



# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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## HOUSING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 28 March 2023

7.00 - 10.08 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  
 Strategic Head of Housing  
 Head of Property Services  
 Housing Manager  
 Accountancy Manager  
 Principal Accountant

Service Delivery Manager  
 Operations Manager  
 Asset Operations Manager  
 Income & Systems Manager  
 Compliance and Assurance Manager  
 Democratic Services & Elections Officer

#### HC.048 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Patrick and Davis.

#### HC.049 Declaration of Interests

There were none.

#### HC.050 Minutes

**RESOLVED** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2023 were approved as a correct record.

#### HC.051 Public Question Time

There

were

none.

**HC.052**      **Members' Questions**

There were none.

**HC.053**      **Independent Living Strategy (Update)**

The Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living) introduced the report and explained that this was an update on the Strategy, previously known as the Older Peoples Housing Strategy. The final strategy would be presented to the Committee in June 2023. The main amendments were listed on page 14 of the reports pack.

Councillors asked question on the strategy and were provided with the following answers:

- They were working with the Housing Manager and the Senior Housing Advice Officer to gather more feedback from tenants from the beginning of the allocation process.
- There was a greater dissatisfaction from the residents in Dryleaze Court due to the loss of the communal area. The residents of this scheme had been granted full access to Dryleaze House.
- They were using a traffic light system to prioritise the schemes which required modernisation. A newsletter was due to be sent out to residents to provide an update on which scheme would be completed next.
- The Animal Welfare Officers had been working to address the issues with dog fouling on sites and offer advice to residents.
- There was a larger piece of consultation and investigation work that would need to be completed to assess which schemes benefited from and utilised their communal areas.

Councillor Schoemaker proposed, and Councillor Miles seconded.

Councillor Miles commended the team for their efforts.

Councillor Schoemaker commended the benefit to the community.

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

**RESOLVED To note the Tenant Satisfaction Survey results and actions moving forward.**

**HC.054**      **BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2022/23 QUARTER 3**

The Principal Accountant introduced the report and provided the quarter 3 update on Budget Monitoring which included:

- Page 148 highlighted the General Fund Revenue position which showed an underspend of £192k (Table 1).
- Page 149 detailed the General Fund Capital Programme which showed an underspend of £1,563k (Table 2).
- Table 3 on page 150 outlined the Housing Revenue Account which showed a projected net overspend of £46k.
- The Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme was detailed in Table 5 on page 153 and showed an underspend of £3,250k.

The following answers were given to Councillors in response to questions asked:

- There were no acquisitions made due to the resource taken to locate and purchase appropriate properties. This was now a high priority in the current quarter and efforts had been made to increase resource.
- It was agreed to respond to Councillor Baker regarding the backlog of referrals from Occupational Health outside of the meeting.
- Residents who had use of the central district heating units were now eligible for subsidy.
- The £592k overspend listed in 5.7 for repairs and maintenance was not solely due to void properties. The Council had a responsibility as a landlord to undertake repairs.
- Page 154, paragraphs 6.9 – 6.13 detailed the new build and regeneration programme which had an underspend of £868k. This was largely due to delays with the projects causing the cost to be moved from the previous financial year into the current one.
- It was agreed to respond to Councillor Green with an estimated figure for the underspend of the Home Upgrade Grant works outside of the meeting.

Councillor Jockel proposed and Councillor Fryer seconded.

Councillor Housden highlighted the negative cost of the void properties.

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

**RESOLVED To note the outturn forecast for the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets and the Capital Programmes for this Committee.**

#### **HC.055      Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund**

The Asset Operations Manager introduced the report and provided a brief update on the Social Housing Decarbonisation fund as detailed in the report and shared the following news with the Committee:

- An additional £1.7m had been secured for the Housing Revenue Account.
- SDC had been recognised for its excellence in retrofitting across the market by the Retrofit Academy Awards.

The Asset Operations Manager confirmed to Councillor Miles that the Non-traditional Homes Strategy was one of the programmes included within the retrofit works.

Councillor Green questioned whether the funding had been match funded and if so, how much? The Asset Operations Manager confirmed that £2,658,628 would need to be funded from Stroud District Council for wave 2.

Councillor Jockel proposed and Councillor Hynd seconded.

Councillors Hoskin, Hynd and Jockel commended the report and the Officers for their work.

