



# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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## HOUSING COMMITTEE

8 June 2021

7.00 pm – 8.50 pm

Council Chamber, Ebley Mill, Stroud

### Minutes

#### Membership

<b>Councillor Mattie Ross (Chair)</b>	P	Councillor Lindsey Green	P
<b>Councillor Chris Jockel (Vice-Chair)</b>	A	Councillor Nick Housden	P
Councillor Paula Baker	P	Councillor Steve Hynd	P
Councillor Laurie Davies	P	Councillor Jenny Miles	P
Councillor Trina Davis	P	Councillor Loraine Patrick	P
Councillor Colin Fryer	P	Councillor Lucas Schoemaker	P

P = Present                      A = Absent

#### Officers in Attendance

Strategic Director of Communities	Head of Community Services
Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living)	Income and Systems Manager
Head of Strategic Housing Services	Housing Strategy and CIL Manager
Operations Manager	Democratic Services & Elections Officer
Community Services Manager	

#### Other Member(s) in Attendance

Councillor Doina Cornell (Leader)

The Chair introduced Officers and welcomed Members of the Committee who introduced themselves and their wards. It was agreed that Item 11 would be heard after Public Questions.

#### HC.001

#### APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Jockel.

#### HC.002

#### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

#### HC.003

#### MINUTES

#### **RESOLVED**

**That the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 April 2021 were approved as a correct record**

#### HC.004

#### PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were none.

**HC.005****MEMBER REPORTS**a) Tenant Representatives – Verbal Update

Following a recent Tenant Voice taster session, two Tenant Representatives had been recommended, along with two further residents to take on supporting roles. These were Mike Richter from Dursley and Becky Adams from Stonehouse and, in the supporting roles, Trish Betteley and Carole Wise.

Councillor Patrick asked whether she would be required to make a declaration of interest if she knew one of the representatives to which the Chair confirmed she wouldn't.

Councillor Davies asked whether the representatives should cover wider geographical areas in the future. The Chair advised that there were other positions such as Tenant Inspectors and Ambassadors for any residents who were keen to get involved. Councillor Fryer suggested the new Tenant Representatives should join the Committee as soon as possible. It was agreed that this would be put to the next Full Council to formalise the appointments.

The Chair informed Members that the Housing Review Panel would be refreshed and led by the Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim) and the Senior Housing Strategy & Enabling Officer. Membership would be closely aligned to the membership of the Housing Committee and non-Committee Members may be invited at discretion. Meeting dates would be confirmed.

Three Task & Finish Groups were proposed to be set up so that Members of the Committee could get more closely involved in the following areas of work:

- Retrofit/Carbon Reduction: to support the development, review and implementation of carbon reduction investment in existing Stroud District Council (SDC) stock, including business plan option appraisals.
- Tenant Engagement and Empowerment: to support development, tenant engagement and empowerment in line with the 2021 Social Housing White Paper.
- Housing Repairs and Voids: to support the development of best practice in repairs and maintenance in SDC stock.

Terms of Reference were to be agreed and membership would be cross-party, drawn wholly from the Housing Committee. The groups would be chaired by a Member and would meet 3 to 5 times a year. The Chairs would report to Housing Committee as appropriate. The work and possible continuation of each group would be reviewed at the end of 12 months. Members were asked to give some thought to which of these groups they may like to join.

**RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL**      **That the tenant representatives are appointed.**

**HC.006****COUNCIL HOUSING: INCOME COLLECTION AND RECOVERY POLICY 2021**

The Income and Collections Manager introduced the report, which focused on rent sundry charges and debts. The key points included; a reviewed policy to ensure compliance with the relevant legislation and debt recovery procedures, opportunity to identify areas for improvement, regular review of internal processes, ensuring tenants remain supported and assessing the impact of Covid-19. The Income Collections Manager commented on the Charter of Social Housing Residents and advised the Charter doesn't specifically mention income collection and rent setting, but the general ethos underpinned the work of the Income Management team. Officers attend regular training including training on Mental Health.

Councillor Green asked if the differences between the amended and original policy could be highlighted in red to easily identify changes. The Income and Collections Manager confirmed this could be done in future.

Councillor Patrick advised she has always been impressed with the process and aims of keeping people in their homes. Councillor Fryer expressed the importance that paying back rent did not mean tenants were set up to fail and to avoid escalation and the risk of eviction.

