

Cabinet Housing Panel
19 July 2021

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

* Reporting to Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET HOUSING PANEL held on Monday 19 July 2021 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors J. Cragg (Chairman)

M. Birleson, A. Dennis, A. Hellyer, T. Kingsbury
(substituting for F. Thomson), H. Quenet, A. Rohale
(substituting for T. Jackson-Mynott), P. Smith, R. Trigg

ALSO PRESENT: Tenant's Panel Representatives

Martin Norman
Ardita McHugh

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Head of Housing Operations (S. Pearson)
Private Sector Housing Team Leader (D. G. King)
Senior Democratic Services Officer (G. Paddan)
Democratic Services Assistant (B. Taylor)

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

It was noted that Councillors J. Cragg and F. Thomson were appointed Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Panel for the 2021/22 Municipal year at the Cabinet meeting on 15 June 2021.

2. SUBSTITUTIONS

The following substitution of a Committee Members had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules:

Councillor A. Rohale for T. Jackson-Mynott.
Councillor T. Kingsbury for F. Thomson.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Chesterman, T. Jackson-Mynott, R. Lass and F. Thomson.

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4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2021 was approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. ACTIONS UPDATE

The status of actions agreed at the panel meeting on 2 March 2021 in the report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) was noted.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor T. Kingsbury declared a non-pecuniary interest in items on the agenda as appropriate by virtue of being a Member of Hertfordshire County Council.

7. HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) on the revised Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2021 and to seek authority to consult on the draft, prior to a final version of the policy being presented back to Cabinet Housing Panel for recommendation to Cabinet to be approved.

The aim of the Housing Assistance policy was to ensure that residents in Welwyn Hatfield who qualify receive the necessary assistance to 'help them live in their own homes, safely and with dignity with the right adaptation when they need it'. The policy was in two parts: Firstly, Mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants – this set out the mandatory legal framework including eligibility criteria and the prescribed means test assessment. Secondly, Discretionary Assistance – this sets discretionary interventions to promote independent living and wellbeing set locally by the Council.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- The updated policy would widen the scope of assistance that is available to disabled people within the Borough, but also update the availability to be in line with the current Government guidance on how grant funding can be used across the Borough.
- The primary assistance that the Council does deliver at present is through the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). This is an activity that was funded through grants received by Hertfordshire County Council from the Better Care Fund (BCF). These grants can only be used in the private sector and the Council are looking at adopting a more discretionary approach.
- The new policy consolidates, simplifies and broadens the scope of the assistance that can be provided to residents within the Borough to adapt their homes within the private sector.

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- Members were pleased with the report and were encouraged by the scope of it.
- Members asked who would be consulted. It was confirmed that the general public would be consulted, as well as the key stakeholders such as Hertfordshire County Council, Adult Care Services, Children Care Services, Age UK, Carers in Hertfordshire, Herts Ability and other relevant stakeholders.
- Members asked about the discretionary assistance which set out the discretionary interventions to promote independent living and wellbeing. Officers confirmed that the DFG was ring-fenced and could only be used in the private sector. The Council wanted to find alternative funding to provide discretionary functions that enable people to live in their homes independently but did not satisfy the requirements of the DFG. The Head of Housing Operations would look at the details of the discretionary assistance and will inform Members.
- Members asked if there were staff who were part funded by the Council and dealt with hoarding. Officers confirmed that County Council had funded posts within the Council that provided tenancy support including tenancy sustainment. They dealt with some of the most vulnerable tenants and residents in the Borough. They look into hoarding as well as other areas such as child wellbeing and schooling.
- Members asked about the local land charge and how it worked. Officers confirmed that with the DFG there were limited property charges. Any amount that was over £5,000 and up to the maximum of £10,000 was placed on the property as a limited charge for 10 years. If the grant recipient moved within that period, the Council would have the discretion to take it back and would take reasons for the move into account.

