



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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HOUSING COMMITTEE

02 November 2021

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 Laurie Davies

*= Absent

Councillor Christopher Jockel (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Nicholas Housden
Councillor Jenny Miles
Councillor Loraine Patrick
Councillor Lucas Schoemaker
Councillor Steve Hynd

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Officers in Attendance

Housing Manager
Strategic Director of Communities
Head of Contract Services
Head of Community Services
Housing Renewal Manager

Service Delivery Manager
Democratic Services & Elections Officer
Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim)
Housing Advice Officer

HC.27

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hynd and Davies.

HC.28

Declaration of Interests

There were none.

HC.29

Minutes

It was agreed to add the absences for Councillors Davies and Davis to the last meeting.

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 were approved with the amendments laid out above.

HC.30 **Public Question Time**

There were none.

HC.31 **Revised Tenancy & Estates Management Policy**

The Housing Manager introduced the report and explained the role of Stroud District Council (SDC) as a landlord within the policy. The Housing Manager drew Members attention to the feedback they had received from tenants, including the lack of enforcement action taken. She informed the Committee that enforcement action was taken when it was needed however, it was a very long process and didn't yield immediate results.

She talked the Committee through the key changes to the policy which included:

- Community involvement.
- Co-opted Tenant Representatives to further ensure tenant views are represented.
- Promoting a Green Champion.
- Home contents insurance.
- Rechargeable repairs.
- Independent living hubs.

In response to Councillor Green, the Housing Manager explained that there were a number of property inspections that took place including:

- Stock condition survey, which is part of a 3-5 year plan.
- Pre-determination inspection, which is arranged before a tenant moves out of the property.
- Regular tenancy audit, these were not currently taking place due to the high demands on work load however, these were completed when there had been an issue or concern raised with the property or the tenant.

In response to a further question from Councillor Green, the Housing Manager informed the committee that it was the tenants responsibility to take out a home contents insurance policy and they advertised this frequently to tenants.

The Strategic Director of Communities informed the Committee there were further property inspections that were routinely completed on SDC properties which were statutory inspections such as gas inspections.

The Housing Manager clarified the terms and roles of the tenant groups such as:

- Tenant Voice Representatives who sit on the Housing Committee and can voice the concerns of the tenants.
- Neighbourhood Ambassadors who work with SDC to put papers together and feed back to the community.
- Tenant repairs inspectors who look at the works completed after a repair and feedback to SDC.
- Focus Groups are for tenants and local residents who wish to be involved short term. Tenants in these groups can often be referred to as involved tenants or tenant representatives.
- Green Champions who will try to look after the community and gardens and encourage other tenants to recycle.

Councillor Schoemaker raised a typographical issue with paragraph 7.8 in appendix A, the first sentence should have read 'on a street, neighbourhood or estate'. The Housing Manager agreed to include the word 'on'.

The Chair suggested a visual 'family tree' to explain the roles of tenants could be helpful, it was agreed that this could be put together.

The Housing Manager provided the following answers in response to questions:

- Tenant Repair Inspectors would be working solo once the programme was started up again. Introductions to the tenant would be completed prior to the checks and any tenants involved would be DBS checked before taking up their relevant roles.
- If there were issues on SDC estates regarding private owners, SDC would liaise with environmental health to assess the situation and take legal action if necessary. SDC's Anti-Social Behaviour and Enforcement Officer was also trained to issue Community Protection Notices (CPN's) as can Environmental Health Officers.

The Head of Contract Services answered a question raised by Councillor Housden around Void properties. He confirmed that there were 3 different time scales to work to in order to fill the properties and these would vary depending on the type of void. He informed the Committee he could provide exact figures outside of the meeting if they requested them.

In response to a question from Councillor Green the Housing Manager Stated that CCTV was allowed for tenants to record their own property however, recording other properties or communal areas was not allowed. Councillor Green requested more specifics to be included around the rules of Tenants putting up their own CCTV.

