



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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HOUSING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 19 September 2023

7.00 - 8.24 pm

Council Chamber

Minutes

Membership

* Councillor Mattie Ross (Chair)

Councillor Natalie Bennett
Councillor Stephen Davies
Councillor Katrina Davis
Councillor Colin Fryer
* Councillor Lindsey Green
* Absent

Councillor Lucas Schoemaker (Vice-Chair in Chair)

* Councillor Christopher Jockel
Councillor Gary Luff
* Councillor Jenny Miles
* Councillor Loraine Patrick
Councillor Rich Wilsher

Tenant Representatives

Becky Adams

Mike Richter

Officers in Attendance

Strategic Director of Communities
Strategic Head of Housing
Head of Housing Solutions
Corporate Policy and Governance
Manager
Principal Accountant

Principal Accountant
Service Delivery Manager
Compliance and Assurance Manager
Democratic Services & Elections Support Officer
Democratic Services & Elections Officer

HC.016

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Green, Jockel, Miles, Patrick, and Ross.

HC.017

Declaration of Interests

There were none.

HC.018

Minutes

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023 were approved as a correct record.

HC.019 **Public Questions**

Public questions were submitted. They were answered by the Chair, Councillor Schoemaker. There were no supplementary questions. Refer to the [recording](#) of the meeting and [Agenda Item 4](#).

HC.020 **Members' Questions**

There were none.

HC.021 **Revised Council Plan**

Councillor Schoemaker introduced the item and advised that the Council Plan was approved in October 2021. The Plan set out the overall strategic priorities and objectives of the council as well as the key actions that would be taken to deliver the objectives. Councillor Schoemaker highlighted the key achievements in the Council Plan for the Housing Committee:

- The New Homes Programme had achieved targets in 21/22 and 22/23. This included delivery of new homes at Ringfield Close, Nailsworth and Broadfield Road, Eastington.
- 3 properties for vulnerable rough sleepers had been purchased through the Government's Next Steps Accommodation Programme.
- The modernisation of all three planned Independent Living Schemes had been achieved or were on target for completion.
- A costed plan to retrofit all council homes had been agreed. Wave 1 of the project for council house decarbonisation would retrofit 167 houses; and a bid for Wave 2 had been successful allowing for a further 250 properties to be retrofitted.
- Feasibility studies were being undertaken prior to low carbon demonstrator projects being commissioned.

Councillor Davis asked how the actions could be marked as completed. In response the Corporate Policy and Governance Manager confirmed the actions marked as completed had been identified as further work required to progress, however in the original council plan there was an end date that had passed, and the actions and milestones had been met.

Councillor Davies asked a number of questions including the following:

- Whether there would be an external consultation on the Council Plan refresh.
- Whether damp and mould would be added to the Council Plan.
- Councillor Davies also stated that the performance indicators particularly for Housing Committee, weren't adequate and that it should be acknowledged in the plan.

The Corporate Policy and Governance Manager responded to the first part of Councillor Davies question confirming that there wouldn't be any external consultation as it was a refresh of the original Council Plan. The Strategic Head of Housing confirmed that damp and mould wouldn't be included in the council plan as there was not any comparable bench marking data. The Strategic Head of Housing added that data would be captured internally in terms of service planning, and that once the benchmarking data was available the performance monitors would be approached. Finally, the Strategic Head of Housing stated that the new performance indicators included compliance which damp, and mould fell under, however the legislation of what the government expect in terms of bench marking wasn't ready therefore it would be impossible to include as a performance indicator.

Councillor Bennett Proposed and Councillor Fryer Seconded.

Cllr Bennett commended the officers for the work put into refreshing the council plan.

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

**RECOMMENDED That the refreshed Council Plan is agreed and recommended to Council.
TO STRATEGY
AND
RESOURCES**

HC.022 Extension of Private Sector Housing Renewal 2018-23 Policy

The Strategic Head of Housing introduced the report in the absence of the Housing Renewal Manager. The Strategic Head of Housing explained that the report was to extend the Private Sector Housing Renewal 2018-23 Policy by a further 12 months.

Councillor Davies asked whether it was driven by a change in a government policy around the councils' responsibilities in private rented accommodation. The Strategic Head of Housing confirmed the question would be taken back to the Housing Renewal Manager to answer.

Councillor Luff Proposed and Councillor Bennett Seconded.

Councillor Bennett commented that it made sense to agree an extension.

Councillor Luff added that it was an excellent policy and there was a need for the policy to be in place.

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

RESOLVED To adopt the current policy for a further 12 months to enable the results of the Gloucestershire Private Sector Housing Stock Condition survey to be considered in a new policy.