Councillors also raised questions on severe financial hardship meaning and whether the Council still use bailiffs. The Income and Collections Manager informed Members that severe financial hardship would be associated with bankruptcy or debt relief order and that court bailiffs only attend evictions to serve the eviction notice.

Councillor Miles commented upon the improved new supportive wording of review letters sent out at the start of debt and asked whether this policy would be set in stone or would there be continuous improvement. The Income and Collections Manager answered that the policy review had inspired a review of the wording of letters and that these new ways of wording will be built upon across the service.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

**RESOLVED            To approve the reviewed policy**

The Chair confirmed that Item 8 would be heard next.

**HC.007                    CLEANER ESTATES STRATEGY ACTION PLAN**

The Strategic Director of Communities introduced the report and advised Committee the Action Plan was following from the Cleaner Estate Strategy which had been approved in April. The Action Plan was broken down into four elements; communities, consultation elements, satisfaction and innovation.

Councillor Miles raised a question on tenant's discontent about cleanliness of estates and if Committee would receive a report for progress. The Strategic Director of Communities confirmed milestones would be put in place to report back to Committee.

Councillor Davies asked whether there would be room for change and adaptability with the policy. The Strategic Director of Communities confirmed there is room to amend and develop.

Councillor Patrick asked for clarification on communal cleaning in flats and what dry mopping was. The Community Services Manager explained that it was mopping without water and reason for its use is to reduce slips and falls. Councillor Patrick further elaborated the reasoning for her question and the Community Services Manager advised any failure in standards should be reported to himself and the Housing team who would investigate.

Councillor Fryer commented whether the Action Plan could be delivered under current financial resources. The Strategic Director of Communities confirmed it could be delivered within existing funds.

Councillor Davies asked for more detail around the budget for gardening, whether Members could be involved with improvement of gardens with tenants and whether a mutual resolution around fly tipping and bulky item collection could be achieved. The Strategic Director of Communities agreed to confirm details of the budget outside of Committee, Members

involvement could be incorporated into the plan and he reinforced the Council's commitment to a joined approach in tackling fly tipping and bulky collections.

Councillor Schoemaker raised a question around working in conjunction with a variety of landlords and private owners and whether a monthly service for those with limited car transport for tip collection which would also help with Carbon Neutral 2030 Strategy reducing emissions. The Strategic Director of Communities agreed a whole community and neighbourhood approach was key and working together to address cleanliness and neighbourhood issues. The monthly service idea could be scoped for integration into the Estate Clean Ups element of the Action Plan. The Chair added mention of the Pride in your Neighbourhood projects and that the Tenant Representatives could also be involved.

Councillor Hynd asked what were the reporting lines for Officers within the Council and how it feeds into Committee in relation to outcomes and being able to measure them against key performance indicators. The Strategic Director of Communities advised he was keen for progress to be reported against tangibles with evidence. The Social Housing White Paper included a commitment to tenant involvement, transparency and thoroughness to be clear for reporting back upon. Officers would be held to account against the Action Plan. Councillor Hynd added it would be useful to know what baselines were being worked from.

Councillor Miles enquired what the alternative provisions for fly tipping removal if any. The Strategic Director of Communities advised scheduled removals could be explored to discourage fly tipping. The Community Services Manager advised Housing and Community Services are working close together to resolve fly tipping removal. The Head of Community Services explained education is also important for tenants.

Councillor Schoemaker asked whether linking up with private enterprise was possible to help with fly tipping and if there were any licenced scrap metal dealers working in the area to which Committee agreed there were.

Councillor Green enquired whether the Council could work and link up with other authority's in relation to fly tipping in particular to reduce fly tipping within neighbouring authorities. The Community Services Manager agreed that this would be useful and informed Members that Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) run the recycling centres and had approached South Gloucestershire Council (SGC) historically but had been turned down. Members felt that SGC and GCC facilitating links would be useful. The Community Services Manager would continue trying to put pressure on county colleagues.