In response to Councillor Patricks question, the Housing Manager explained how hoarding issues were dealt with. She explained these issues took a long time to resolve as they would need to first establish whether the tenant would engage with SDC or with their support mechanisms. Often they would need to try and find mental health support. She informed the committee that they were dealing with one such case which had already exceeded 18 months' worth of work and was still ongoing.

Councillor Patrick also questioned how the cleaning operatives were reviewed. The Housing manger explained that 50% of the blocks that are not cleaned due to a historical decision to allow tenants to take over. She also informed the committee that the cleaning completed is of a basic standard and the community services officers inspect the blocks that are cleaned. Councillor Patrick suggested that further training could be provided for the cleaners.

Councillor Davis spoke of an issue she had been made aware of regarding the breeding and selling of dogs in an SDC property. It was agreed to be followed up by the Housing Manager outside of the meeting.

Councillor Miles proposed and Councillor Schoemaker seconded.

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

- RESOLVED:** a) To adopt the revised Tenancy & Estate Management policy.
 b) To give delegated authority to the Head of Housing Services, in consultation with the Chair & Vice Chair of Housing Committee to make minor amendments as necessary.

HC.32 **Revised HomeseekerPlus Allocations Policy**

The Chair informed the Committee that an all-Member briefing was being arranged to allow members to ask any questions regarding Homeseeker and housing allocations.

The Head of Strategic Housing Services (Interim) introduced the report and provided the Committee with the background and the purpose of the policy. She explained that the update to this policy would not alter how households apply for affordable housing. The updates were in response to legislation and to refine some wording.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Schoemaker, the Housing Advice Manger explained that the global banding applied to almost every band on the system and applies to all of the authority areas and that this allowed greater consistency. He explained there were a few bandings which only applied to local areas.

Councillor Patrick asked for confirmation if the '3 strikes and you're out' policy, when bidding for properties, applied to care leavers. The Housing Advice Manger confirmed that it did apply as it does to all applications however, Officers had a high level of discretion and were trained to assess refusal reasons and allow for special circumstances. The local connections for care leavers had been widened and allows them to choose the authority area they would prefer. He also agreed to run a report following the meeting to show how many times applications had been struck out to help provide reassurance that it was rarely used by Officers.

Councillor Baker proposed and Councillor Fryer seconded.

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

- RESOLVED** a) To agree the changes made to the HomeseekerPlus Allocations Policy and approve the revised policy for adoption.
 b) To give delegated authority to the Head of Strategic Housing in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Housing Committee to make minor textual and formatting changes before publication.

HC.33 **Mobility Scooters Policy in Council Properties**

The Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living) introduced the report and explained that this was a brand new policy and was for all users in Stroud District Council housing not just Independent Living. She explained this was for the safe storage and charging of mobility scooters. Part of the policy involved finding suitable places to store mobility scooters if there was not a safe space at the accommodation.

After a question raised from Councillor Green, the Service Delivery Manager confirmed there had been many safe storage areas already put in to place at different schemes

across the District. It was also confirmed where safe storage and charging was not possible they would look to see if they were meeting the housing need of the tenant.

Councillor Fryer questioned when leaseholders may be recharged for the costs of alterations. The Service Delivery manager confirmed that recharges would only be for things deemed unreasonable for SDC to complete for example, widening doors and imputing ramps.

In response to a question regarding tax disks on page 99, the Service Delivery Manager agreed to amend the wording of the report from displaying a tax disk to having the mobility scooter registered for tax (if required).

Councillor Miles questioned if a general needs tenant required alterations such as hardstanding, would the cost of that come out of SDC budget. The Service Delivery Manager confirmed that the costs would come out of the Gloucester County Council (GCC) aids and adaptations budget.

The Service Delivery Manager confirmed in response to Councillor Schoemaker that the closest they can get the mobility scooters to the Grange View accommodation was 25 steps away. She also informed the committee that around 10% of Independent Living tenants utilise a mobility scooter in independent living.