HC.023 Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24 Q1

The Principal Accountant introduced the report and highlighted the following areas:

- General Fund Revenue Budgets
There was an over spend of £23K, however there was additional grant funding from DLUHC in respect of homelessness and Ukraine homelessness prevention.
- General Fund Capital Programme
The disabled facilities grant scheme had an overspend of £390k which was due to the volume and value of discretionary grant payments. Sustainable warmth LADS 3 had a £345k underspend for efficiency and heating improvements to homes on the gas network, the project was due to end in September 2023 and had an anticipated underspend of funding of £0.5 million. Sustainable warmth home upgrade grant had a £506k underspend for energy efficiency and heating requirements for homes not on the gas network. Underspend of £972k where the project was also due to end in September 2023 and the underspend would be around £1.5 million. The home upgrade grant there was an additional £466k anticipated spend.

- Housing Revenue Account Budget Position
Quarter 1 showed a net overspend of £122k. Repairs and Maintenance had an overspend of £563k, there were several vacant positions in property care leading to a £199k underspend. The estimated variance for sub-contractors was £195k. There was £150k projected overspend across the property care service. The Independent Living scheme had a £400k underspend. Other expenditure had a £143k underspend.
- HRA Capital Programme
Central heating had a £1,336k underspend. New Build and Regeneration had a £6,249k underspend.

Councillor Davies asked for further detail on repairs and maintenance. The Principal Accountant confirmed that there was an underspend on vacancies but there were contrasts on contractors. There was a £264k variance on overspend on the painting contract. Council Tax and Voids had £178k and £150k overspend which related to staffing materials.

Councillor Davies asked for clarification as to whether contractors were being hired even though repairs were brought in-house. The Principal Accountant confirmed that contractors were being paid where there was a shortage of staff. The Principal Accountant also confirmed that the cyclical painting contract ended in June 2023 with extra cost incurred because of additional properties identified throughout the year.

Councillor Wilsher proposed, and Councillor Schoemaker seconded.

Councillor Davies raised concerns over the lack of internal staff working in repairs which meant that contractors caused an overspend. Councillor Davies also commented on the underspend on new build properties.

The Strategic Head of Housing responded that property care had been brought in house prior to the pandemic which had an impact however he had been investigating the whole service and looking into how efficiency savings could be made and whilst maintaining a focus on keeping residents safe. He confirmed that Councillor Davies comment on underspend on new builds would be taken back to the Head of Property Services.

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.024 Damp & Mould Policy

The Strategic Head of Housing introduced the report and explained that since the last Housing Committee the Council's Damp and Mould working group had been drafting the Council's action plan. The action plan was put in place to ensure the councils approach to damp, and mould was appropriate, proactive and represented best practice. A members evening was held on 9 August 2023 to enable members to contribute to the piece of work. The Strategic Head of Housing thanked members for their contributions. One of the crucial parts of delivering on the action plan was to adopt a new damp and mould policy for Council tenants and leaseholders.

The Strategic Head of Housing explained that the purpose of the report was to present the new policy which would replace the existing damp and mould policy that was approved in 2017.

In section 1.2 of the policy it set out the aims, which in summary were to:

- Comply with statutory requirements and good practice
- Take appropriate and timely remedial action, undertaking effective investigations into the root cause
- Ensure the service was accessible to all tenants and leaseholders and that they were treated in a fair, respectful and consistent way
- Be proactive – both in responding to reports of damp and mould and taking preventative steps
- Keep residents safe

The policy set out the Council's service standards, improvement works and timeframes as well as aftercare for tenants and leaseholders who were experiencing damp and mould in their homes.

As part of the drafting of the policy the Council had sought a review from internal audit and had assurance that the policy was good quality.

Councillor Davies asked whether a time frame for each of the areas included in the flow chart in appendix A will take to complete. In response the Strategic Head of Housing confirmed that he would ask the project group to add time frames to the chart.

Councillor Fryer proposed and Councillor Luff seconded.

Ms Adams, Tenant Representative, added that damp and mould was a big issue and making the changes to the policy would be for the better. The flow chart was also clear from a Tenants perspective.

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

RESOLVED To

- a) approve the Damp and Mould Policy with effect from 01 October 2023**
- b) delegate authority to the Strategic Head of Housing to make changes to the policy in consultation with the chair and vice chair of Housing Committee**

HC.025 Local Authority Housing Fund

The Head of Housing Solutions introduced the report and explained that following Committee in January 2023, where a bid to DLUHC to purchase accommodation for people fleeing conflict was approved, a further bidding opportunity arose which had a deadline of July 2023. The Chair and Vice-Chair of Housing Committee along with the Leader of the Council gave approval to submit a bid to purchase 4 out of 5 properties which would be permanent homes. The bid was successful and £723k was awarded to purchase an additional 4 properties.

