

Cabinet Housing Panel
8 June 2023

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

* Reporting to Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET HOUSING PANEL held on Thursday 8 June 2023 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors G.Moore (Chairman)
M.Birleson (Vice-Chairman)

J.Cragg, S.Goldwater, T.Kingsbury, T.Rowse, A.Scott,
F.Thomson, S.Thusu, S.Tunstall and J.Weston

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

OFFICIALS Executive Director, Place (C. Barnes)
PRESENT: Service Director, Resident & Neighbourhood (S. McDaid)
Service Manager, Housing Repairs and Building Safety (E. Manzie)
Democratic Services Assistant (V. Mistry)

At the beginning of the meeting, the Executive Director (Place) gave a presentation on what the Cabinet Housing Panel is and what it considers relating to the Council's Housing functions such as Housing Maintenance, repairs and compliance, Housing needs (options and allocations), housing development, income and home ownership, private sector housing and independent living and housing strategy, what the panel's scope of considerations were and format and content of meetings.

1. SUBSTITUTIONS

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

Councillor T.Kingsbury for Councillor R.Trigg
Councillor S.Thusu for Councillor R.Lass

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R.Lass and R.Trigg.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2023 were approved as a correct record by the Chair.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors T. Kingsbury, F. Thomson and S. Thusu all declared a non-pecuniary interest in items on the agenda as appropriate by virtue of being Members of Hertfordshire County Council.

5. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR HOUSING - QUARTER 4

Report of the Executive Director (Place) on the strategic Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Quarter 4 of 2022/23.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- Members noted there were areas of improvement but there was still a lot of red areas where targets were not met.
- Members asked about the total number of households living in temporary accommodation. In the report is stated 'this situation remains the same as previous quarters'. The supply of properties for people to move into continues to be a challenge and the report highlighted the new development at Shredded Wheat should lead to several families moving in.
- Members asked for clarity on the Shredded Wheat development as there are 162 people in temporary accommodation and how are they going to be helped? Officers stated in relation to the Shredded Wheat development, there are a significant number of affordable properties within that development. Whilst they will be advertised in the normal way through the housing system, the council was hopeful that some of the families that are in temporary accommodation would be successful for shortlisting for some of those properties, that would provide some move on from temporary accommodation. Over the last three to six months the council has seen new properties emerging. The number of people in temporary accommodation is high, so the council have a number of initiatives that they are reviewing. The council owns its own properties and have recently completed a couple of developments that will allow families to move in, so the council are continuing to invest in in those in those properties. To make sure the supply of properties is maximised, the council work with developers through the planning process.
- Members asked what are the reasons that properties are hard to let, why are they not suitable for people to move into and what can the council do to improve them? Officers stated there might be a number of reasons for this. Officers were currently doing a review of the reasons for refusal. This could be people perhaps not accepting the offers of the flats that the council are providing. It could be the location not meeting expectations or size. Officers will have more information once the review has taken place. Officers stated that an update can be provided at the next meeting on the reasons and it will also be reflected in the performance report.
- Members asked how many voids there were at any one time? Officers stated they did not have the information at hand but will provide

information after the meeting. Officers stated they have regular meetings looking at voids, the process, what is still outstanding and what needs to be progressed between various teams.

POST MEETING NOTE: There are approximately 60 voids on average at any one time.

- Members asked how many people were in temporary accommodation and what were the different locations? Officers stated that there were 162 households that were currently in temporary accommodation. These were a number of council owned sites. It includes Howlands House, Burfield Close and Inspira House. There are unfortunately some residents in hotel accommodation which the council limit. Officers were happy to arrange for a report to be circulated giving a breakdown of all the locations, capacity, how many were in each location before the next meeting.
- Members asked how the KPI around repairs was measured in particular the first time fix, was this when the resident is satisfied or when the contractor decides that the first time fix is complete. Members also asked how many tenants are surveyed and what happened when the surveys were not returned and how the completed targets were measured. Officers stated the first time fix was based on the evidence provided from the contractors and a review of the jobs on each patch, which is done by the patch surveyors. In regards to customer satisfaction, every repair that gets done, a text message is sent out from Morgan Sindall to a contractor to get the satisfaction. The council are looking at other ways of getting information from residents in terms of paper and online. The council also contact residents if they have negative feedback to find out why there is negative feedback.
- Members questioned the text messages and asked if residents do not reply to the text messages, are they included in the survey or do the council only survey the residents that reply? Officers stated that the council do track the numbers that do not reply. The council do try to continually contact residents but are looking at other ways to interact with residents.
- Members asked about the first time repairs and asked if the council are expecting to get back on track with those repairs? Officers stated they are expecting to get back on track with the repairs. It was noted at the end of last year, the council had some significant issues within the sector, not just supply issues, but issues within in the media, etc which caused repairs to go up a significant amount which did have an impact on stock not just for the council but for manufacturers and stockholders as well. The council are expecting this year will be a big improvement.
- Members asked about BPI 69 and stated it seemed like a low response rate. Members asked if the council could look at the number of anti-social cases that they dealt with? Officers stated they can provide more information about it and what the questions asked in the survey were. It may be that the questions are more about the service provided as to apposed whether it has been resolved or is still ongoing. The council has a really good anti-social behaviour team and they do take proactive action.

