



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council Offices • Ebley Mill • Ebley Wharf • Stroud • GL5 4UB

Tel: (01453) 754 351/754 321

www.stroud.gov.uk

Email: democratic.services@stroud.gov.uk

HOUSING COMMITTEE

05 April 2022

7.00 - 9.38 pm

Council Chamber

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Mattie Ross (Chair)

Councillor Paula Baker
Councillor Laurie Davies
Councillor Katrina Davis
Councillor Lindsey Green
Councillor Nicholas Housden
Councillor Colin Fryer

*= Absent

Councillor Christopher Jockel (Vice-Chair)

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

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Officers in Attendance

Strategic Director of Communities
Head of Contract Services
Interim Head of Housing Services
Head of Strategic Housing Services
(Interim)
Housing Manager

Accountancy Manager
Principal Accountant
Operations Manager
Housing Renewal Manager
New Homes & Regeneration Manager
Democratic Services & Elections Officer

HC.066 Apologies

The Chair proposed to move Agenda Item 13, Members Questions to be taken after Agenda Item 4. It was agreed.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Fryer.

HC.067 Declaration of Interests

Councillor Jockel declared an interest in the Canalside issue on agenda item 8. It was agreed if this came up during discussions, he would leave the room.

HC.068 Minutes

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2022 were approved as a correct record

HC.069 **Public Question Time**

There were none.

HC.070 **Members' Questions**

Member Questions were submitted by Councillor Housden and answered by the Chair. Supplementary questions were also asked and answered by (Refer to the [Council's recording](#) and [Agenda Item 13](#)).

HC.071 **Budget Monitoring Report 2021/22 Quarter 3**

The Principal Accountant introduced the report to the Committee, he then summarised the main variances from each of the budgets:

General Fund Revenue Budget

- Table 1 on page 14 of the document pack showed an underspend of £7k.

General Fund Capital Programme

- Table 2 on page 15 of the document pack showed a total underspend of £361k.
- £230k underspend on the Disabled Facilities Grant Scheme due to a backlog of referrals for an occupational therapist within the County Council.
- £195k underspend on the Green Homes Local Authority Delivery Scheme (LADS) Park Homes due to the alignment of the grant.
- £50k overspend on the Green Homes LADS 3 due to a new grant for energy efficiency improvements.
- £50k underspend on the Health through warmth Grant due to the insulation grants.
- £50k overspend on the Home Upgrade Grant – Sustainable Warmth due to the new grant bid.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

- Table 3 on page 16 of the document pack showed a total overspend of £836k.
- Total Income - £377k overspend.
- Supervision and Management - £387k underspend.
- Repairs and Maintenance - £762k overspend.
- Other Expenditure - £61k overspend.

HRA Capital Programme

- Table 5 on page 19 of the document pack showed a total overspend of £59k.
- Total Major Works showed a £14k underspend due to works deferred later into the next financial year.
- Total Other Capital Works - £435k had been allocated for the implementation of the new Housing System.
- New build and Regeneration showed a £73k overspend due to slippage, costs rising and start time delays due to Covid.

In response to Councillor Davis, the Strategic Director of Communities explained that they could not comment on specific cases during a meeting, these would need to be raised outside the meeting.

After a question raised by Councillor Green, the Strategic Director of Communities confirmed that the increase in tenants leaving their tenancies had remained high and this was due to a number of reasons which included:

- Tenant's personal circumstances.
- Tenants moving into care homes or similar.
- Tenants who had passed away.

Councillor Housden questioned the savings made on item 4.8 (page 14) of the report and further questioned whether the situation in Ukraine would have had an impact. The Housing Manager confirmed that through working with a partner organisation they had changed the way that the temporary accommodation scheme was delivered which is how they managed to make the savings. She further informed the Committee that the current situation with Ukraine shouldn't affect that specific budget however it could impact other parts of the Housing budget.

