entitled to. Acknowledged that there could be a potential gap for tenants who wanted to move (due to under occupation of their property) but were not in receipt of some kind of benefit funding as they would not be able to access the discretionary housing payment to assist with moving fees.
- v. The 'target hardening works' domestic abuse funding was a specific budget set aside to fund works to a property where a victim of domestic abuse wished to stay in their property. Examples of target hardening works included new doors, fencing, or a ring doorbell. Often victims of domestic abuse did not want to stay in their property and were supported by the Council to move to alternative accommodation. This budget was therefore usually underspent so the reduction in the budget was to reflect this. There was alternative funding which could be used to support people if the revised budget was spent.
- vi. The data from tenancy audits could be interrogated further; relevant referrals were made for victims of domestic abuse and support was provided. Additional security measures (provided through the target hardening funding) were only effective where the perpetrator was no longer in the household. As noted above, usually victims of domestic

- abuse did not want to stay in their property and were therefore supported to move to alternative accommodation, therefore did not expect the reduction in budget for target hardening works to impact residents as the budget was for very specific circumstances.
- vii. Advised that the HRA BSR was prepared upon the budget approved within the HRA Medium Term Financial Strategy. Revenue and capital budgets were agreed with relevant budget holders. A balanced budget needed to be prepared. There had been additional pressures from damp, condensation and mould (DCM) cases which had been built into the budget. Hard decisions had to be made about the services which were provided and those that weren't.
 - viii. The Council had ambitious plans for both delivering new homes and retrofitting existing homes which the Council could not fund on its own. Officers would continue dialogue with Central Government regarding financial support.
 - ix. Advised that Officers were trying to highlight that RTB funding could now be used to fund shared ownership housing as previously it was not possible to do so.
 - x. The Council was mindful of the impact on residents when rents were increased. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the HRA BSR drafting process. The Council was in a difficult economic position. Rent increases were capped on an annual basis. If rents were not increased there would be a lasting impact on the HRA, and this needed to be balanced against the ability of the Council to deliver services for tenants.
 - xi. Under the current staffing structure there was sufficient capacity within the Team to fulfil the resident engagement requirements of the Housing Regulator. The Resident Engagement Strategy would be reviewed as part of the transformation programme. Moving forward the proposals to bring together certain Teams as part of the restructure would strengthen resident involvement.
 - xii. In response to the question regarding previous Housing Scrutiny Committee decisions and the process for rent arrears action, noted that the 2019 report and decision statement was in relation to Universal Credit [Agenda for Housing Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, 16th January, 2019, 5.30 pm - Cambridge Council](#). This stated 'In light of issues surrounding Universal Credit and payment arrangements for housing costs, approvals for eviction will not be progressed for a tenant in rent arrears which relate solely to Universal Credit delays and missed payments which are beyond their control. Any delays that are deemed to be the result of the tenant's own delay in applying/supplying the correct information will be followed up through the usual processes.'

- xiii. The report referred to in October 2013 was a report on Welfare Reform and the impact on tenants [Agenda for Housing Management Board on Tuesday, 1st October, 2013, 5.30 pm - Cambridge Council](#). The decision stated that 'Eviction will not be progressed for a tenant in rent arrears, which solely relate to the under occupation reduction in Housing Benefit, when all any of the following criteria are met:
- a. Where the tenant has applied for rehousing and is making active reasonable bids.
 - b. Where the tenant has applied for DHP.
 - c. Where other tenancy conditions (such as anti-social behaviour) have not been seriously breached.'
- xiv. The issues raised in relation to enforcement action for rent arrears would be better considered within the Council's Rental Arrears and Income Collection Policy rather than as part of the BSR. The Rental Arrears and Income Collection Policy was due to be reviewed, and Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives would be involved with the review in due course. In response to the concerns raised regarding the two additional factors impacting rent arrears (two child benefit cap and benefit cap) it would not be prudent for the Council to pursue possession orders or eviction for rent arrears which occurred due to delays with payment of benefits.
- xv. Noted concerns raised about service charges and the standard/level of service provided. Noted that building cleaning was tricky as areas could be cleaned and shortly afterwards for example following inclement weather areas become dirty quickly, so it appeared as though cleaning had not been undertaken. Requested that issues were raised with Officers and noted that Tenants and Leaseholders could raise concerns via the Council's complaint process.

