

Cabinet Housing Panel  
8 November 2021

## WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

\* Reporting to Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET HOUSING PANEL held on Monday 8 November 2021 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Campus East, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors J. Cragg (Chair)  
F. Thomson (Vice-Chair)

M. Birleson, L. Chesterman, A. Dennis, R. Lass, H. Quenet, P. Smith, R. Trigg and R. Platt

ALSO PRESENT: C. Andrews (Resident Panel Representative)

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Head of Community & Housing Strategy (S. Chambers)  
Head of Housing Operations (S. Pearson)  
Housing Development & Strategy Service Manager (H. Sarohi– Parhar)  
Compliance Manager (E. Manzie)  
Principal Governance Officer (J. Anthony)  
Democratic Services Assistant (B. Taylor)

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### 12. SUBSTITUTIONS

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

Councillor R. Platt for Councillor T. Jackson-Mynott.

### 13. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A. Hellyer and T. Jackson-Mynott.

### 14. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2021 was approved as a correct record by the Chair.

Councillor M. Birleson sought an update on previous meetings restricted item (item 11). Officers assured that progress was being made to determine a way forward.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor R. Trigg declared an interest in item 16 (item 7 on the agenda) as appropriate by virtue of being a member of the accredited landlords within the Welwyn Hatfield Borough and recused himself from the meeting for this item.

16. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) on the adoption of the new Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy following consultation. Officers stated that the Current WHBC policy was adopted under the provisions of The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002. A review of this policy had been undertaken resulting in a number of proposed changes which would seek to increase the number of people assisted and to improve housing conditions. The proposed changes to the Housing Assistance Policy had been highlighted to Members in the papers circulated prior to the meeting.

Officers stated that key stakeholder groups had been consulted and a survey had been conducted with the public which gave positive responses. Officers informed Members of the proposal for two new grant schemes. The first was the Safer Homes grant which would deal with category one hazards. The second grant scheme being for Crime Prevention and would work alongside the Police and other partners to ensure resident safety by providing additional security measures. Officers stated the policy was clear on who would be eligible for the grants with an FAQ added to the website to help residents seeking to apply.

Officers stated that more members of the community, notably vulnerable groups or individuals, would be helped by the proposed policy and that there would be an increase in spending from the grant pot which would help the community further.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- Members expressed support in the updated policy and asked if a six-month review report could be brought to the panel. Officers agreed to the review.

RESOLVED:

(**Unanimous** of Members present – 8 in total)

A) The panel noted the contents of this report.

B) Members recommended to Cabinet that the final policy set out at Appendix A be adopted and that given the unanimous agreement of the

Cabinet Housing Panel  
8 November 2021

panel, for the decision to be taken by the Executive Member using their delegated powers under paragraph 18.1(b) of the Cabinet Procedure Rules.

17. HOUSING COMPLIANCE

Report of the Chief Executive that provided an update on the Housing compliance position and the improvement plan. Officers referred to the Councils self-referral to the Regulator of Social Housing once it discovered issues of non-compliance. Officers stated that of the six compliance areas; four were deemed major compliance areas (Fire, Water, Asbestos, Electric) and that three of these areas would be compliant by September 2021, with Officers having to contend with a significant non access issues. Officers confirmed that Water and Electric works were progressing and works nearing completion. Furthermore, Asbestos was now 100% compliant, as was electric & gas in communal areas. Officers informed Members that Fire compliance would be reached by March 2022 with type three fire assessments taking place. Due to high levels of no access, the fire assessment has been changed to type one for properties where access permissions have not been granted. Officers confirmed that this approach was decided on after consultation with the regulator and the fire service.

