



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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HOUSING COMMITTEE

8 April 2021

7.00 pm – 8.39 pm

Remote Meeting

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Mattie Ross (Chair)

Councillor Catherine Braun
Councillor Stephen Davies
Councillor Jim Dewey
Councillor Chas Fellows*
Councillor Colin Fryer

*= Absent

Councillor Jenny Miles (Vice-Chair)*

Councillor Lindsey Green
Councillor Julie Job
Councillor Norman Kay
Councillor Gary Powell
Councillor Debbie Young*

Officers in Attendance

Strategic Director of Communities
Head of Housing Services
Head of Contract Services

Head of Community Services
Housing Manager
Democratic Services & Elections Officer

Other Member(s) in Attendance

Councillors Doina Cornell

Others in Attendance

Carole Wise, Tenant Representative

Councillor Ross (Chair) paid tribute to the former Chair of the Committee, Chas Townley, for all his work over many years for housing and for Stroud District Council.

HC.034 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Miles, Councillors Fellows and Councillor Young.

HC.035 Declaration of Interests

There were none.

HC.036 **Minutes**

RESOLVED **That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2021 are approved as a correct record.**

HC.037 **Public Question Time**

There were none.

HC.038 **Tenant Representatives Update**

Carole Wise was introduced and presented an update on behalf of Sandra Longstreth, Tenant Representative. She drew attention to the support that had been provided to tenants during the Covid pandemic, including remedying practical issues, homeseeker assistance, and advice for those requiring financial support. She outlined future plans for consultation with tenants on a range of issues, and for encouraging use of Community Hubs when it is safe to do so. She emphasised how much can be achieved through teamwork.

Councillor Fryer supported the aim to recruit an additional Tenant Representative to assist Sandra Longstreth within the District.

HC.039 **Update of the Tenant Led Service Standards**

The Housing Manager introduced the report. She confirmed that consultation on the Service Standards with the Neighbourhood Ambassadors and the Tenants Voice Representatives had taken place in October 2019. The Service Standards demonstrate that Tenant Services provide a clear and transparent service to SDC's tenants, leaseholders and residents. Those involved in the consultation believed that the Service Standards could be further strengthened by making a number of additions and these are detailed in the report. The Housing Manager explained that, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the Service Standards were not submitted to the Housing Committee in 2020.

The Housing Manager acknowledged that, at present, the number of involved tenants is small, and more work needs to be done to increase involvement. ARK consultants have been commissioned to look at how delivery of tenant involvement can be improved in the future. She noted, however, that SDC's Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Strategy, written with tenants in 2018, provides a solid platform to improve tenant engagement going forward. The Housing Manager detailed a number of new initiatives to encourage tenants to become involved including through social media, a programme of 'Love where you live' events, a digital equality programme, and a restart of Café Conversations when the easing of Covid restrictions allow.

The Housing Manager confirmed that an Action Plan, detailing the implementation of the Service Standards, including the involvement of tenants, and what action will be taken to improve tenant engagement, will be brought to the committee in June 2021.

Councillor Davies asked whether any statistics are available in relation to Tenant Services to measure performance. The Housing Manager confirmed that these are

available through ongoing monitoring of services including allocations and lettings, complaint handling, and anti-social behaviour management.

Councillor Davies asked whether there was any work being done to provide a self-service facility online for tenants. The Housing Manager confirmed that a new housing management system is currently being developed. This will look both at self-service capability, such as booking appointments, as well as retaining a telephone service for those wishing to speak to someone directly.

Councillor Fryer expressed some concern about the low number of tenants involved in the consultation on Service Standards and asked how the consultation had been carried out. The Housing Manager confirmed that the consultation had been conducted with Neighbourhood Ambassadors and Tenants Voice Representatives. Whilst it is acknowledged that the numbers included are low, there are plans in place to improve tenant engagement in the future including consideration of the recommendations from the ARK consultants' report.

Councillor Dewey asked whether, when Covid restrictions allow, it is possible for those tenants who are less computer literate to have a face-face meeting with Tenant Services particularly for issues such as anti-social behaviour. The Housing Manager confirmed that this would be possible once restrictions were lifted, and currently Tenant Services talk to tenants by telephone and go through an action plan with them.

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Braun and seconded by Councillor Fryer.

Councillor Fryer stated that it was good to acknowledge the importance of the voice of tenants on the Housing Committee.

Councillor Braun acknowledged the importance of having clear standards and engaging with tenants to improve those standards. She also recognised the importance of using those standards to monitor performance so that the Housing Committee can be confident in the quality of service provided to tenants.