RESOLVED:
(Unanimous)

- (1) That subject to any comments received from Members of Cabinet Housing Panel, the 2021 Housing Assistance Policy would be published for public consultation via an Executive Member Decision Notice.
- (2) Members noted that subject to agreement of the recommendation in the report, a further report would be brought to Cabinet Housing Panel following the consultation, setting out the results and any proposed changes to the draft policy resulting from this, with a view to recommending this to Cabinet for approval.

8. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR HOUSING PERIOD QUARTER FOUR - 2020/21

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) on the summary of strategic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Housing in Quarter Four in 2020/21.

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The report provided a summary of the strategic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and comments about performance by exception. The KPIs were monitored quarterly by Heads of Service. The report was the final out-turn report for the year 2020/21.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- Members asked why the KPIs had become BPIs and what they stood for. Officers confirmed that BPIs stood for Business Plan Indicators instead of key performance indicators.

**RESOLVED:
(Unanimous)**

The Panel noted the contents of the report.

9. NOW HOUSING - PROGRESS REPORT

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities), which provided an update on the progress of Now Housing Limited, which was owned by the Council. The company provided housing across the Borough and provided housing accommodation for families and residents that could access Council housing but cannot afford market rent. The company helped facilitate people into accommodation that was affordable.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- The company at present owned and managed only one block of 12 flats in Chequersfield.
- There were 100% of rent collection collected with no debts due and no loss of monies through void loss either because all of the properties had been occupied since the tenancies had commenced towards the end of last year.
- The company plans to increase the number of properties within the portfolio but it had been suggested that whilst stock numbers were low, the Council would bring periodic updates back to the Panel on a six months basis.
- Members asked what changes were expected to be seen over the coming years, in terms of number of houses. Officers confirmed that in the business plan it states that the company plans need to increase the portfolio to over 300 properties over the next ten years. This will be delivered through an ambiguous programme of stock acquisition, new developments and possible joint ventures with developers to increase the portfolio numbers to enable a range of homes to be provided.
- Members asked if there was a plan laid out for a number of flats, bedrooms or houses. The Officer stated that there was a business plan that was circulated and shared in September 2020. It set out the objective

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of what type of stock we would buy (1 or 2 bedroom properties) based on the assessment that was carried out on the demand for housing need.

- Members asked what the length of a tenancy was. Officers confirmed that the tenancies were short hold and were for a five years fixed period.
- Members asked if anything was on the horizon to acquire more properties in the next 12 months. Officers confirmed that there were a pipeline of property acquisitions and some properties were being built. The Head of Housing Operations to bring this information to Members.
- Members thanked the housing department in their role supporting the residents of the Borough.

Post Minute Note: A note was circulated advising Members of the length of tenancy for a 'Now Housing' tenant, which is three years, not the five years, as advised at the meeting. The information relating to the 'Now Housing Business Plan' had been circulated (CHP agenda pack of March 2021).

The Head of Housing Operations advised that the potential pipeline over the next 3 years is 350 properties, consisting a mix of one and two bedroom flats and studio flats. All opportunities were subject to viability assessments and the necessary formal approval from the Now Housing Board and the Council's Cabinet.

**RESOLVED:
(Unanimous)**

The Cabinet Housing Panel noted the report of Now Housing Limited, which presented an update on the company's progress to date.

10. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100(A)(2) and (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting for Agenda item 11 on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of confidential or exempt information as defined in Section 100A(3) and paragraphs 3 (private financial or business information) and 5 (legal and professional privilege) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

In resolving to exclude the public in respect of the exempt information, it was considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

11. INDEPENDENT LIVING - 24 HOUR CONTROL CENTRE SERVICE REVIEW

The Panel considered the exempt report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities).

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The report set out the considerations, options and recommendations to deliver against the project scope objectives, as part of the Council's Modernisation Programme.

(Note: A more detailed record of the Panel's decision is contained in Exempt Minute 11).

Meeting ended 8.30 pm
GP