



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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HOUSING COMMITTEE

01 February 2022

7.00 - 9.13 pm

Council Chamber

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Mattie Ross (Chair)

Councillor Paula Baker
Councillor Katrina Davis
Councillor Colin Fryer
Councillor Lindsey Green
Councillor Laurie Davies

Councillor Christopher Jockel (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Steve Hynd
Councillor Jenny Miles
Councillor Loraine Patrick
Councillor Lucas Schoemaker
* Councillor Nicholas Housden *

* = Absent

Officers in Attendance

Strategic Director of Communities
Head of Housing Services
Housing Manager
Democratic Services & Elections Officer
Operations Manager

Housing Renewal Manager
Project Manager
Service Delivery Manager
New Homes & Regeneration Manager
Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim)

Tenant Representatives

Mike Richter

Becky Adams

HC.053 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Davies and Housden.

HC.054 Declaration of Interests

There were none.

HC.055 Minutes

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2021 were approved.

HC.056 Public Question Time

There were none.

HC.057 Capital Grant for Temporary Accommodation

The Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim) introduced the report and explained that it was for a one-off Capital Grant to Gloucester City Homes (GCH) for the purchase and conversion of a building in Stroud into temporary accommodation. This would be for the primary use of single people and childless couples at risk of homelessness. They further informed the committee of a similar proposal in 2019 for the same project and explained that it had come back to the Committee for approval as the details had since changed.

The Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim) gave a brief History of the report which included:

- The work that had led to identifying the need for the temporary accommodation.
- The previous work with the Salvation Army to progress the project.
- The need for temporary accommodation to allow pets.

She further informed the Committee the new building would provide 5 rooms for temporary accommodation, one communal kitchen, one communal living room, a staff office on the ground floor and a back yard in order to allow pets to exercise.

The Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim) gave the following answers in response to questions:

- GCH would be the owners of the building.
- As part of the legal agreement, it would be for the sole use of Stroud District Council (SDC) however, if rooms were frequently available, they could be offered out to other authorities.
- Completing the conversion work in-house would not have been possible due to current capacity.

Councillor Miles questioned whether someone would have to make an application via Homeseeker or whether they would be directly matched into these accommodations. The Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim) explained that due to this being classed as temporary accommodation it was dealt with differently to other applications and usually people were directly matched due to lack of options available.

In response to concerns raised from Councillors, the Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim) confirmed that One Legal would be drafting the legal agreement with GCH and would ensure that the investment would be protected should the property change hands at any point.

Councillor Schoemaker questioned whether this accommodation was similar to that of the former Painswick Inn, Open House. The Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim) explained that at the start of the pandemic, Open House was fortunately empty which enabled SDC to occupy it's use for longer term accommodation. She further explained that due to the new site being managed by the Salvation Army, this would enable tenants to get the instant support they required in order to move them onto more appropriate accommodation, thus creating a much faster turnaround.

Councillor Fryer raised concerns over the Salvation Army selling the property before SDC had finalised everything to which, the Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim) explained that the Salvation Army approached SDC first with the intention of selling and GCH are working very closely with them throughout the interim period.

Councillor Jockel questioned whether the property could be added as an asset of community value, the Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim) thanked him for the suggestion and advised she would take it back to her team.

Councillor Baker proposed and Councillor Hynd Seconded.

Councillor Green debated the ownership of the property but overall showed support for the application.

Councillor Fryer commended the fact that people could bring their pets with them into the accommodation.

Councillor Baker shared previous experience of GCH purchasing similar properties in the past for the same purpose. She also echoed Councillor Fryer's commendation that pets were allowed.

Councillor Schoemaker raised concerns regarding the location of the property.

Councillor Miles echoed Councillor Green's thought over ownership and expressed support for the application as it could mean homeless persons in Stroud could stay local to friends and family.

Councillor Hynd expressed his support and commended the report for the revenue savings.

After being put to a Vote, the motion was carried unanimously.

- RESOLVED To:**
- a) Delegate authority to the Head of Strategic Housing Services in consultation with the Council Solicitor, to enter into legal agreement(s) with Gloucester City Homes to set out the terms applicable to the payment and use of the grant.**
- And**
- RECOMMEND That:**
- TO COUNCIL b) The Temporary Accommodation Capital Grant be added to the Council's Capital Programme.**

HC.058 HRA Delivery Plan Update

The Head of Housing Services introduced the report to the Committee and explained that the HRA delivery plan was previously agreed in December 2019. From that a 12 point action plan was put in place for services to follow. He further explained that a Members' information sheet containing updates on that action plan was circulated in 2020.