Councillor Kay referred to the particular challenge included in the report, to assist people in obtaining their own properties, when the number of properties available to rent continually reduces as people opt to buy their properties.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED

- a) To adopt the updated Tenancy Service Standards, and**
- b) To delegate authority to the Strategic Director in consultation with the Chair of Housing to review the implementation of these service standards and provide an update and action plan to Committee in June 2021.**

HC.040 **Cleaner Estates Strategy 2021-24**

The Head of Housing Services introduced the report. It constituted a new piece of work reflecting a commitment to improve the quality and cleanliness of the Council's estates. Consultation took place in December 2020 and January 2021 and tenant feedback has been incorporated into the Strategy. Successful delivery of the strategy required collaborative consultation and development of specific standards around levels of cleanliness, and a review to ensure the standards were being met.

Reporting on performance would be a critical part of the transparency of service delivery and a clear indicator of resident satisfaction which had been poor to date. The aspirations of the strategy reflected the need for improvements, through a careful balance of support, education and enforcement. Work had been commissioned to help better understand and strengthen tenant involvement which would be developed and incorporated into future policies and strategies.

The strategy set out the Council's expectations and aspirations to become an exemplar authority in its delivery of service, by putting communities at the heart of what it does.

The Head of Housing Services highlighted the four key principles and four delivery objectives the strategy was based on. He advised that an action plan was being developed and would be submitted to the Committee in June 2021. This would be more detailed and would outline when consultation and feedback took place, where the service touch points were, and the named person who would own each element.

Councillor Braun asked what the implications of the strategy would be for working with Ubico, and cited paragraph 1.9 of the report which referenced work undertaken by the Environment Committee in relation to the Waste Management Policy. The Head of Housing Services indicated the collaborative work undertaken with Ubico, but highlighted the importance of ensuring Ubico perform to expected Council standards as well as through contractual arrangements. He also emphasised the collaborative work that had already been undertaken between Tenant Services and Community Services within the Council to deliver an improved service across the district.

Councillor Powell asked whether it would be possible to speed up the response to incidents like fly-tipping from now on. The Head of Housing Services indicated that there was an urgency across the district to manage fly-tipping, and that with the right processes and people in place, work would be done to improve response times. This would form part of the action plan and include collaborative work with Community Services.

Councillor Davies suggested that, as the strategy had clear financial implications, it would have been useful to have detailed those in the report as justification for some of the work that was being progressed. The Head of Housing Services agreed to circulate this to the committee.

Councillor Dewey asked about the size of the estate and whether the strategy was likely to be applied more widely. The Head of Housing Services clarified that whilst initially the focus for the strategy would be on Council tenancies, the intention was to expand the work at a later date.

Councillor Fryer asked whether the Council charges that now applied for the removal of bulky waste could have increased the incidence of fly-tipping. The Head of Housing Services emphasised that fly-tipping could take many forms, and that whilst the Council charge could have had a small impact, the problem would not be solved by regular collections. The issue needed to be addressed through communication and education, with some punitive action taken when necessary. If affordability was a hinderance then more discussion with residents was required to resolve that.

Councillor Fryer proposed and Councillor Dewey seconded the motion.

- a) To adopt the Cleaner Estates Strategy, and
- b) To agree that a detailed action plan to deliver the strategy is presented to Housing Committee in June 2021.

Councillor Kay proposed an amendment as follows:

The Committee RESOLVES to:

- a) Adopt the Cleaner Estates Strategy, with the addition of “A commitment to ensure that specific needs are met with regard to any tenant or resident with protected characteristics category under the Equality Act 2010” into the key principles (3.3), and**
- b) Agree that a detailed action plan to deliver the strategy is presented to Housing Committee in June 2021.**

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Braun and the wording was agreed by the Chair.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried unanimously.

The substantive Motion was then debated. On being put to the vote, it was carried unanimously.

- RESOLVED**
- a) Adopt the Cleaner Estates Strategy, with the addition of “A commitment to ensure that specific needs are met with regard to any tenant or resident with protected characteristics category under the Equality Act 2010” into the key principles (3.3), and**
 - b) Agree that a detailed action plan to deliver the strategy is presented to Housing Committee in June 2021.**

HC.041 Updated Tenant Services Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Policy

The Head of Housing Services introduced the report. He explained that the policy provided an up-to-date approach to the management of anti-social behaviour (ASB) which was a statutory requirement for social landlords, and was in line with the Social Housing White Paper 2020. The last revision to the policy was in 2017.

