



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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HOUSING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 6 February 2024

7.00 - 9.00 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)**

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

Tenant Representatives

Mike Richter

Officers in Attendance

Strategic Director of Communities
 Head of Housing Solutions
 Head of Property Services
 Accountancy Manager

Customer Insight Officer
 Compliance and Assurance Manager
 Housing Manager
 Democratic Services & Elections Support
 Officer

HC.051 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bennett, Davies, Jockel and Schoemaker.

HC.052 Declaration of Interests

There were none.

HC.053 Minutes

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meeting held on 05 December 2023 were approved as a correct record.

HC.054 Public Questions

Housing Committee
 Tuesday, 6 February 2024

Subject to approval at
 next meeting

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

HC.055 Members' Questions

There were none.

Following a proposal by the Chair it was agreed that due to the interest from members of the public in attendance that item 10 Swedish Timber Houses would be taken after agenda item 5 Members Questions.

HC.056 Swedish Timber Houses - Review

The Head of Property Services introduced the report and explained that Officers had carried out further work following consideration of the report at Housing Committee in December and begun consultation with key stakeholders. The feedback from the consultation was set out in Appendix B. The Head of Property Services added that Uley Parish Council had provided further feedback since the documents were published advising that the Parish Council reserved their position until any forthcoming planning applications had been examined and debated by the parish council and public.

An update with further feedback was also submitted by Wotton Under Edge Town Council. They advised that refurbishment of the Mount Pleasant site would not guarantee a satisfactory Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating and would therefore be uneconomic. Wotton Under Edge Council also added that they did not support the sale of the site and that redevelopment would be the best option subject to satisfactory consideration of the plans.

The Head of Property Services explained that there would be three options to be considered for the houses:

- Sell
- Refurbish
- Redevelop for new affordable homes

The Head of Property Services stated that the operational decision to refurbish the Swedish Timber Homes at The Camp and North Nibley had already been made and work would begin on submitting planning applications. Stinchcombe, Uley and Wotton Under Edge were larger sites and therefore there was an opportunity to increase the number of affordable units to help towards the increasing demand for affordable homes and support objective CW2.1 of the Council Plan.

The Head of Property Services added that the Council had considerable experience in supporting tenants and private residents who had been affected by this type of proposal through previous regeneration schemes and support had been offered to those affected by the Swedish Timber Home review.

Councillor Green asked what rate the rent would be set at if redevelopment was the chosen option. The Accountancy Manager responded to confirm it would be affordable rent on EPC A rated properties which would be 80% of market value. Tenants that had been decanted and had chosen to move back into the property would be protected and charged social rents for the length of their tenancy.

Councillor Patrick asked what the process would be if the current occupiers didn't want to sell the property back. The Head of Property Services confirmed that the Council would try to buy back through negotiation and that the private owners had already been approached. The Council did have compulsory purchase powers however they would be used as a last resort.

Councillor Miles asked whether the Council had access to housing needs surveys from the Parish and Town Councils to support the need for extra housing. The Head of Property Services confirmed Stinchcombe referenced a survey in their response and that she believed Uley had recently begun their survey. She advised that she would confirm whether Wotton Under Edge would be carrying out this survey or had already completed a housing needs survey.

In response to a question from Councillor Luff, the Head of Housing Solutions confirmed that there were just over 4,000 people on the housing waiting list in the District.

Councillor Green asked a further question regarding the Swedish Timber Houses and whether they were listed as non-designated heritage assets. The New Homes & Regeneration Manager advised that she believed some of the units were listed as non-designated heritage assets however some weren't. In response to Councillor Green's follow up question the New Homes & Regeneration Manager added that the Wotton Under Edge home was listed as a non-designated heritage asset. Councillor Green expressed concerns that the Council may be taking away the Swedish Timber Houses which had become a landmark of special historic interest as outlined in the report. The Head of Property Services stated that it was recognised and that it was taken into consideration in the planning balance and set against the delivery of affordable homes.

Councillor Luff asked whether planning permission would be sought before demolishing the properties to which the Head of Property Services confirmed it would be.

Councillor Luff Proposed and Councillor Fryer Seconded.

Councillor Fryer added that it was important to note how many people were waiting for housing.

Councillor Miles offered support for the recommendations and confirmed that she was aware that planning and highways would need to be investigated however the redevelopment would provide much needed social housing.

Councillor Wilsher suggested that the report allowed the council to build affordable housing and allowed the council to improve actions on climate change.

Councillor Patrick confirmed that she was happy to support new social housing provided that the Council listen to the people who lived in the areas.