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

**RESOLVED To note the contents of the paper.**

#### **HC.056      De-pooling of Rents and Service Charges**

The Income & Systems Manager introduced the report and explained that the depooling of rents and service charges would allow for greater transparency of the services offered and

their costs to tenants. She explained there would be a large consultation period for tenants to share their views. She highlighted the following key points:

- Depooling would allow 100% of costs incurred through services offered to be recovered currently some costs were subsidised by the Housing Revenue Account.
- The charges would be included as part of the budget setting for the Committee to consider in December 2023.
- A gradual implementation was proposed as an option to support existing tenants with additional charges over the coming 3 years.
- The Committee was also being asked to approve the Rents and Service Charges Policy at appendix A which had been updated.

Councillor Housden asked for reassurance regarding the potential for some tenants to be at risk of greater costs. Officers confirmed that there was a potential for some tenants to receive an increase in costs due to the current subsidy however this would enable tenants to be aware of what services they receive and pay for them accordingly. Tenants would also be given the option to choose which services they require and therefore have greater control of their overall costs.

The following answers were given to Members in response to questions asked:

- The costs for services would be included in the benefit payments for tenants who qualify and there would be an additional hardship fund set up for vulnerable tenants.
- The charges would need to come back to Committee for approval before they could be implemented, and Councillors could still request to make further changes after the initial consultation period
- They would be holding surgeries in Housing Hubs for tenants to come in and ask questions. They would also be sending a refreshed rent notification which detailed the changes as well as completing door knocking in order to communicate directly with tenants.

Councillor Green questioned whether the resolution should be changed to reflect that the charges still needed to be approved. The Accountancy Manager explained that this was to start the process and would allow for the consultation to take place.

Councillor Jockel proposed an amendment to amend the resolution as follows:

The Committee resolves to approve: a) the **principle of depooling of rents with effect from 1 April 2024 and detail of service charges brought back to committee in December 2023**; b) new and re-let tenancies will be subject to the formula rent and service charges with effect from 1 April 2024; and c) the Rents and Service Charges Policy as at Appendix A. Councillor Housden seconded.

Councillors agreed to the amendment.

Councillor Jockel proposed and Councillor Housden seconded.

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

**RESOLVED To approve:**

- a) the principle of depooling of rents with effect from 1 April 2024 and detail of service charges brought back to committee in December 2023;**
- b) new and re-let tenancies will be subject to the formula rent and service charges with effect from 1 April 2024; and**
- c) the Rents and Service Charges Policy as at Appendix A.**

Councillor Housden left the meeting.

### **HC.057**      **Tenant Engagement & Support**

The Housing Manager introduced the report and explained that the overall satisfaction of the services provided by Stroud District Council had fallen to 70% compared to 81% in 2019. She explained that the housing sector as a whole had seen a reduction since the Covid-19 Pandemic however these results were lower than that of comparable Councils. She informed the Committee that they had identified the following points for improvement and would be discussing these with tenants at the upcoming café conversations:

- Quality of the home.
- Cleanliness and Maintenance of communal areas.
- Response to repairs & maintenance.
- Satisfaction with customer service, dissatisfaction with the ability to speak with the right person.
- Communication had seen a drop in satisfaction to 56%.
- Satisfaction with complaint handling

The Strategic Director of Communities and the Chair of Housing commended the team for the report and the work they had completed.

In response to Councillor Baker, the Housing Manager explained that hybrid working wouldn't have had an affect on the availability of Officers. Housing Officers were out on patch more frequently and therefore away from the Office during that time.

Councillor Fryer proposed and Councillor Hynd seconded.

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

**RESOLVED To note the Tenant Satisfaction Survey results and actions moving forward.**

### **HC.058**      **Empty Council Homes Policy**

The Strategic Head of Housing introduced the report and explained that this Policy was created from the recommendations from the Audit carried out in 2022. The policy set out the process for managing void properties and applied to all council owned homes. He informed the Committee that the target to return voids back into use was 42 days and they were currently averaging a 37 day turnaround time for voids with minor works required.

In response to Councillor Green the Operations Manager confirmed that pre-void inspections were temporarily stopped during the Covid-19 pandemic due to the need to access the tenants home however these had now been back in place since the ease of restrictions.