He informed the Committee that the need for a new HRA delivery plan was due to the changing nature of the work the Council and the Stakeholders were involved with which included:

- The New Council Plan,
- Governments White Paper on Social Housing,
- Carbon Neutral 2030 (including Retrofit),
- The Impact of Covid.

Councillor Shoemaker raised a question regarding objective 6 on page 20 of the document pack where it listed the percentages of rented and shared ownership properties. He questioned whether SDC would be looking to procure a higher percentage of shared ownership properties due to their success rate or if it would stay as a 50/50 divide. They agreed to send the necessary data to Councillor Schoemaker outside of the meeting.

The Head of Housing Services gave the following answers in response to questions asked:

- There was a larger piece of work currently being undertaken to look at the age range of Independent Living (IL) tenants which involved further consultation with younger tenants who could be potential future IL tenants.
- In 2019 there were a lot of discussions around opening up the green spaces and working with outside bodies to improve the use. Due to the pandemic that work had been paused however, now that the restrictions were lifting, this would be looked at again as part of the Cleaner Estates project.
- SDC were in a good position coming out of the pandemic, momentum was rising on projects that were unfortunately halted, due to resource being driven elsewhere. Tenant involvement was growing with tenant representatives on the committee and other tenant activities ongoing.

Councillor Jockel proposed and Councillor Miles seconded.

Councillor Schoemaker questioned whether the report would be coming back for an annual review. The Head of Housing Services explained that there was no date in the report for it to return to committee however, Councillors could ask for it to come back anytime. He advised Members to wait until after the summer in order for the consultation to have taken place and for the report to have advanced.

After being put to a Vote, the motion was carried unanimously.

- RESOLVED**
- a) To note the updates
 - b) To agree to review and submit a revised plan in light of the new Council Plan, the 30-year financial plan, the Government White Paper on Social Housing and CN2030 including retrofit.

HC.059 Older Persons Strategy Action Plan

The Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living) presented the report and explained it was a 5 year strategy that had been adopted by Council in. They further explained that this report included the draft proposal for the consultation of a new strategy for 2023-2026. They then provided members with the updates from the report which included:

- Sheltered Housing had transitioned into Independent Living and re-branding was completed.
- A thorough cost analysis across Independent Living Schemes had been completed which was reflected in the tenant costs.
- Awarded 10k in September 2021 from the National Lottery to complete the nature trail in Concord (Community Hub) in partnership with Stroud Valleys. This was aiming to be completed by summer 2022.
- Had undertaken a review of the application process for IL to move towards a housing need rather than meeting an age bracket. The minimum age to qualify for IL had been lowered to 55.

- Working with Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) to develop their housing with care strategy by using the Community Hubs to host activities and meetings. They had started initially with low numbers due to the pandemic but were hoping to widen that, once restrictions were lifted and tenants felt safer.

The Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living) gave a quick summary of the report and informed the Committee that there would be a wider consultation for the proposed new strategy and an increase in technology. She also informed the Committee that they had started a new programme in the Community Hubs called prehabilitation classes which were for people who were diagnosed with cancer to go to classes to improve their health and wellbeing before undergoing treatment or operations.

Councillor Miles questioned whether there had been a change in the atmosphere since the change to Independent Living. The Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living) confirmed that was the case, especially in the sites that had already undergone modernisation upgrades.

In response to Councillor Green, the Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living) confirmed:

- Hamfallow and Jenner Court both had plans to go through the modernisation upgrade to become smaller hubs that would feed into the main Community Hubs.
- The volunteer Co-ordinator had been working with the Police Commissioner to secure funding for a disabled bus.
- The Volunteer Co-ordinator would also be looking to recruit volunteers who could drive in order to provide transport to those residents who couldn't make it to the larger hubs.

Councillor Miles proposed and Councillor Schoemaker seconded.

Councillor Schoemaker commended the move towards a more inclusive attitude and the great benefits for the community.

After being put to a Vote, the motion was carried.

RESOLVED a) **To note the plan updates,**
b) **To agree that officers consult with residents and stakeholders to draft a new strategy by December 2022 for the period 2023-2026.**

HC.060 **Independent Living Modernisation Programme**

The Project Manager introduced the report and explained that it consisted of two sections, the first included a programme update on ongoing works and the second included the next set of IL schemes proposed for modernisation in the next financial year. He then gave a brief update on section one which included:

- The work at Vizard close had been completed in November 2021 within budget and on schedule.
- Work on Jenner Court commenced immediately afterwards and was on target to be completed in March 2022.
- Despite the effects of Covid and additional strains on supply costs and materials, the project had continued to be delivered on target and within budget.