The Head of Housing Solutions gave an update on the purchases of 15 properties from the first scheme. 5 property purchases had completed, there were 2 in Stroud, 2 in Stonehouse and 1 in Wotton-Under-Edge. A further 6 properties had legal instructed on them, and 1 property awaited survey.

Councillor Bennett proposed and Councillor Luff seconded.

Councillor Luff commended the speed in acquiring the properties.

Councillor Schoemaker asked whether there was a deadline to purchase the initial 15 properties. The Head of Housing Solutions confirmed there was a deadline of November 2023.

Councillor Davies also commended the speed of the process.

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

RESOLVED **To**
 a) note the submission and success of a further capital bid to DLUHC for the purchase of accommodation to be held within the HRA.
 b) delegate authority to the Head of Property Services to acquire properties.

RECOMMENDED **To**
TO STRATEGY **c) Increase the HRA Property Acquisitions capital budget 2023/24 to**
AND **£6.72m, as set out in this report.**
RESOURCES
AND COUNCIL

HC.026 Asbestos Policy

The Compliance and Assurance Manager introduced the report and explained that the Council maintained an Asbestos Policy which covered the management of asbestos in the Councils Housing stock to ensure the Council complies with relevant legislation. The changes in the policy mainly related to changes in Job titles and roles, minor changes to comply with legislation and clarification on technology in asbestos surveys.

Councillor Luff asked whether the current retention period of 40 years or when the person became 80 and whether this could be made longer. The Compliance and Assurance Manager confirmed that it could be extended and that the 40-year period was standard guidance. Councillor Luff added that it would be a risk-free way to provide the council protection. Councillor Luff proposed a change to the retention period so that the records were kept until those people that had been exposed had passed away or extend to 120 years.

The Compliance and Assurance Manager stated that there wasn't a reason that the retention period couldn't be extended.

Councillor Davies asked whether this was included in insurance and something that couldn't be changed without checking with insurers.

Councillor Luff added that the only issue could be with data protection however he would be happy to delegate to the Compliance and Assurance Manager.

The friendly amendment to extend the retention period until the person affected passed away or for 120 years was agreed and that the Compliance and Assurance Manager would make the change in the policy.

Mr Richter, Tenant Representative, asked how often asbestos surveys needed to be carried out on rented properties. The Compliance and Assurance Manager confirmed that within rented properties there wasn't a duty under law to conduct asbestos surveys and that the duty would be on the management side for example communal areas. The

Compliance and Assurance Manager added that as responsible landlords the Council survey homes periodically to ensure that repairs are undertaken efficiently. Mr Richter asked a further question of how long the surveys lasted as he had 5 since he had been a tenant. The Compliance and Assurance Manager added that specific cases may need additional surveys where the initial survey didn't cover the specific work involved. Mr Richter had further questions where the Compliance and Assurance Manager confirmed he would be able to investigate further outside of the meeting.

Councillor Luff proposed and Councillor Fryer seconded.

Councillor Fryer stated that the asbestos policy was just as important as the damp and mould policy.

Councillor Luff added that the policy was excellent with the agreed minor amendment.

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

RESOLVED To note the amendments to the Asbestos Policy.

HC.027 Mobility Scooter Policy

The Independent Living Manager introduced the report and advised that the policy was a review of the previous 2021 policy for mobility scooters in Council properties. The policy aimed to meet the needs and aspirations of tenants and to mitigate the risk around fire safety. There were 5 community hubs within independent living where there were specialist mobility scooter parking points. Each individual request for a mobility scooter was investigated case by case to ensure there was an appropriate safe compliant charging point and storage point. The only amendment that had been made to the existing policy was reference to the tenancy agreement. The changes were in section 3, 3.1 and section 5.

Councillor Davies asked whether mobility scooters had the same risk of fire as with electric bike charging. The Independent Living Manager confirmed that there was the same risk and that mobility scooters were therefore only allowed to be charged at a designated charging point. These charging points had a cut off between 8pm and 8am therefore the mobility scooters would not over charge.

Councillor Schoemaker proposed and Councillor Fryer Seconded.

Councillor Fryer added that he felt it was important that the Council did all it could for those with mobility scooters as it gave people freedom.

Councillor Davies echoed what Councillor Fryer had stated, and that it was important that people were as independent in their home as possible.