The Interim Head of Strategic Housing Services explained about the hosting scheme for people to offer housing opportunities to Ukrainian refugees. She further explained that should any of those placements fail, it was likely that the Council would be asked to step in to provide accommodation.

Councillor Housden repeated his earlier question regarding the loss of £1.1m in the budget due to voids. The Accountancy Manager explained that the figures shown in the graphs were pressures against the budgets. She further explained in detail that the figures were only an estimate and therefore could not be counted as a loss. She also mentioned that the pressures were against the repairs and maintenance budget as a whole and therefore not solely representative of the voids.

The Tenant Representative asked for confirmation that the savings against the kitchens and bathrooms as seen in table 5 on page 19 of the document pack, would be carried forward to the next financial year. The Principal Accountant confirmed that this was the case. After a further question on the topic the Head of Housing Services explained that there were works that were deferred into the following year due to the increased costs of labour and the difficulties surrounding Covid guidance causing less workers on site.

In response to Councillor Housden the Head of Property Services confirmed that item 5.5 on page 17 of the document pack showed an additional £250k which was allocated to the ongoing work on the void properties.

Councillor Jockel proposed and Councillor Baker seconded.

Councillor Baker thanked the Officers for the report and explained it was an extremely difficult year and she was pleased to see that things were improving.

This was echoed by Councillors Miles and Schoemaker.

The Councillors debated the following topics at length:

- The length of time void properties spent empty.
- The Councils priorities on larger projects.
- The length of time utilities took to repair issues and visit a property.

Councillor Schoemaker raised a point that this was reporting the year in which there were still Covid lockdowns, material costs had risen, and labour was increasingly difficult due

to self-isolations. He further explained that whilst he was happy with those figures now if they remained unchanged in 12 months' time then they would be questioning them.

Councillor Hynd also raised the point that due to the nature of the HRA, there were no grants available for the larger costs that Covid had caused such as PPE.

The Chair, Councillor Ross, commended the officers for their report and their hard work to reduce the number of voids to pre-covid levels.

Councillor Jockel expressed his support for the report and stated he was proud to be part of a Council that provided social housing to the community.

After being put to a vote, the Motion was carried with 7 votes for and 4 abstained.

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

HC.072 Tenant Engagement Strategy

The Housing Manager introduced the report and explained that its purpose was to maximise the opportunities for tenants to engage with Stroud District Council (SDC) and ensure that the experience enhances future delivery.

She informed the committee that they held 3 tenant engagement sessions on the 22nd Feb which were largely successful. They had a large turnout which included new tenants that hadn't been involved before.

The Housing Manager further informed the committee of some of the feedback they had already received which included.

- The re-modelling of the tenant involvement names as tenants felt they were too formal.
- The Café conversation style was a great success due to social inclusion and a less formal atmosphere.

She updated the Committee on the scrutiny training for tenants in May. TPAS were scheduled to come and do some training with the involved tenants and then they can choose an area to scrutinise which will then be fed back to the Committee.

They were focusing on getting Officers out in the Community more, such as Housing Hubs for Neighbourhood Management Officers to engage with their tenants and making use of the larger community hubs that were built during lockdown.

The Housing Manager gave the following answer in response to Councillor Green, they were still working on engaging with younger tenants as mainly it was the older tenants who were engaging.

Councillor Davies proposed and Councillor Schoemaker seconded.

Councillor Patrick commended the work and stated she had seen the difference in how tenants engage with the council.

Councillors Schoemaker and Jockel both commended the report.

Councillor Davies was pleased with the outcomes of the tenant empowerment. She further commented that part of her ward had secured a grant as part of the Jubilee fund to develop part Nouncells Cross as an art project.

