

Cabinet Housing Panel  
13 March 2023

## WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

\* Reporting to Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET HOUSING PANEL held on Monday 13 March 2023 at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber.

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

M. Birleson, D. Jones, R. Lass, G. Moore, T. Rowse,  
T. Travell, S. Tunstall, R. Trigg, and M. Holloway

ALSO PRESENT: Residents Panel Representatives: C. Andrew and A. McHugh

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Executive Director, Finance & Transformation (R. Baker)  
Executive Director, Place (C. Barnes)  
Service Director, Property Maintenance and Climate Change (I. Hancock)  
Service Director, Resident & Neighbourhood (S. McDaid)  
Private Sector Housing Manager (J. Smith)  
Senior Democratic Services Officer (C. Francis)

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### 24. SUBSTITUTIONS

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

Councillor M. Holloway for Councillor L. Crofton.

### 25. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Crofton and S. Tunstall.

### 26. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2023 were approved as a correct record by the Chair.

As per the minutes from the last meeting, concern was raised that the family referred to previously are still in temporary accommodation. Officers were asked why it has taken so long for them to be housed when the note says the average length is 146 days for those with children. Officers clarified that these are average figures, so there will be cases that are shorter and longer than the average length.

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The Chair advised that for individual cases it would be more appropriate to raise with herself or Councillor Thompson, as Executive Member for Housing, outside of the meeting.

27. 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 a non-pecuniary interest in item 9 of the agenda by virtue of being a PAL accredited landlord.

28. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR HOUSING Q3

Report of the Service Director (Property Maintenance and Climate Change) setting out the housing performance indicators for Quarter 3 2022/23.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- In relation to BPI 31, where it states, 'where the work is completed right the first time', members asked why some cases cannot be completed the first-time round. Officers clarified that in 88% of instances in Q3 work could be undertaken with tools and parts available in the contractor's van. When a specialist part is required, a follow-on repair will need to be booked in.
- Officers noted that in terms of cost of living, there is a dedicated page on the council's website. A Hertfordshire wide pamphlet was distributed by the County Council which Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council supported and were involved in. The council works closely with partners dealing with cases on the front line, including the setting up of warm spaces.
- In terms of housing needs targets, officers advised that the team is under significant pressure, both in terms of the number of new presentations of potential homelessness as well as the volume of new properties coming forward for allocation. Senior management is working with the teams to improve the performance wherever possible and hope to see an improvement in Q4.
- Officers advised that the Homeownership and Income Team have been given training, specifically around the cost-of-living crisis. This includes what support is available and ensuring residents are claiming the benefits to which they are entitled. The council are working with tenants by engaging with them and setting up payment plans. Officers confirmed there have been no evictions this year.
- Officers advised that in relation to BPI 63 and 65 these are two separate teams. The two teams work closely together but these are separate disciplines, so the support they provide to the public is different, as is their areas of knowledge and expertise. In terms of BPI 63, we would normally see a reduction in caseload of new people presenting during December. Whilst that number is slightly reduced from the previous months, it is still significantly high. There has been some staff turnover in that team, which

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has unfortunately had an impact. In terms of BPI 65 all of the cases that have been dealt with were resolved quickly, but there were still some outstanding cases at the end of the quarter, which affected the statistics. In terms of the housing needs register applications, overall, the team is well resourced and is running smoothly, but again they are seeing a significant number of applicants, as well as needing to allocate a significant number of new development properties. These have come at a similar time, which would normally be spread out throughout the year.

- Members asked for numbers of properties to be included in the commentaries for all the repairs and voids measures to help give context to the percentages.

**RESOLVED (Unanimous)**

Members noted the contents of the report.

29. HOUSING COMPLIANCE UPDATE

Report of the Service Director (Property Maintenance and Climate Change) providing an update on the Housing Compliance position.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- Electricity domestic testing is 99.1% compliant, officers advised that of the 76 properties they have been unable to gain access to, most of these properties are occupied.
- Officers confirmed that the Legionella compliance relates to the testing regime and not whether there are any actions outstanding. Officers said this can be added to future reports.

**RESOLVED (Unanimous)**

Members noted the contents of the report.

30. PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING TEAM AND THE PARTNERSHIP ACCREDITATION FOR LANDLORDS ('PAL') SCHEME

Report of the Service Director (Resident and Neighbourhood) providing an update on the Private Sector Housing Team and PAL Scheme.

Following a presentation on this the following points were raised and discussed:

- Members thanked officers for the vital work the team does to protect residents from bad private landlords.
- Officers advised that currently there is no register of private landlords. With new legislation there will be a portal for landlords where they will have to register the declaration of their interests which will be managed by DLUHC, but this is in the early stages. Currently the council can only extrapolate from

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the census data to see what properties are privately rented. A rough estimate is that around 20% of landlords in the borough are now accredited.

- A previous paper presented to CHP detailed how discretionary grant funding was being used to provide safe accommodation for homeless in the borough by developing a new building for the Peartree YMCA Centre.
- Members asked how much emphasis goes into the adequacy of the bin and recycling provision. Officers said there are conditions that go on to a House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) that detail what the requirement is for bins, recycling, and handling of waste. These are mandatory conditions that the landlords must comply with. There are also discretionary conditions that can be placed on properties that have issues with dealing with their waste, such as asking for a bin survey to be conducted. Officers said they could look at ideas such as increasing recycling for tenants as part of the gold standard for the PAL scheme.
- The council has a range of leaflets that are available on both the PAL and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council websites. Leaflets from the waste services team are also provided.
- Officers clarified that some landlords from letting agents are not necessarily accredited, but the agents who manage the property would then come under the PAL scheme in that regard.
- The Executive Member for Housing noted that she attended a recent Landlords Forum and received really positive feedback from it. She also attended some HMO visits last week and was impressed by the thoroughness of the inspections undertaken.

**RESOLVED (Unanimous)**

Members noted the contents of the report.

Meeting ended at 8.10pm  
CF