Councillor Luff summarised to confirm that it was excellent that the Council would be increasing affordable housing and that he was satisfied that the planning process would highlight any issues.

Councillor Ross added that the Council were at the beginning of the process and that the consultation was vital.

After being put to a vote, the Motion was carried with 5 votes in favour and 3 against.

RESOLVED To approve the preferred option of redeveloping the Swedish Timber Sites at Stinchcombe, Uley and Wotton-Under-Edge, subject to a further report to Committee setting out details on the proposed schemes, the financial implications and feedback from further consultation.

HC.057 Local Authority Housing Fund - further bid opportunity

The Head of Housing Solutions introduced the report and explained that the government had launched a new Local Authority Housing Fund to support local authorities in providing accommodation for families that had arrived in the UK via the Afghan and Ukrainian resettlement scheme. The aim of the scheme was to relieve the pressures on local authorities and increase the number of affordable homes available. The scheme also supported the UK's humanitarian duties to people fleeing war.

The Head of Housing Solutions added the Council was successful in bids for £1.8m at the start of 2023 and over £0.5m in June 2023. The Government had contacted the Council to bid for unspent funds elsewhere. Due to the short turn around provided a bid had been submitted for the unspent funds.

The Head of Housing Solutions confirmed that the bid had a property purchase deadline of March 2024. She added that the Council were in a fortunate position as the process of buying a property was already underway. The purchase was a buy back of a right to buy property which they had been planning to purchase with unspent right to buy funds. The Head of Housing Solutions stated that following the advice from finance they wished to swap the funds over to allow the Council to take up funding from the government to buy the property and hold the right to buy funds to buy a further property later.

In response to a question from Councillor Miles, the Accountancy Manager confirmed that if the properties weren't Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rated C then they would become part of the retrofit program. In response to a follow up question from Councillor Miles, the Accountancy Manager stated the Council would be looking to charge affordable rents for the properties.

Councillor Wilsher Proposed and Councillor Fryer Seconded.

Councillor Fryer added that the report would help refugees and when the property was no longer required it could go back into the housing stock.

Councillor Luff commented that he would support the report as the Stroud District welcomed refugees and highlighted that the houses may go back into the general needs stock in the future.

Councillor Wilsher, Miles and Ross echoed comments from other councillors and thanked the officers involved.

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

RESOLVED To note the Local Authority Housing Fund bid submission to DLUHC for the purchase of accommodation to be held within the HRA and accept the grant funding should the bid be successful.

HC.058 **District Heating and Independent Living Charges 2024/25**

The Accountancy Manager introduced the report and explained that it was an update to the budget setting paper that was brought to Housing Committee in December 2023. The update focused on the five independent living schemes that had district heating charges. The Accountancy Manager confirmed that there was a commitment to monitor the district heating usage and charges due to the cost of delivering the service increasing significantly. It was established that the gas and heating in communal areas was higher than anticipated and so therefore felt it was appropriate to ensure that the charges truly reflected the useage. The Accountancy Manager confirmed that the main driver for this was that communal area charges were eligible for Universal Credit and Housing Benefit, however district heating were not eligible for those benefits due to being in individual properties.

The Accountancy Manager stated that there was no overall increase in charges for tenants with district heating charges and schemes, however there was an increase for the tenants in Dryleaze House who used the communal areas. These tenants didn't have the district heating schemes in their homes. The Accountancy Manager also confirmed that the increase had been capped in line with all independent living service charge increases that were approved in December 2023. The Accountancy Manager finally added that the increases had already been approved by Strategy and Resources Committee however it was subject to being approved by Housing Committee.

Councillor Miles asked whether the increased charges took into consideration the lower gas prices. The Accountancy Manager confirmed that tenants' charges would be capped at domestic rates and were set on a estimate of what the fees would be next year.

Councillor Miles Proposed and Councillor Luff Seconded.

Councillor Luff suggested that the changes allowed the usage in communal areas to be more transparent, and it provided more support for those on benefits.

Councillor Ross thanked the officers involved.

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

RECOMMENDED **That the HRA charges from 1 April 2024 for District Heating and**
to COUNCIL **Independent Living Service Charges for the relevant Independent Living**
 schemes are amended as set out in this report.

HC.059 **Domestic Abuse Policy**

The Housing Manager introduced the report and explained that the policy set out the Councils response to addressing domestic abuse and that the policy was in line with Gloucestershire's Domestic Abuse Strategy. She added that the policy also ensured that domestic abuse victims were treated as a high priority and that there was a victim centred approach working in partnership with Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS), the police and Adult Social Care.