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

RESOLVED To adopt the updated Tenant Engagement Strategy

HC.073 Decant Policy

The Housing Manager introduced the report and defined that decant was the process of moving households out of their homes either due to their landlord having compulsory powers of purchase to redevelop or in order to carry out emergency repairs. She further explained that this Policy set out the terms and processes for decanting people from their homes. She recognised that this was a sensitive issue and there would be support for the families involved. The aims of the policy included:

- To provide choice to tenants.
- Ensure that decants operate in a fair equitable and reasonable manner.
- To deliver simple but effective consultation and feedback.
- To enable decants to be carried out in a way which minimises disturbance to households.
- To establish a basis of making offers of support both financial and practical.
- To enable the Council to make best use of stock.

She then informed the Committee of the main updates to the Policy which included:

- The home loss payment was set at £7,100.
- Job titles had been amended to reflect the current structure; decanting was now being looked after by a Lettings Officer.
- Tenants may be considered for a direct match, in line with the HomeseekerPlus Policy.
- If multiple tenants were interested in a direct match, an assessment would be made based on suitability. This process sensitively and take in account specific factors such as disability and vulnerability.
- Safeguarding process will be used for any tenants who were at risk.

In response to Councillor Patrick the Housing Manger explained that the policy was only applicable to tenants who needed to be moved and not those who wanted to move or downsize.

Councillor Miles proposed and Councillor Schoemaker seconded.

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

RESOLVED To adopt the updated Decant Policy

HC.074 New Homes and Regeneration Programme Update

The New Homes and Regeneration Manager introduced the report and explained that it provided an overview of SDC's New Homes and Regeneration Programme. This included an update on the current schemes within the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and an update on the 3 schemes where an extension of time had been requested and additional costs were incurred.

The New Homes and Regeneration Manager drew Members' attention to the following:

- SDC had built 251 new homes to date.
- A further 94 homes were planned and budgeted for delivery by 2025.
- SDC were actively exploring further opportunities for development.
- A budget of £3m had been allocated to acquire new land for development due to the current limited land opportunities for the Council.

The New Homes and Regeneration Manager updated the Committee on the Site within the current programme, this included:

- SDC had procured a framework agreement with E.W. Beard.
- The schemes were split into tranches in order to mitigate risk.
- The contractor's performance would be monitored monthly through a robust set of KPI's.
- The past 2 years had been challenging with Covid and Brexit having detrimental impacts on the supply of materials and labour.
- SDC had taken handover of 7 new homes in Minchinhampton with a further 9 bungalows in Eastington and 20 homes in Nailsworth to be received in the coming months.
- SDC had achieved an EPC rating A in the new homes in Summersfield road. It was hoped that the tenants would see a reduction in energy costs because of this.
- The delivery of the new homes had been challenging with Covid and Brexit causing a significant impact of cost of materials and labour which over all caused large delays.
- On final completion of the contract an outturn report would be presented to the Strategic Director of Resources and would further be reported to the committee at the budget setting meeting.
- The next four sites scheduled to be completed were:
 - Gloucester street & Bradley Street, Wotton under Edge
 - Orchard Road, Ebley
 - Cambridge House, Dursley
 - Glebelands, Cam

The New Homes and Regeneration Manager gave the following answers in response to Members' questions:

- In relation to Queens Drive site, there were ongoing legal issues which were more complex than first thought. They were exploring other options which was hoped to be resolved shortly.
- Between 2019 – 2025 they had built or were planning to build 101 houses.

Councillor Jockel left the room due to an interest he disclosed at the beginning of the meeting.

Councillor Housden received the following answers in response to his questions about Item 4.4.6 on page 71 of the document pack

- Work was ongoing with the Town Council and other providers of land in the Town, it was still the intention to keep the site in the HRA
- It was not agreed that the site should be removed from the HRA.
- It was not the Chairs intention to remove the site from the HRA as it was the Committees decision to transfer the site and it would remain in the HR until a point where the Committee decided otherwise.