Councillor Patrick advised it was individuals outside of the area who come into the district specifically to fly tip or dispose of their waste at bin stores which then needs to overflowing rather than the residents of the street where fly tipping happens. The Community Services Manager informed the Committee of the current project to develop contained rather than communal bin stores. Work is being undertaken and has seen improvements already.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried unanimously

**RESOLVED To agree to adopt the Cleaner Estates Strategy Action Plan**

**HC.008 TENANT SERVICES COMPENSATION POLICY 2021**

The Strategic Director of Communities introduced the report advising that the Housing Regulator requires that we have a Tenant Compensation Policy that was reviewed regularly. The policy was last reviewed in 2017 and the revised 2021 policy was consulted on with

tenants to produce a more concise document. The key changes were summarised on page 38 paragraph 3 in the document pack which included; clarifying roles and responsibilities on Officer involvement, a new Neighbourhood Nuisance Compensation Policy that linked into the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy Agreed in April 2021, reviewing lessons learnt as part of the annual reporting and training for staff and tenants.

Councillor Green asked if there was anything in place for tenants who do not wish to be identified and how they can report anonymously. The Strategic Director of Communities confirmed it was an option and support would be provided to tenants who feel intimidated along with working with local Police and third party agencies.

Councillor Baker asked for clarity on homelessness payments in the event of tenant moving which was initiated by the Council and if they qualify for the payment. The Strategic Director of Communities advised he would need to further investigate but suggested common sense and discretion would be applied along with compassion.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried unanimously

**RESOLVED            To approve the updated policy**

**HC.009                            VISITOR ROOM POLICY (INDEPENDENT LIVING)**

The Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living) introduced the report and advised the purpose was to establish a new policy for the Visitors Rooms at the Independent Living Schemes, including setting a charge for use of these rooms of £20 for the first night and £10 each additional night. Across 27 of the schemes, 24 had guest rooms which were previously free of charge, however 11 were fit for purpose. The implementation of the charge is for use of the rooms and ensure compliance was maintained. Consultation was undertaken with tenants (727 letters sent) with 9 responses for and against.

Councillor Fryer asked whether any discretion would be granted to residents on Universal Credit or other benefits to ensure they were not penalised. The Service Delivery Manager confirmed that discretion would be used and advised Members that the rooms were used 7 to 12 times a year, averaging 1 to 2 nights at a time.

Councillor Green asked whether the rooms could be repurposed if vacant such as for homelessness. The Service Delivery Manager advised that the rooms could be repurposed however careful consideration would be required as the schemes often contain vulnerable individuals. The rooms have also been used previously to temporarily rehouse tenants in the case of damage or flooding to their property.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried unanimously

**RESOLVED            To adopt;**  
**a) The Visitors Room Policy for Independent Living, and**  
**b) A charge for using the Visitor Room in Independent Living schemes of £20 for the first night plus £10 for each additional night.**

**HC.010**                      **SERVICE STANDARDS ACTION PLAN**

The Strategic Director of Communities presented the report and advised that the Action Plan sat behind the Tenant Service Standards which was approved at Committee in April. Some of the specifics of the Action Plan which would be reported back to Committee included; updating the Tenants Empowerment Strategy, support tenants with digital equality, benchmarking Stroud District Council standards against other Authority's and to commit to the STAR surveys of tenants and residents yearly for feedback.

Councillor Baker raised a question around the rollout of digital equality programme and whether it would only be for individuals who volunteer for tenant representatives. The Strategic Director confirmed initially it will be a pilot asking for volunteers with an intention to review at a later date.

Councillor Miles asked whether there would be funds identified to re-employ Resident Involvement Officers following the redesign of the Tenancy Management Service to support tenants. The Strategic Director of Communities advised there was an Officer in post who would be continuing on the work and review available resources to put towards tenant involvement.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

**RESOLVED**                      **To agree that the action plan is relevant, fit for purpose and implemented.**

**HC.011**                      **PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPRESENTATIVES**

Councillor Davies and Councillor Green were appointed as Performance Monitoring Representatives.

**HC.012**                      **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair announced that a Work Programme meeting would be held before September Committee and all of Committee will be invited to attend and contribute.

Councillor Hynd raised concern that the Options Appraisal Decarbonisation and Energy Efficiency of Council Housing Policy on September agenda could be a large item for discussion alongside the rest of the reports for September Committee. The Strategic Director of Communities agreed and reasonable consideration time at Committee would be needed.

**HC.013**                      **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

There were none.

The meeting ended at 8:50 pm

Chair