The Executive Councillor for Community Safety, Homelessness and Wellbeing advised that the reduction in the budget for domestic abuse funding for 'target hardening works' appeared on the face of the document to be alarming however it was a budgetary measure and advised that anyone who needed help and support would receive it.

The Executive Councillor for Housing noted that rents were increased by 5% in 2022/23, in 2023/24 rents were increased by 7.4%. The proposed rent increase for 2025/26 was 2.7% which was a lower percentage than in previous years. The impact of rent increases on tenants unfortunately had to be balanced against the delivery of a balanced budget.

The Committee resolved by 6 votes to 1 with 5 abstentions to endorse recommendations a to i.

The Committee resolved by 6 votes to 1 with 2 abstentions to endorse recommendations j to t.

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.

25/7/HSC Homelessness Prevention Grants

Matter for Decision

This report detailed the annual bid round for grants made to organisations providing homelessness prevention services. It provides an overview of the process, the grant eligibility criteria and the budget. Appendix 1 details the applications received with recommendations for 2025-26 awards.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Community Safety, Homelessness and Wellbeing

- i. Approved the award of homelessness prevention grants to voluntary and community organisations for 2025-26, as set out in Appendix 1 of the Officer's report.

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 Advice Service Manager.

The Executive Councillor for Community Safety, Homelessness and Wellbeing advised that the Council had received a higher 'Homelessness Prevention Grant' from Central Government compared to last year, which could be used to increase the Council's (similarly called) Homelessness Prevention Grants, awarded to partner organisations, which was the subject of this report.

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

- i. Noted that 'the Haven' was to provide support 2 nights and 1 afternoon a week.
- ii. Homelessness applications needed to be determined in accordance with Homelessness legislation and each case was considered on its own merits. Not everyone who presented as homeless would be provided with interim accommodation whilst their homelessness application was determined. The Homelessness Relief Duty lasted for 56 days but not all applicants may be accommodated during that time. The applicant would need to fall within a 'priority need' during that time. Examples of 'priority need' included having dependent children, or a person being vulnerable due to their mental health needs. Applicants who did not qualify within the Homelessness Relief Duty would be provided advice on other accommodation options for example Jimmy's Night Shelter and the Winter Provision for Rough Sleepers.
- iii. Applicants had to set outcomes within their Homelessness Prevention Grant applications to explain how their project / application would prevent / relieve homelessness. Organisations which were awarded grant funding had to provide monitoring data to the Council in relation to their outcomes every 6 and 12 months so the Council could assess the effectiveness of the homelessness prevention measures.

The Committee resolved unanimously 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.

25/8/HSC Cambs Home Improvement Agency (Cambs HIA) - works contractor procurement

Matter for Decision

Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (Cambs HIA) was established as a shared service on behalf of City Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council in 2012 and delivers adaptations and repairs work for elderly and disabled adults and children.

The proposed procurement and contracts will ensure that Cambs HIA is compliant with the Procurement Regulations. It will ensure that there is

standardisation in specifications and access to pre-tendered fixed and variable price contractors / suppliers who will be able to deliver all work in much shorter timescales and at more competitive rates.

The simplified delivery model, made possible with the contracts in place, will enable grant applications to be processed and completed quicker and at lower overall cost.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Board's decision to proceed with a procurement exercise for up to four years for the provision of two contracts, the first being for adapted bathrooms and kitchens and the second for the provision and installation of disability equipment.
- ii. Authorised Cambs Home Improvement Agency (on behalf of Cambridge City Council and its partners South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire district councils) to evaluate tenders and to award contracts to suitable bidders following a competitive tender evaluation process.

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 Cambs HIA Manager.

The Committee resolved unanimously 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 8.19 pm

CHAIR