He then informed the Committee that the Independent Living Modernisation Steering Group, which was made up of Senior Managers and Service Heads, were looking to

make tenant consultation an ongoing process even after the review of the Older Persons Strategy Action Plan had been completed.

The Project Manager concluded with a summary of section two of the report which included:

- 3 Independent Plus Schemes and 4 Community Hubs would undergo modernisation by the end of March 2022.
- The Hub Coordinator and the Volunteer Coordinator had been doing excellent work promoting the activities taking place in the Community Hubs.
- They had received overwhelmingly positive feedback from both tenants and outside bodies regarding the Community Hubs.
- Grange View in Stroud, Uplands was proposed for the next wave of modernisation and would become a Hub.
- Burdett House in Stonehouse and Hamfallow Court in Newtown were also proposed for modernisation into Independent Plus in the next financial year.

Councillor Miles questioned whether the finance had been set aside for the whole of the programme or if it would need to be revisited at some point in the future. The Project Manager confirmed that there had been a budget set out for the entire programme.

Councillor Fryer questioned whether a few IL tenants could be included on the Steering Group for further tenant involvement. The Project Manger confirmed he would raise that in the next meeting.

Councillor Schoemaker questioned what the net benefit was with regards to the units that had been built and the units that had been demolished. The Project Manager confirmed that there were 16 units lost at Cambridge House and 13 Proposed Units to be built however, the majority of the demolished units were bedsits and the proposed units were 2/3 bed houses. That meant an initial loss of units however, a greater capacity to house more people.

The Chair confirmed that there was a lot of work being put into grading the schemes red, amber and green. Cambridge house had been graded as red due to the condition of the site and the difficulty with letting the bedsits. There had also been a need identified for more family housing in the area as demand for one bedroom accommodation had been sufficient.

Councillor Schoemaker proposed and Councillor Hynd seconded.

Councillors Miles, Jockel and Schoemaker all showed support for the report.

After being put to a Vote, the motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED That Grange View in Stroud, Burdett House in Stonehouse and Hamfallow Court in Newtown, Berkeley will have modernisation works carried out in the financial year 2022/23.

HC.061 Progress Update on Key Action Plans (Cleaner Estates and Service Standards)

The Housing Manager circulated a written update to Members prior to the meeting.

Councillor Patrick requested that the Neighbourhood Warden, Andy Beamish, be named in the report due to the substantial work he had put in to support the service. The Housing Manager agreed.

Councillor Patrick also commended the fact that the Neighbourhood Management Officers were looking to spend more time in the communities to set up surgeries for residents to come and discuss their issues.

In response to Councillor Green, the Housing Manager confirmed that the residents of Oak Drive had been consulted with regards to the new location of the bins.

The Housing Manager agreed to keep Councillor Fryer up to date with the progress of Phillimore Road.

RESOLVED To note the update.

HC.062 Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) Policy

The Housing Renewal Manager introduced the report and explained about the MEES regulations history. She informed the Committee that on the 1 April 2020 it had become a legal requirement for private rented landlords to have an EPC certificate above E in order to legally rent the dwelling. There were some exemptions to this however, landlords were required to make a legal claim in order to register their exemption. She further explained that the government had created a fund in order to support Councils with the enforcement of the regulations. SDC and GCC were successful in their joint bid for funding and secured 80k which enabled them to hire a full time member of staff for 6 months and to set up the systems and processes for the project.

The Housing Renewal Manager informed the Committee that all the preparation work had now been completed and most landlords identified had been sent an initial letter. The process involved sending a second letter if there had been no contact after the first letter was sent and then finally the enforcement phase.

The Housing Renewal Manager gave the following answers in response to questions from Councillors:

- The funding was only available until March 2022 and it went towards setting up the processes and systems in order to begin the enforcement work, a data mining company and for a full time member of staff for 6 months to complete the work and train additional Officers in the process.
- Once the funding had ended SDC would not have the resources available to identify landlords however they were hoping to pick up cases as part of their day to day work.

Councillor Schoemaker questioned how to get funding so that the work could be continued as it would support the councils 2030 Carbon Neutral pledge. The Housing Renewal Manager confirmed that this would need to be done as part of the budget setting process.