Officers stated that an improvement action plan was produced for the council to reach full compliance in all six areas.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- Members thanked the Officers for their hard and efficient work in correcting the issue.
- Members asked why the fire doors would not be completed until the end of March 2022 and why the delay in sorting a contract. Officers stated that the fire door programme was being completed separately, and that more doors than initially anticipated needed to be changed. The longer time scale was due to the fire doors being specially made to order in bulk numbers.
- Members sought assurance that the worst fire doors were being replaced first. Officers stated that the fire doors needed to be checked every six months and the council was prioritising according to risk assessments undertaken on each building to target the 'worst'.
- Members asked whether there was a pattern to the no access problem. Officers stated that there were three main reasons: 1) the tenants need assistance, 2) the tenants did not understand why the council were intervening and 3) tenants had made changes in the properties without permission.
- Members expressed concern over the compliance issue and a desire to scrutinise. It was proposed that the best time for scrutiny would be once the council achieved full compliance. Members noted that regular compliance reports would come to each CHP.
- Members discussed the merit of Members receiving training on statutory compliance issues to ensure the Panel could perform its function

Cabinet Housing Panel  
8 November 2021

adequately. It was noted that training requirements were being considered and would be provided via the Member Development Steering Group.

- In response to a question, the Chair confirmed that as yet no timeline had been provided for completing the ongoing investigation.
- Members asked how the tenants were kept informed. Officers stated that the webpage was regularly updated and that there was a specific email and number for tenants to use to contact Officers if they had any questions or concerns.

RESOLVED:  
**(Unanimous)**

The panel noted the contents of this report.

#### 18. AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE REPORT

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) of an update on the Council's Affordable Housing Programme (AHP). Officers gave an overview of the Affordable Housing Programme that provided Members with information of the Welwyn Hatfield Design Brief which would go to consultation with Members, Residents Panel, and tenants. Officers stated that green technologies were included in all new builds. Furthermore, Officers informed members of the draft 'accelerated affordable housing homes pipeline programme 2021-2029'.

Officers updated Members of the progress of each of the affordable housing schemes utilising images and plans.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- Members welcomed the social housing development in the borough.
- Members sought clarification that there were sufficient heating engineers capable for maintaining and repairing air source heat pumps once they had been installed. Officers assured Members that the Council's current contractors would provide this service.
- Members asked about communal spaces at Minister House. Officers stated that there would be communal kitchen and dining halls in addition to multi-purpose activity rooms and a roof terrace. Furthermore, the multi-purpose rooms give flexibility to what could be offered to residents.
- Members expressed excitement to the Minister House project. The Executive Member proposed that sites visits be arranged for the CHP members to all the affordable housing programme projects.
- Members asked whether EV charge points were included in the green technologies being used. Officers stated that all properties have EV charge points, and the council was actively pushing the green technology agenda.

RESOLVED:

Cabinet Housing Panel  
8 November 2021

**(Unanimous)**

The panel noted the contents of this report.

19. NOW HOUSING UPDATE REPORT

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) which provided an update on Now Housing Limited and included the updated business plan. Officers stated that the initial business plan was approved in October 2019 and that the business plan is reviewed on an annual basis. The review was brought forward due to the updated pipeline of the number of properties to be delivered by Now Housing. Officers summarised the acquisition programme that was set out in December 2020 and consisted of a forecast acquisition of 368 homes. However, the updated plan aimed for 416 homes over the next five years. The loan facility for Now Housing would be reviewed in 2022 based upon the projected borrowing to deliver the new acquisitions targets.

Officers stated that Now Housing owns and manages one block of twelve flats in Chequersfield, Welwyn Garden City. Officers highlighted that the performance on rent collection was 100% and that no rent had been lost due to voids. One property became void at the end of October 2021. Officers provided an update to the report to announce the property had been let in 4 days which minimised any loss.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- Members asked about the delays in Inspira House to 2025. Officers stated that it was purchased to be used as an interim facility of temporary accommodation whilst Howlands House was redeveloped. The delays were due to planning complications which was currently progressing. Officers stated that Inspira House was having works done to rectify some issues and was hopeful it would be ready for reoccupation in a few weeks. Inspira House would also be used as temporary accommodation whilst Burfield Close was redeveloped.
- Members expressed gratitude for verbal updates from Officers.

RESOLVED:  
**(Unanimous)**

The Panel noted the report of Now Housing Limited.

Meeting ended at 8.31 pm  
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