- It was the Council's intention to work with Stonehouse Town Council who had expressed an interest in the Ship Inn Site and with anyone else who would wish to further the project.
- Around 600 people had expressed their views in a closed question survey which only represented the views of some of Stonehouse's residents.
- It was confirmed that Stroud District Council had spent approx. £54,672.06 on the site with regards to planning applications, legal fees, additional surveys ect.

It was agreed to share the details of the party wall issues mentioned on page 70 of the document pack outside of the meeting.

Councillor Schoemaker proposed and Councillor Miles seconded.

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

RESOLVED To:

- a) Note the outcome of the delivery of the current New Homes Programme in particular the position with regard to the schemes at Summersfield Road, Broadfield Road & Ringfield Close.**
- b) Note the update provided on the programme of new council homes, with budget already approved in the MTFP, for delivery during 2022 to 2025.**

HC.075 Revised Civil and Financial Penalties Policy

The Housing Renewal Manager introduced the report and explained that it was to update and introduce new policies in relation to the private sector enforcement work. She further explained the points of the report which included which included:

- Landlords were now required to have an electrical safety check on their properties. There was a maximum penalty of £30,000 under the financial penalties policy for not complying.
- Appendix 1 showed an update to the current financial penalties policy to reflect these changes.
- Appendix 2 showed the procedure for the electrical safety check enforcement because it was a new action.
- Appendix 3 was a new policy which regarded the redress schemes for lettings agency work and property management work which was introduced in 2014 however Stroud had not had a policy for this in place until now.
- The smoke and carbon monoxide alarm (England) regulations 2015 policy had been refreshed as shown in appendix 4. The main change included a reduction in the early payment discount.

The Housing Renewal Manager gave the following answers in response to questions asked from Councillors:

- There were not normally court costs involved as the first point of enforcement was a fine. If the fine was not paid then it would go to court as a debt.
- We have not had to enforce any of these previously however, we had previously issued fines and notices.

Councillor Hynd proposed and Councillor Schoemaker seconded.

Councillor Schoemaker stated that it was great to get the policies in place and commended the fact that our standards were so high that we hadn't needed to take enforcement action in the past.

Councillor Miles debated that it was good the council took an advise first approach as some landlords would have inherited properties and may not have been as knowledgeable as others.

In response to Councillor Schoemaker, the Housing Renewal Manager reminded the Committee of the [Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards \(MEES\) Policy](#) which related to the EPC certificate of rented accommodation and would be updated when the minimum rating rose from an EPC E to an EPC C in 2025.

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

RESOLVED To:

- a) **Adopt the revised Policy on the Implementation of Financial Penalties for Certain Housing Offences Attached in Appendix 1; and**
- b) **Adopt the Electrical Safety Standards Policy attached in Appendix 2;**
- c) **Adopt the Redress Schemes for Lettings Agency Work and Property Management Work Policy Attached in Appendix 3; and**
- d) **Adopt the revised Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 Policy attached at Appendix 4**

HC.076 Progress Update on Key Action Plans (Cleaner Estates and Service Standards)

A report was circulated ahead of the meeting as part of the document pack.

Councillor Patrick passed along some feedback to the Housing Manger with regards to the new bin store at Oak Drive, Dursley.

Councillor Housden questioned whether the addition of CCTV to Chapel Street had caused an uplift in fly-tipping on nearby areas. The Housing Manger confirmed this was not the case and they were keeping a very close eye on surrounding area to ensure this did not become a problem.

HC.077 Member / Officer Reports

- a) **Update on the Out of Hours Provisions - Briefing Note**

A report was circulated ahead of the meeting as part of the document pack. The Head of Contract Services informed the Committee that the transfer to the new provider had gone seamlessly.

The Head of Contract Services gave the following answers in response to Councillor Green:

- The previous contractor had given their notice to terminate the contract due to a commercial decision in their main hub to internalise the service, therefore they could not continue with any external contracts.