Councillor Baker questioned whether SDC provided metal sheds to keep mobility scooters in. The Service Deliver Manager confirmed sheds were used at the 4 Hubs however, general needs tenants wouldn't be automatically entitled to these, it would depend on being able to find a suitable location and would be assessed on a needs basis.

Councillor Schoemaker proposed and Councillor Baker seconded.

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

RESOLVED To adopt the Mobility Scooter Policy in Council Properties.

HC.34 Corrective Action to Strengthen the Council's Out of Hours Call Out Provision

The Head of Contract Services introduced the report and explained that it was based on the action plan created following an Audit that had been approved at the last Audit and Standards Committee. He informed the Committee that a lot of the actions had already been completed and they were continuing to work on the outstanding ones. He stated that they had concluded that there was no systematic failing in terms of the service provision and that it was a one off and was due to a series of events. Extra precautions had been put in place this year to ensure it is not repeated.

In response from questions raised by members the Head of Contract Services answered the following:

- The service provider has added a new dedicated line, reviewed internal processes and trained additional staff to answer phone calls. SDC has also put in measures following a non-response from contractors to escalate the matter to on call officers.

- SDC would provide the list of the on call Officers to Members.
- A number of processes which could be improved added up to the overall failure.

After concerns raised by Councillor Housden over the renewal of the contract, the Head of Contract Services explained the following:

- The contractor would have met the expectations for call handling and answering however, the volume of calls drastically exceeded that number.
- He also informed the Committee that the KPI's were over ambitious in relation to time scales for call answering.
- The contract was intended for extension if acceptable and this was being reviewed by One Legal.
- The KPI's were being looked at as part of the ongoing process.
- The contractor performance was reviewed on a monthly basis and service users were consulted as part of this.

Councillor Housden voiced his continued concerns with the renewal process of the contractor.

The Strategic Director of Communities confirmed SDC accepted the failure and recognised the areas for improvement, they were awaiting confirmation from One Legal regarding some items within the report.

Councillor Green questioned whether a target date of the 1 December was too late considering bad weather had already started. The Head of Contract Services explained that the improvements began immediately and this deadline was for the actions and the documentation to prove these had taken place and been completed. Councillor green further questioned how often the contractor's performance would be reviewed to which the Head of Contract Services confirmed there would be monthly meetings as well as a quarterly review. He agreed to provide the Committee with the results from the quarterly reviews and to bring back a review of the report to the April Housing Committee in 2022.

Councillor Miles proposed and Councillor Fryer seconded.

Councillor Patrick expressed a lack of confidence with the report. She questioned whether the new processes and system had been tested enough.

Councillor Housden questioned whether this report should be taken to full Council. Members debated this topic at length and agreed this could be considered after they have received the review in April 2022.

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

Councillor Ross gave her thanks to the Officers who had worked hard to look into the problems which had been identified and that the plan was now in place to ensure that it did not happen again.

RESOLVED a) To Note the action plan and corrective actions already implemented and;
b) That the Lead officer to provide an update on progress at the April 2022 Committee meeting

HC.35 **Volunteering Policy (Independent living)**

The Service Delivery Manager (Independent Living) introduced the report and explained that it was a brand new policy. She spoke about the 4 independent community hubs and their value to the community and to tenants. She explained the policy was to support the rights, roles and responsibilities for volunteers. The Service Delivery Manager informed the Committee that a part-time Volunteer Coordinator had recently been recruited to work with and train all of the volunteers. She further explained that all volunteers would have to undertake a DBS check in order to be successful for the role.

In response to a question from Councillor Green, the Service Delivery Manager explained they were currently looking at ages from 55 upwards but this would continue to evolve. Councillor Green expressed an interest linking this with the Youth Council to which the Service Delivery Manager explained the Community Hub Coordinator had been working on an intergenerational activities project which they hoped to be rolling out shortly.

