



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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HOUSING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 31 January 2023

7.00 - 8.47 pm

Council Chamber

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Mattie Ross (Chair)

Councillor Paula Baker
 Councillor Katrina Davis
 Councillor Colin Fryer
 Councillor Lindsey Green
 * Councillor Jessie Hoskin
 * Absent

Councillor Lucas Schoemaker (Vice-Chair)

* Councillor Nicholas Housden
 * Councillor Steve Hynd
 Councillor Christopher Jockel
 Councillor Jenny Miles
 Councillor Loraine Patrick

Tenant Representatives

Becky Adams

Mike Richter

Officers in Attendance

Strategic Director of Communities
 Interim Head of Housing Services
 Head of Strategic Housing Services
 (Interim)
 Accountancy Manager

Housing Manager
 Senior Housing Advice Officer
 Senior Housing Strategy & Enabling Officer
 Democratic Services & Elections Officer

Others in Attendance

Andy Kefford

HC.037 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hoskin, Housden and Hynd.

HC.038 Declaration of Interests

There were none.

HC.039 Minutes

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2022 were approved as a correct record

HC.040 **Public Question Time**

There were none.

HC.041 **Members' Questions**

There were none.

HC.042 **Local Authority Housing Fund bid**

The Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim) introduced the report and explained that this was a new opportunity that had arisen just before the end of 2022. She further explained that Central Government had allocated Stroud District Council (SDC) £1.8m of funding to purchase 15 properties to use for people who were fleeing conflict in Afghanistan and Ukraine. SDC would be required to provide £2.2m in match funding for the project which could then be reclaimed through rental income.

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

- The new properties would have affordable rents.
- The Property Services Team had begun to identify potential houses within the open Market and through the Buyback scheme but had not yet made any commitments.
- Ukrainian and Afghanistan refugees in temporary housing could be rehomed into these properties however there were currently none being temporarily housed by SDC.

Councillor Patrick proposed and Councillor Green seconded.

Councillors Green, Jockel, Baker, Miles and Patrick commended the report and expressed their support for the funding.

After being put to a vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED To approve the submission of a capital bid to DLUHC for the purchase of accommodation to be held within the HRA.

HC.043 **Out of Hours Service Provision**

An information sheet was circulated prior to the committee and had been published online.

The Interim Head of Housing gave the following answers to Councillors and Tenant Representatives:

- They could look into options to bring the Out Of Hours (OOH) service in house however, the cost was expected to be much greater to provide the current level of service that the contractor currently provided.
- The incident on the 17 December was due to exceptional cold weather circumstances. OOH service providers all over the Country experienced the same drastic increase in demand and therefore did not have the capacity to manage all of the incoming calls.
- 10% of calls received on the 17 December were from the same number. Steps have been made for Orbis to put a message on the phonenumber when experiencing high levels of calls to provide email and text options to tenants who cannot stay on the line.
- Standby arrangements were put in place over the Christmas period where at least 4 Officers were on call should Orbis have met any of the thresholds. These arrangements could be used as a supplement in the future should the need arise.

- They were looking to provide clarification, for tenants, as to what was classed as an emergency and who to contact in certain situations. This would be updated in the current Tenant Handbook and circulated via all communication channels with tenants.
- After the incident of the 17 December the OOH contractor had been asked to not only email SDC once a threshold had been met but to actively contact the SDC Officer on call to alert them.

In response to Councillor Shoemaker, the Interim Head of Housing agreed to look into proactive options such as identifying tenants with heat pumps and asking them not to turn off the equipment during periods of extreme cold weather.

HC.044 Tackling Damp and Mould

The Interim Head of Housing introduced the report and explained that it was a very topical subject due to recent news stories and there were a number of things to be addressed. She provided the following update:

- The cross over with the Cost of Living crisis meant that people were struggling to heat their homes and this contributed to damp and mould growth.
- They were looking to revise the Damp and Mould Policy
- They were investigating what proactive actions could be completed during the void process of a property.
- They had set up a Working Group with Officers, Members and Tenant Representative to address damp and mould issues.
- They were looking to categorise damp and mould issues by the level of the problem and the vulnerability of the household.
- They had invested in monitoring equipment which provided live information on temperature, humidity and ventilation to SDC and tenants. Once the equipment had been in place long enough it could provide guidance to prevent damp and mould in those areas.