- There was no period of time without a contractor during the transfer
- In the last report presented to committee there was an outstanding action awaiting advice from One Legal which had now been concluded. The related to two points, one of which was an action to update a record which had since been completed and the other was confirmation that the decisions made were legal.

Councillor Green expressed her disappointment with this only being a briefing note and not a full report. She drew attention to the previous report, which was brought to the November 2021 meeting, page 113 paragraph 6.4 stated that a report would be brought to April 2022 Housing Committee which would provide an update of the progress made in delivering the action plan and lessons learned. She further questioned where the updated action plan and the lessons learned were in the briefing note.

The Head of Contract Services apologised for the difference in the briefing note to a report. He confirmed that he would be providing a further report to the Committee at the next meeting.

He informed the committee that the first performance meeting with the new contractor was next week and should the Committee wish, the results from that could be reports back separately.

b) Tenant Representatives

Becky Adams gave an update on the previous few weeks. She mentioned that they were awaiting an induction which had been previously postponed due to Covid. This induction would enable them both to meet with Housing Managers, meet with other involved tenants, include a trip to the Littlecombe site and visit to few properties. Becky also informed the Committee that they had been able to visit some void properties as part of the task and finish group which was very insightful.

c) Performance Management Q3

The Strategic Director of Communities introduced the report and explained that it was a draft report which currently included all of the key indicators that could be looked at as part of the performance monitoring process. He further explained that the two performance leads had not yet had a chance to meet to discuss the report. There was a meeting arranged on the 25 April to look into the report in further detail. It was hoped that this meeting would highlight 2 or 3 things which would then be brought to the attention of the Committee to discuss further. The Strategic Director of Communities informed the Committee that they were keen to get the Youth Council and the Tenant Representatives involved with the performance monitoring process.

The Chair added that there was a mistake in the report which named Councillor Stephen Davies as a report Monitor when it should have read Councillor Laurie Davies.

d) Retrofit/Carbon Reduction Task and Finish Group Update

Councillor Jockel explained that they were approaching the beginning of the implementation stage, there were measurements agreed to keep on track of the progress and then gave a brief update of progress since the last meeting which included:

- Agreed how the roll out would take place starting with an initial 250 properties per annum which would then expand to 470 properties per annum. This would then be rolled out geographically across the district
- The visits to Hamfallow and Berkely had now been completed and feedback had been given. This would then be discussed at the next meeting of the task and finish group.

e) Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Task and Finish Group Update

In Councillor Fryer's absence the Chair gave a short update which included a new tenant member for Middle of the Hill.

The Housing Manger confirmed that they had found someone to assist with recording and editing the DIY videos that Tenant Representative Becky was keen to get started on at the last Committee.

f) Housing Repairs and Voids Task and Finish Group Update

Councillor Baker provided a brief update to the Committee. After putting in their recommendations for the Voids in December, the group was well into their work with the repairs which included:

- They had been exploring the challenges with communications, part of which would be picked up with the new IT systems.
- Looked into the repairs policy in detail and established what was the responsibility of the tenant and the landlord and identified those that came under both.
- Damp and Condensation was one of those under the shared responsibility header which could be affected by lifestyle and repairs issues. They discussed amending the wording for shared issues to help direct tenants where they needed to go to address the issue.
- Discussed the challenges of maintaining and repairing existing systems of heating.

Councillor Patrick questioned why the roof tiles in St Georges Road were being thrown away during the renovations, she also highlighted a health and safety concern with the lack of hats and hi-vis being worn on site.

The Head of Contract Services explained that the concrete tiles were no longer fit for purpose due to the nib of the tile having worn away. He explained that they were being replaced with a clay tile which has a longer lifespan. He further informed the committee that a percentage of the tiles were supposed to be recycled to be used elsewhere. It was agreed to take the health and safety complaint away as an action to monitor.

HC.078 **Work Programme**

RESOLVED To note the Work Programme.

The meeting closed at 9.38 pm

Chair