The Head of Housing Services detailed some of the revisions and additions to the policy:

- Acts of ASB towards elected members in relation to their Council duties would be included;
- The service would expand its abilities to take further action using Community Protection Notices against perpetrators of ASB;
- Drug dealing and substance misuse would be designated as high risk ASB, allowing greater powers to take action through the courts;
- Details of the use of the community trigger to validate actions taken as a social landlord would be included;
- A co-ordinated multi-agency framework of support approach would be applied when vulnerable persons were identified;
- The victim of ASB would be given an Action Plan detailing actions to be taken to resolve the ASB with the appropriate review period.

The Head of Housing Services emphasised that tackling ASB and nuisance effectively was a high priority for the Council's Tenant Services Team and corporately. The commitment was to tackle ASB swiftly and effectively, making use of legal powers where appropriate. It was important to maintain and improve strong working relationships with other agencies, including neighbourhood police teams and other support services, in order to achieve this. The Head of Housing Services highlighted the support for the policy from the Stroud Neighbourhood Police Team. In addition, staff would be supported and provided with the appropriate skills and knowledge to manage ASB effectively and safely. The Council's response to ASB must be measured and proportionate at all times, and all complaints must be investigated thoroughly with appropriate professional input to achieve the best outcomes for all.

The Head of Housing Services clarified that reports would be made on ASB cases where any equalities issues were involved, and benchmarking would be carried out against other providers and included in performance reporting. He emphasised the importance of ongoing engagement and dialogue with tenants, including the effectiveness of actions taken to tackle ASB.

Councillor Kay explained that he was aware of a detailed proforma completed which explained the equality implications of this policy but was not included in the report. He asked whether in future it would be possible to include this detail, or to add this as an appendix to the report. The Head of Housing Services confirmed that he would discuss this with colleagues to ensure a uniform approach and update the committee.

Councillor Braun drew attention to the shocking increase in ASB cases reported this year for understandable reasons. She asked to what extent the number had decreased with the easing of lockdown, and when that information would be available. The Head of Housing Services confirmed that he would have expected the number of cases to have reduced slightly because of the proactive work carried out by the dedicated officer now in post to handle higher level ASB cases. He agreed to provide updated information to the committee as soon as possible.

Councillor Braun asked whether another Star Survey was planned for the new civic year and whether some focus could be placed on tenant satisfaction in terms of ASB so that monitoring was maintained. The Head of Housing Services confirmed that the Star Survey was conducted on an annual basis but that, in order not to overwhelm tenants with questions on a range of issues, a targeted approach was needed.

Councillor Fryer asked how many of the 193 cases reported this year were at the higher level. The Head of Housing Services explained that it was difficult to quantify without referring to specific cases as often cases started in one category but on investigation may be unsubstantiated and downgraded. However, he agreed to provide the committee with a breakdown of cases in due course.

Councillor Job asked whether, in view of some recent tragic events involving victims of dog attacks, whether consideration should be given to moving 'pets out of control' into a higher ASB category. The Head of Housing Services explained that the lead on such cases would be taken by the Animal Welfare Officers, unless the tenancy agreement had been fundamentally breached. He agreed to have further discussion with colleagues in the Animal Welfare service regarding the best approach and report back to the committee.

Councillor Davies requested feedback on how well the service was working with other agencies, and whether there are some organisations which were less helpful than others. The Head of Housing Services confirmed that excellent relationships with the police exist internally and externally, but that there were some problems working with Mental Health services as they were under great pressure and did not have the resources to attend multi-agency meetings. He emphasised that although there was still work to be done on multi-agency working, this had improved significantly over the last 18 months.

Councillor Green asked whether it would be possible to get a breakdown of reported ASB cases and how they were resolved. She asked if tenants could be given a realistic timetable for how cases were worked on, in order to educate people and manage expectations. The Head of Housing Services explained that this was part of the discussion about the Action Plan for a victim of ASB, detailing what the issues were and how they would normally be resolved. The importance of being honest with victims about the details of the case and the likely timescales involved was recognised.

Councillor Dewey referred to paragraph 3.7 of the report and asked whether it was meant to read 'mental health or criminality' rather than linking the two. The Head of Housing Services confirmed this was an error and agreed to amend the text accordingly.

The Motion was proposed by Councillor Powell and seconded by Councillor Kay.

Councillor Davies stated that, whilst he was supportive of the policy, he wondered why this work had not been completed before, and why no details on the financial implications of the policy had been provided.

Councillor Braun stated that it was good to think about how these issues could be resolved with a focus on restorative justice in terms of low-level cases. Wherever possible neighbours should be encouraged to talk to each other to try to resolve these issues. She welcomed future reports offering a breakdown of cases by level and timescales taken to resolve them. She also welcomed the joint working with Community Services and all other agencies to resolve these difficult issues for tenants.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED To adopt the updated Tenant Services Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

HC.042 Member Questions

There were none.

The meeting ended at 20.39pm

Chair