In response from Members questions the Service Delivery Manager gave the following responses:

- Health & Safety and Safeguarding training would be provided for all volunteers.
- Volunteers would be identified through the Volunteer Coordinator.
- Volunteers would primarily be tenants to begin with and then branch out to the wider community.
- The Volunteer Coordinator would be cross trained in order to pass along the relevant training to volunteers.

Councillor Schoemaker questioned paragraph 2.3 in the report which mentions 'suitable outlying properties' which should read 'Suitable outlying tenants'. The Service Delivery Manager agreed that Councillor Schoemaker was correct.

Councillor Miles proposed and Councillor Schoemaker seconded.

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

RESOLVED To adopt the Volunteering Policy for Independent Living**HC.36** **Pet Policy**

The Housing Manager introduced the report and gave a brief overview of the history of owning a pet within SDC properties and sheltered accommodations. She stated that SDC had been praised for recognising the benefits that stem from pet ownership for example; mental health and social isolation. She informed the committee of the main concerns raised which included:

- Significant noise from cockerels.
- Multi-pet households.
- Dogs loose in communal areas.
- Fouling in communal areas.

She then informed the Committee of the key changes of the policy which included:

- Removed permission to house cockerels.
- Breeding and sale of animals from SDC properties had been prohibited.

- Permissions to have a pet can be withdrawn if the pet criteria had been breached.
- Permission to house caged pet on communal land was not acceptable.
- Number of permissions in multi-pet household were subject to the home the owner could provide for the pet.
- No fouling would be enforced and dogs needed to be kept on leads in communal areas.
- Reminded tenants that permission is to be sought before the pet and a responsible person should be named to care for the pet in their absence.
- Continue to refuse permission for cat flaps as they compromise the integrity of the door. Surveyed whether tenants would replace the door when leaving but only 16% (of 38 responses) said they would consider that.
- Evictions and abandonments would give SDC responsibility to arrange appropriate action for the pet.

In response to questions the Housing Manager explained:

- Neutering an animal was not a condition, it was just a responsible and reasonable request to ask tenants.
- There was currently no pet register in place to ensure the animal was what was requested.

Councillor Fryer proposed and Councillor Patrick seconded.

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

RESOLVED a) **To adopt the revised Pet Policy; and**
 b) **To give delegated authority to the Head of Housing Services, in consultation with the Chair & Vice Chair of Housing Committee to make minor amendments as necessary.**

HC.37 **Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire Warm & Well Partnership Renewal**

The Housing Renewal Manager introduced the report and explained the partnership had been in place since 2001. She stated that the main reason for this was to try to address the problems around fuel poverty and by working as a partnership, it created a stronger position for the Councils to secure bids. She explained that the Committee was being asked to approve the contract extension for an extra 2 years for the warm and well scheme. She further explained the reason behind this was due to the better care funding only being guaranteed for a further 2 years. She informed the Committee the bid for the sustainable warmth competition had been submitted and the decision for this had since been delayed however the report would state otherwise as the decision was expected in October. She further explained if the bid was successful, any gas heating works would not be an acceptable use of the funding.

Councillor Green questioned whether SDC could support the funding for the warm and well scheme should the better care funding not be continued. The Housing Renewal Manager confirmed she would hope that to be the case should the funding be removed however, funding for the better care project came directly from central government and although not impossible it was unlikely this funding would be cut.

Councillor Housden requested a breakdown of the costs and asked if this could be delivered in house. The Housing Renewal Manager explained the following Councils within the partnership each provided different amounts in order to pay for the telephone advice line, technical staff etc.

- Each of the 6 District Councils within Gloucestershire provide £20,000
- South Gloucestershire provide £30,000 because they are a unitary authority.
- Gloucestershire County Council provide £60,000.

Councillor Miles questioned if park homes would continue to be prioritised. The Housing Renewal Manager confirmed this was not the case with this particular bid, they would still be able to address some park homes however, they would be looking at the wider property market.