The Housing Manager added that all reports of domestic abuse were treated as a high priority and that officers would sign post victims to appropriate support agencies. She added that the Council currently provided two properties as safety accommodation and were working with Green Square to increase the provision for a further two properties across the Stroud District.

The Housing Manager confirmed that officers had attended training around domestic abuse and stated that there were some upcoming training on how to support perpetrators to change their behaviour. The Housing Manager added that legal action would be taken where necessary however it was recognized that there were times where perpetrators also needed support to try and change their behaviour.

Councillor Green asked whether the policy applied to those not living in a council property and for people who were not council tenants. The Housing Manager confirmed that the policy was a housing services policy however if a person that wasn't a council tenant approached the Council, then they would be offered support and be signed posted to the relevant agencies. She added that for tenants there would be a different process as the Council could move them or support them to stay if they wished therefore this policy was written for Council tenants and leaseholders.

Councillor Green asked whether there was a separate policy for non-council tenants. The Strategic Director of Communities responded to confirm that the Council was committed to the Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Strategy which was an overarching policy.

Councillor Green expressed concerns that some people may not want to come forward and when they did, they would be passed on to other agencies. Councillor Green asked whether the language in the report could be modified to explain that people would be supported regardless of whether they were a council tenant or not. The Housing Manager responded to confirm that the officers were trained in how to sign post victims and regardless of whether they were a tenant or not they would be supported.

Councillor Miles asked whether there was a word that could be said when a tenant was in danger. The Housing Manager responded that Property Care staff were efficient in reporting back any issues and forwarding back information where there was a safeguarding concern. Councillor Miles added that the tenant may not be able to raise an issue if they were in danger as the perpetrator may be in the room.

The Strategic Director of Communities added that Community Services & Licensing Committee in March would be considering a revised Safeguarding policy for the Council which included domestic abuse and staff training. In response to Councillor Green question the Strategic Director of Communities confirmed that the training would include subcontractors.

Councillor Patrick asked how they could promote a secret word or action for those in danger without a perpetrator also discovering it. The Housing Manager responded that the main message would be to make sure tenants knew that they could come to the Council, and they would be supported and treated as a high priority.

Councillor Wilsher asked whether there were areas across the housing service provision that the Council could work with other registered providers. The Housing Manager added that the Council worked with various providers on different contracts and were always open and interested in working with other providers. The Council had previously worked with organisations to support people being discharged from hospital.

Councillor Ross advised that the Strategic Head of Housing had created an officer group working with the Head of Housing Solutions regarding temporary accommodation. The Housing Manager added that there was a service level agreement with Housing Advice and three properties were kept available for temporary accommodation.

The report stated that domestic abuse was a breach of the Councils tenancy agreement and Councillor Green asked if the Council would only pursue that when there was a conviction or would there be another method. The Housing Manager confirmed that a tenant could only be evicted if there was a conviction.

Councillor Miles asked for clarification on whether the person in danger would have to stay with the perpetrator until they were convicted. The Housing Manager added that the victim would not stay with the perpetrator and that the different options would be discussed with the victim.

Tenant Representative, Mr Ritcher, asked for clarification on whether the victim and perpetrator would be evicted or just the perpetrator. The Housing Manager confirmed that the courts normally award the tenancy to the victim however if the victim wanted to move as they felt unsafe then they would also be supported in that decision.

Councillor Patrick Proposed and Councillor Wilsher Seconded.

Councillor Green thanked the officers involved in writing the policy.

Councillor Luff stated that it was important that the Council were positive about domestic abuse when police and other services are so stretched.

Councillor Patrick suggested that it was an excellent policy and added that the Council needed to be aware when perpetrators were released from prison.

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

RESOLVED To:

- a) adopt the Domestic Abuse Policy;**
- b) agree to the policy**

HC.060 Legionella Policy

The Compliance and Assurance Manager introduced the report and explained that they had a duty to manage the risk of Legionella bacteria in the water systems particularly in the independent living schemes. He added that following the introduction of new reporting requirements from the Social Housing Regulator, a new Legionella policy and management plan had been written to ensure compliance was met with the updated reporting requirements and standards. Consultation had been carried out with the tenant representatives and following their comments some changes were made to the way Legionella would be communicated.

The Compliance and Assurance Manager highlighted some of the changes to the published document in Appendix B section 5.4 relating to document retention periods:

- Policy and Procedures were revised to three years.
- Risk assessments were revised to a further four years.
- Risk management schemes were revised to four years.
- Monitoring, inspection, and test results remained at five years.