Councillor Schoemaker stated that the mobility scooter policy was a vital element to the independent living scheme and was pleased that residents were provided with the opportunity. Both Councillor Schoemaker and Councillor Luff stated that they would like to be able to offer residents a mobility scooter loan scheme in the future.

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

RESOLVED To

1. Adopt the revised Mobility Scooters Policy in Council Properties;
2. Agree to the amendments and updates.
3. Agree a review date.

HC.028 **Updated Tenancy Conditions**

The Strategic Head of Housing introduced the report and explained that the tenancy conditions were last updated in 2019 and it was best practice to keep these under regular review to ensure they remained legal and relevant to how tenancies were managed.

The key changes were outlined in the report but in summary:

- Sheltered housing had been renamed to Independent Living following the Councils rebrand and in line with the Councils Independent Living Strategy
- The addition of service charges, to enable collection of service charges as part of the Councils depooling that was presented to Housing Committee in March
- Informing tenants of their responsibility to insure the contents of their property
- Lofts must not be used for storage
- Permission must be sought for video doorbells and CCTV
- Radon equipment must be left to run continuously
- Shared communal hallways and gardens must be kept clear and tidy
- Ensuring that tenants were aware that they were responsible for their own behaviour and that of any visitors to their properties.

Councillor Davies asked how often it was followed up with tenants that blocked communal hallways or gardens. The Strategic Head of Housing stated that issues were followed up if they were reported especially where it was a fire or health and safety risk.

Councillor Wilsher asked whether delaying the consultation to tenants due to the recent legislation in new Social Housing Regulation Act where the regulator of social housing was consulting on tenant consumer standards until the consultation ended in April. In response to Councillor Wilsher the Strategic Head of Housing confirmed that housing was aware of the new legislation and that they were working closely to ensure the Council was ready. The Strategic Head of Housing added that it would be best to approve the updated tenancy conditions now as it came down to health and safety.

Councillor Fryer asked for clarification on page 207, section 5.1.3, regarding storing highly flammable materials and whether this included lawn mowers and strimmers. The Strategic Head of Housing confirmed that tenants were able to store small amounts of flammables for the purpose of grass cutting or strimming if it was stored safely.

Ms Adams, Tenant Representative, added that tenants that had moved into void properties were told works had been completed however the work hadn't been completed, the tenant had then reported it as a repair to be told it was now the tenants' issue. The Strategic Head of Housing confirmed that he would ensure further investigation into the case. Ms Adams confirmed that the situation had already been rectified, however the point she would like to make was that the homes aren't always given out in the state that Housing would like them back.

Councillor Wilsher proposed and Councillor Bennett seconded.

Councillor Bennett added that she agreed with the updated tenancy conditions.

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

RESOLVED To

- a) **Agree that the attached Tenancy Agreement Conditions be released to tenants for formal consultation and delegation given to the Chair of Housing and the Strategic Head of Housing to adopt the definitive version after consultation**
- b) **accept the updated Tenancy Conditions**

HC.029 Tenant Representatives

Ms Adams, Tenant Representative, stated that the tenant representatives attended the Tenant Participation Advisory Service conference and that they had new ideas for more tenant engagement. One of the ideas was to use the independent living hubs to hold a coffee morning every 6 weeks, it would be made clear that the coffee morning wouldn't be a place to complain. However, if there were issues that needed to be brought back to the Council then tenants could report the problem to the tenant representatives. Ms Adams added that people may struggle communicating online and benefit from personal contact.

An event had been planned for October by the Housing Service and the tenant representatives hoped to prepare a presentation to encourage people to become an involved tenant.

Mr Ritcher, Tenant Representative, added that there was an investigation to hold more scrutiny panels.

The Strategic Head of Housing added that he was glad the conference was useful, and their ideas were great.

HC.030 Performance Monitoring

A report was circulated prior to the Committee meeting.

Councillor Davies added that the performance monitoring report was inadequate as there were no due dates and no completed actions which meant that housing performance could not be measured. Councillor Davies added that the report could not be accepted.

The Strategic Head of Housing added that the council plan refresh would help to improve performance monitoring.

HC.031 New Homes Programme

A report was circulated prior to the Committee meeting, there were no comments.

HC.032 Renters' Reform Bill

A report was circulated prior to the Committee meeting, there were no comments.

HC.033 Progress update on Key action plans (Cleaner Estates & Service Standards and tenant engagement)

A report was circulated prior to the Committee meeting, there were no comments.

HC.034 Homelessness Services

A report was circulated prior to the Committee meeting, there were no comments.

HC.035 Work Programme

There were no questions or comments on the Work Programme.

The meeting closed at 8.24 pm

Chair