The Housing Renewal Manager confirmed a lot of the identified properties in Stroud would likely fall under one of the exemptions however, this data would then be collected and could be looked at in the future if needed.

Councillor Baker asked how they had become aware of the properties. The Housing Renewal Manager confirmed it involved manually looking for them which was why some of the funding went towards data sifting for a company to narrow down the list of properties and identify which ones needed to be contacted.

Councillor Patrick raised concerns with the EPC certificate as they were valid for 5 years regardless of changes in the property. The Housing Renewal Manager explained SDC had no authority over the exemptions they could only work with the information they had been given. She further explained that a lot of the work involved raising awareness of possible funding available to private sector landlords and providing examples of the benefits to completing the works. This was why they had received such positive feedback already.

In response to Councillor Jockel, The Housing Renewal Manager confirmed:

- They had identified around 200 landlords already who had all now received their first letter.
- They didn't have the resources to be able to model some cost examples for landlords however, there was a separate piece of work ongoing from the better care funding to carry out a private sector stock condition survey which would create similar data for landlords to view, this was due later in 2022.

In response to Councillor Hynd, the Housing Renewal Manager confirmed that there was a database of local contractors who would carry out these types of works and they had been given some funding through the Sustainable Warmth Bid in order to update that database.

Councillor Hynd proposed and Councillor Schoemaker seconded.

Councillors Schoemaker, Jockel and Hynd all expressed their support for the report.

After being put to a Vote, the motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED a) **To adopt the MEES Regulations Policy contained in Appendix A to this report; and**
 b) **To authorise the Head of Environmental Health in consultation with the Chair of Housing Committee to make minor amendments as may be required.**

HC.063 **Member Reports**

a) Tenant Representatives (Verbal Update)

Tenant Representative Becky Adams stated that the meetings were very useful to both tenants and Officers. At their last meeting they discovered the text messaging system had never yielded any responses and it was established that the information was going to the wrong place. This was amended and immediately improved communication for tenants.

At the last meeting they also discussed ways of showing tenants how to take better care of their homes in order to prevent smaller repairs. She had volunteered to be in a few helpful tip videos to educate other tenants which would go out on SDC's social media.

b) Retrofit / Carbon Reduction Task and Finish Group

Councillor Jockel informed the Committee that their last meeting was on the 26 January 2022 within which they discussed the following:

- Progress of the works at Hamfallow with the ground source heat pumps, they were hoping to arrange a site visit soon.
- They were arranging to meet with the manufactures of some of the equipment in order to broaden their knowledge.
- The potential risks to the project and came up with solutions to prevent or slow the chances of the risks affecting the projects. An example of this was the tender for the contract which would come up for renewal next year.
- The struggle to recruit a full team.

The potential to stock pile materials to prevent the need to wait for them to be delivered and speed up the process.

c) Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Task and Finish Group

Councillor Fryer informed the Committee that they welcomed two new tenants onto the Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Task and Finish Group. He also echoed the Housing Manager's earlier news regarding the Neighbourhood Management Officer (NMO) surgeries bringing SDC Officers closer to their tenants.

He informed the Committee that there had been a tenant scrutiny taster day booked with Tpas which the Task and Finish Group was looking forward to.

Finally, he discussed the last meeting where they discussed communication response times. He has requested that the planned meeting with Housing Services to discuss that topic take place as soon as possible.

d) Housing Repairs and Voids Task and Finish Group

Councillor Baker reported that since the last Committee meeting they had shifted their focus from voids to repairs. She then provided the Committee with a brief voids update which included:

- Last year the number of completions were 24% in excess of previous years and averaged 8 a week. The focus of those works were on the work in progress properties which were usually shorter term to bring back into use.
- In November and December 2021 the completion rate increased to 12 properties a week and additional funding of £250k was put into voids to challenge the significant major work properties.
- Since December the Omicron variant of Covid, the current energy crisis, supply chain delays and inflationary costs had all contributed to the slow in completions which were back down to 8 a month.

Councillor Baker then gave an update on Repairs which included the identification of the broken communication line and the introduction of the short clips for tenants to look after their homes.

HC.064 **Work Programme**

The Chair informed the Committee there had been a few minor changes to the work programme which included:

- The Decant Policy had been moved to following meeting.
- The Play Areas Strategy had been redirected to Community Services & Licencing Committee.

RESOLVED To note the above updates to the Work Programme.

HC.065 **Members' Questions**

There were none.

The meeting closed at 9.13 pm

Chair