The Chair invited Mr Allen to join the meeting as one of the tenants involved in the consultation.

Councillor Green asked whether heat pumps had been referenced in the Legionella policy as they worked differently. The Compliance and Assurance Manager responded to confirm that heat pumps differed to combination boilers however heat pumps would be investigated individually in the risk assessment rather than in the policy.

Councillor Green asked whether they had the expertise necessary for heat pumps to carry out the various works outlined in the policy. The Compliance and Assurance Manager responded to confirm that Property Care had capacity and the Council also had support from contractors to carry out those duties.

In response to a question from Councillor Miles the Compliance and Assurance Manager confirmed that within the risk assessment each risk would be categorised differently for a tank system or a combination boiler. Councillor Miles asked a follow up question regarding vulnerable residents and whether arrangements would be made if the tenant would be away from the property for a longer period. The Compliance and Assurance Manager added that it would be unusual for a property to have a cold water tank however the risk assessment would highlight them as a higher risk.

Councillor Luff asked whether the heat pump would raise the temperature once a week for a short period of time which was a standard procedure for a heat pump and asked whether the housing heat pumps would differ. The Compliance and Assurance Manager confirmed that there was no difference.

A friendly amendment was agreed to add a review date of 2 years to the resolution.

Councillor Fryer Proposed and Councillor Luff Seconded.

Councillor Luff recommended the policy.

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

RESOLVED To:

- 1. Adopt the Legionella Policy and Legionella Management Plan;**
- 2. Agree to the amendments and updates; and**
- 3. Agree a review date of 2 years.**

HC.061 Preparations for changes to the regulation of social housing

The Customer Insight Officer gave a brief presentation on the preparations for changes to the regulation of social housing.

Councillor Wilsher asked whether it was common practice for the Housing Committee to oversee the submission prior to going to the regulator. The Customer Insight Officer confirmed that the tenant satisfaction measures were a new submission to the regulator and officers had been working on collating the data prior to submitting in June 2024. She added that the performance monitors would have more oversight of the tenant satisfaction measures and there would also be an assurance document to explain the data. The Strategic Director of Communities confirmed that there would be thorough detail provided to and oversight by Housing Committee.

Councillor Luff asked whether the changes applied to non-social landlords. The Customer Insight Officer confirmed that it was just for social housing.

Councillor Patrick asked whether more staff were required to comply with the regulations. The Strategic Director of Communities responded to confirm that the resources the Council already had needed to be well managed and they needed to ensure that there were appropriate strategies in place. The Strategic Director of Communities also referred to the staffing review report included in item 12b.

Councillor Miles expressed concerns on the Ofsted style inspections and asked if support would be in place for staff to prevent them from stress relating to the inspections. Councillor Miles asked if one area needed improvement whether it would affect the overall review in the inspections. The Customer Insight Officer confirmed the detail of inspections hadn't yet been released however there would be six weeks' notice of the inspections. The Customer Insight Officer added that the inspections wouldn't be with the officers and would be for the directors and councillors.

Councillor Wilsher asked whether members could be updated regularly on the self-assessment and asked whether the changes to the regulations of social housing would be added to the corporate risk register. The Customer Insight Officer confirmed that the self-assessment would be shared with members and a review had been undertaken by an external consultant to give the council assurance. The Customer Insight Officer added that the changes to the regulations of social housing hadn't yet been added to the corporate risk register however it was coming.

Councillor Ross agreed that the self-assessment should be regularly shared and that the changes to the regulations of social housing should be included in members induction.

Tenant Representative, Mr Ritcher, asked how the IT systems were progressing. The Strategic Director of Communities confirmed that the implementation was well underway.

Councillor Fryer Proposed and Councillor Wilsher Seconded.

Councillor Green and Wilsher thanked all staff involved in the preparation of the expected changes.

Councillor Ross thanked the Customer Insight Officer and added that the social regulator was there to ensure the council kept their tenants safe.

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

RESOLVED To note the report on preparations for changes to the regulation of social housing.

HC.062 **Tenant Representatives**

There was no update.

HC.063 **Housing Service Review**

A report was circulated prior to the Committee meeting.

Councillor Luff asked whether apprenticeships were considered for the Housing Assistants. The Strategic Director of Communities confirmed he would respond to Councillor Luff outside of the Committee.

HC.064 **Work Programme**

There were no questions or comments on the Work Programme.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm

Chair