In response to Councillor Patrick, the Housing Renewal Manager explained due to treasury rules, public funding had to be awarded through a bidding process.

Councillor Housden asked whether there were any plans to tie this in with the current retrofit work. The Housing Renewal Manager explained this particular bid is for private sector properties or private sector landlords.

Councillor Baker proposed and Councillor Schoemaker seconded.

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

- RESOLVED**
- a) To continue to provide advice and support to those in fuel poverty in the district by renewing the Councils membership of the Warm & Well Partnership for up to a further 5 years; and
 - b) To provide Core funding to support the partnership of £20,000 per annum from the Better Care Fund Disabled Facilities Grant wider social care budget; and
 - c) To approve the extension of the Warm & Well delivery contract for a further 2 years; and
 - d) To approve as the lead authority, the submission and acceptance of the bid for £5.2 million to the Sustainable Warmth Competition for the energy efficiency improvements to the homes of those in fuel poverty cross Gloucestershire & South Gloucestershire under the Warm & Well Scheme; and
 - e) To authorise the Chief Executive to undertake all action as necessary to ensure the delivery of the Sustainable Warmth project, including, in consultation with the Borough Solicitor, the entering into of any legal arrangements or other documentation; and
 - f) If successful recommend to Council, the addition of the Sustainable Warmth Bid to Stroud District Council's capital programme.

HC.38 **Progress update on Key action plans (Cleaner Estates & Service Standards)**

The Housing Manager gave a verbal update into the work that had been completed that month on the project which included:

- An options appraisal at Nouncells Cross to improve cleaning and waste management.
- Promoting the role of Green Champions - 6 tenants expressed interested.
- Looking into purchasing a locked skip to remove fly-tipping more efficiently.
- Hosted a focus group for the independent living schemes which 10 tenants attended. They requested the opportunity to meet as a group on a quarterly basis which is currently being arranged.
- Hosted a Tenant Evening on the 12 October which received good feedback and resulted in a number of tenants who volunteered to be involved.
- Service standards have been benchmarked by TPAS, have received recommendations and feedback and will bring back a report on this after the recommendations have been reviewed.

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

Councillor Baker proposed and Councillor Green seconded.

After being put to a vote; 7 votes for, 2 votes against, the Motion was carried.

a) Tenant Representatives

Tenant Representative Becky Adams expressed her feedback from the tenant evening on the 12 October and stated it was a very useful and informative evening.

Tenant Representative Mark Ritcher expressed his interest with the projects the task and finish groups were working on and how they were solving the issues.

b) Housing Review Panel Update

The Chair explained that this had been paused while other work had been prioritised.

c) Retrofit/Carbon Reduction Task and Finish Group

Councillor Jockel informed the Committee what was discussed at the last meeting of the group:

- What they needed in place to make it work.
- What would success look like & how would that be measured.
- Seasonal work done mostly in summer.
- How effective was it.
- Getting a good before measure to show progress after the work was completed.
- Overall carbon savings.

d) Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Task and Finish Group

Councillor Fryer informed the Committee that there had been 3 meetings to date. During these meeting the initial points raised were:

- Review of communications channel from tenants to SDC including telephone and e-mail.
- Meeting to be scheduled to meet the new Community Action and Engagement Officer.

- Complaints, define the type of complaints received to see what merits a complaint and if it could have been handled differently.

He informed the Committee he also attended the tenants evening on the 12 October and stated it was a very productive evening with lots of expression of interests for tenant roles within SDC. He stated how important it was to include the tenants in the work being completed at SDC.

e) Housing Repairs and Voids Task and Finish Group

Councillor Baker informed the Committee they have had 2 meetings to date and would start by focusing on voids first and following the voids through the process. She explained the Operations Manager will be taking people out to view the different types of voids and they would be looking to get some figures together soon to see how to progress.

HC.40 **Work Programme**

There were no questions or comments on the Work Programme.

HC.41 **Members' Questions**

There were none.

The meeting closed at 10.08 pm

Chair

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