Councillor Baker commended the policy and raised a question regarding the key return policy, that the tenant would be charged an additional week if they couldn't return the key on the Monday. In response to Councillor Baker the Housing Manager explained that the key was ideally returned to Ebley Mill however if the tenant was unable to travel then alternative arrangements could be made.

Mr Ritcher, Tenant Representative, questioned whether the outcomes of the Tenant Advisory Panel had been fed back to Officers and Tenants on the panel to show that their recommendations had been completed. The Housing Manager confirmed that it would be published on the website and would be included in the Key notes he also agreed to publish it in the Members Weekly update so all Councillors would be made aware.

Mr Ritcher further questioned whether it could be mentioned in the local press, it was agreed to look into this.

Councillor Miles started that she agreed that the policy should focus on the minor voids in order to return properties to use quicker however she questioned whether this would cause a backlog in the major voids. The Operations Manager explained that the major voids were still being addressed they were just progressing at a slower rate due to awaiting parts, utilities and the scale of works required.

In response to Councillor Jockel, the Operations Manager agreed to look into the possibility that any furniture left over could be donated to a furniture bank however it would need to be safe to do so.

In response to Councillor Green, the Operation Manager confirmed that there should be an additional 2 targets for a turnaround time for major voids and for a complete refurbishment.

Councillor Green requested the figures for any voids that were no longer financially viable. The Operations Manager confirmed they could be included going forward.

Councillor Baker proposed and Councillor Hynd seconded.

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

**RESOLVED To:**

- a) **Approve the Empty Council Homes Policy.**
- b) **Note that the Policy will take effect from 01 April 2023.**

**HC.059      Tenant Information & Property Update**

The Housing Manager introduced the report and explained that a review of the Tenant Handbook was undertaken in February 2022 which resulted in the Handbook becoming available online. Since the publication, the information was not readily available in a handbook format and therefore the decision was taken to rename it to 'Tenant Information and Property Update'. The main changes included:

- Reference to Sheltered Housing had been amended to Independent Living.
  - Reference to Neighbourhood Management Officers had been changed to Housing Officers.
  - The permission required section had been highlighted to tenants.
  - Added permission to install hot tub in order to check the electricity supply.
  - Refusal for the permission to install wood burners due to the health and safety risks regarding use and maintenance.
  - Florescent lighting would be removed and replaced by the landlord, Stroud District Council (SDC).
  - Reminder that fences were the tenants responsibility and Stone Walls were SDC responsibility.
- In response to questions, the Officers confirmed the following:

- If the fence fell down on a void property it would be SDC responsibility to mend before the house was rented out.
- They were working with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) to improve tenant engagement particularly with those who work during the day or had caring responsibilities.
- If a property already had a wood burner, they would be looking to block it up so it could not be used due to the risk of fire when not maintained correctly.

Councillor Fryer proposed and Councillor Jockel seconded.

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

**RESOLVED To accept and support the changes to the tenant handbook including its renaming to Tenant Information and Property Update.**

The Chair asked members if they wished to continue the meeting given that the time was approaching 10pm and in accordance with the Councils' Constitution section 3 paragraph 6, members would need to vote in order to continue the meeting.

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

**RESOLVED To continue the meeting beyond 10pm.**

**HC.060      Canalside Site /A419 Stonehouse (Former Ship inn Site)**

A report was circulated prior to the Committee meetings as part of the reports pack, there were no questions.

**HC.061      Damp and Mould Policy**

A report was circulated prior to the Committee meetings as part of the reports pack, there were no questions.

**HC.062      Progress update on Key action plans (Cleaner Estates & Service Standards and tenant engagement)**

An update was not requested and there were no questions.

**HC.063      Performance Monitoring Q3**

A report was circulated prior to the Committee meetings as part of the reports pack, there were no questions.

**HC.064      Tenant Representatives**

Ms Adams, Tenant Representative, at the request of the Independent Living tenants, raised concerns regarding the cost increases of the district heating systems. The Accountancy Manager confirmed that the charges would be monitored closely, and monthly metre readings would be provided to residents. If there was an opportunity to reduce the costs due to the gas price decreasing, then a further report would be brought to Committee in year. The costs had been based on the average cost for the year and would therefore not be reduced during the summertime.

The Service Delivery Manager stated that the team were available to be contacted should anyone need any support.

**HC.065**      **Work Programme**

There were no questions or comments on the Work Programme.

The meeting closed at 10.08 pm

Chair