Councillor Fryer raised concerns with pre-paid meters and affordability for the tenants and questioned whether SDC repair staff had the knowledge to signpost tenants who required extra support. The Interim Head of Housing confirmed that was the case and they were also trained to alert the Housing Team if there were concerns for tenant's welfare. The Housing Team could then signpost the tenant and provide support by way of food vouchers. In response to Councillor Fryer the Interim Head of Housing explained that they did not have a list of tenants on pre-paid meters. Before Christmas they had records of properties which had the gas capped, they visited each of those properties to complete a welfare check for the tenants.

In response to Councillor Baker, the Interim Head of Housing confirmed that health conditions such as asthma and age of tenants would come under household vulnerability and therefore would be prioritised as part of the categorisation process.

Councillor Patrick commended the effectiveness of Positive Input Ventilation (PIV) systems and questioned whether they could be used more widely. The Interim Head of Housing explained that in a lot of cases tenants either turned them off or blocked them up in an attempt to reduce costs.

The Interim Head of Housing gave the following answers in response to Councillor Green:

- The time taken to resolve or improve a damp and mould issue was dependant on many factors such as severity, lifestyle, vulnerability of the household etc. and was therefore difficult to predict.

- Where black mould spores were present and the tenant's health was at risk, the Council would move quickly to address the issue or identify whether a priority move would be necessary.
- Page 14 detailed the figures of complaints from 1 April 2022 – 19 January 2023. It was agreed to provide some comparable figures from earlier years outside of the meeting.
- The Council was not waiting for the results of the Decent Home Standards Review to respond to damp and mould cases, there was already ongoing work with tenants to address issues however it needed to be mindful that the review was underway and could lead to further changes in the future.
- The Council did not blame tenants for damp and mould issues however a large amount of the resolution was to work with tenants to change lifestyle choices such as drying washing on a radiator.

In response to Mr Ritcher, Tenant Representative, the Interim Head of Housing explained that many of the properties within the Housing stock were older and were built with little ventilation options. The Retrofit project would help to improve energy efficiency within the properties which would ultimately help with affordability of fuel bills.

Councillor Patrick questioned whether damp and mould issues could be identified earlier and therefore resolved quicker and at less expense to the Council. The Interim Head of Housing explained that was something the new Working Group would be looking into.

Ms Adams, Tenant Representative explained that it was difficult for tenants to keep on top of the maintenance of a property with high levels of condensation and shared her own experiences. The Interim Head of Housing agreed to take her comments back to the team to see what other proactive steps could be taken by the Council.

HC.045 **The Housing Enabling Process**

An information sheet was circulated prior to the committee as part of the reports pack.

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

- There was an open book process for developers making viability cases which involved sending the figures across to the District Valuer at HMRC for scrutiny.
- Social Housing was included under the umbrella heading for Affordable Housing which also included shared ownership.
- The majority of new deliveries were affordable rents as opposed to social rents however these rents were capped at the Social Housing Allowance levels for new properties.

Councillor Schoemaker commended the number of affordable houses that were being built. 245 in 2021/22 and 219 in 2020/21 and hoped for it to continue. The Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim) agreed and explained that Great Oldbury was responsible for a large amount of those figures due to the affordable homes being delivered in line with the market housing.

HC.046 **Member / Officer Reports**

- a) Progress Update on Key Action Plans (Cleaner Estates & Service Standards and Tenant Engagement)

An update on Cleaner Estates & Service Standards was circulated prior to the committee and published online. The Housing Manager provided a verbal update on Tenant Engagement:

- Involved Tenants had held a scrutiny panel before Christmas, those that were part of an Independent Living Scheme had reported back about sharing the results of the scrutiny with other tenants in the communal areas as part of a coffee morning.
- A few Tenants had signed up to podcasts and conferences provided by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS). They had already provided some positive feedback from engaging with other tenants from other Local Authorities.
- The satisfaction survey results for general needs tenants had been collated and they were just awaiting the results from the independent living tenants. These results would be reported at a future Committee. The Housing Manager gave a brief verbal update on the current results.

Councillor Jockel asked how the questions for the survey were created. The Housing Manager explained that the questions were based off the information requested by the Housing Regulator.

b) Tenant Representatives

Mr Ritcher, Tenant Representative raised an issue with the untidy work completed with the insulation upgrade in Dursley. The Interim Head of Housing explained that there was a large amount of turnover within the asset management team and part of the work was completed by temporary members of staff. She requested the details outside of the meeting in order to rectify any issues.

HC.047 **Work Programme**

It was agreed to get back to Mr Ritcher regarding the Ship Inn site in Stonehouse and when this could be expected to return to committee.

RESOLVED To note the above updates to the Work Programme

The meeting closed at 8.47 pm

Chair