- Members asked about BPI 63 and asked if the council could bring other people from different teams to support during the period November to December to stop the dip from happening this year? Officers stated in terms of housing support plans and the work of that team, there will be some additional KPIs and this will give members a more detailed overview of how things are going. The council will look into how the dip can be avoided in quarter 3. It was noted the assistant director for the area is already working with the team manager to have a look at how they can improve performance across the team in general. The teams are working incredibly hard. There have been a number of challenges throughout the year and they've responded to those so it was not felt there was any additional resource we could bring in for that period from inside the council, It is a specialised area of work with legal implications in terms of looking at whether the Council owe people a duty and how this is discharged that housing duty. It was noted a report will be added to the work programme that will detail the work within the team and changes that can be made to try and increase performance and prevent the dip in quarter 3.
- Members stated the council need a new KPI to prioritise the insulation of the council's worst insulated homes and a commitment to the climate. The rules have changed to get a warm home discount, to get the discount the insulation of the property needs to be above D. Some tenants in poorly insulated homes are now missing out on the discount. Officers stated they will have a look into this and see how best to provide regular updates such as by report. The council do have a big investment programme in the housing stock. Officers also stated they have got the stock condition surveys which will identify any issues. The council also have the de-carbonisation grant which look at the worst affected homes to make sure they are comfortable.
- Members asked about BPI 37, hard to let properties. The council has a significant number of properties that are hard to let. There was a greater need to understand why that was.
- Members asked about BPI 37 and gas safety and if officers could elaborate on the legal process that is being followed, is it legal on the council's part or the tenants part? Most private tenants have gas and electrical safety, will there be one for electrical at some point that will come under a KPI? Officers stated that the gas is covered in the compliance update report and is a legal process. When the council have access issues which the council had a significant amount of in the last few months, the council have to get an injunction to gain access to the property, unfortunately the courts have been backlogged over the last few months which has slowed down that process, fortunately, over the last few weeks the council have started to see the end of the backlog. There is now a KPI for electrical testing.
- Members asked is there a way of measuring or understanding how some of the problematic housing issues end up in the newspaper, apart from KPIs? Officers stated they will look into this. As directors and team managers, the KPIs are an important part of monitoring how the service is

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doing, how the teams are performing and but it is only a part of that picture. Even if there is a green KPI, it is not something they will then pay no attention to, looking at how many cases have been escalated to the council. How many cases are coming through Member from Member enquiries.

- Members stated that a review of the KPIs might be useful and to keep an eye on their performance. Officers stated they were happy to take away any key areas of focus and schedule them in the work programme.

RESOLVED (**Unanimous**)

Members noted the contents of the report.

6. HOUSING COMPLIANCE UPDATE

Report of the Chief Executive providing an update on the Housing Compliance position.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- It was noted fire was 100% compliant with fire risk assessments. There are still some remaining actions and they are programmed to be completed this year. The Council have escalated the programme significantly to ensure that they are all completed.
- Water hygiene is 100% and that does include actions.
- Asbestos is 100% with no outstanding actions.
- Electricity comes in two parts, blocks which is 99.99% with one block, non-compliant due to an issue with the meter and is not a risk issue and is currently being dealt with by UK Power Networks.
- Domestic is 99.1% compliant and the council have had significant access issues.
- The same with gas, there are two parts, communal is 100% compliant with no outstanding actions and domestic is 99.87% compliance and the access issues have prevented the council from getting in, however, the council have in the last few weeks started to see the injunctions coming in.
- It was noted lifts were 100% compliant.
- Members thanked officers for their hard on making sure the council were compliant.
- Members asked about 3.2 of the report and asked what kind of things make up the medium actions taken from the FRA that have not been done yet as there's quite a few of them and what is the most common action from them that is still outstanding? Officers stated the most common action is nominal fire doors, it is a fire door, but it is not fire door set, so it does need to be upgraded, but it is not a high risk because is a nominal fire door and they were done last year. The council have completing 2000 fire doors since then, so the council have completed the majority of the

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high risk with 10 now remaining for the high risk and that they are programmed in in the next few weeks.

- Members noted that it was positive to see the really high compliance in each of the areas, and know no access has been an issue, and there was always a hope and an expectation that when residents got used to the inspections, that it would drive down the no access issues. When do you think the council will get to that stage where no access does not become such an issue because then there is a lengthy process trying to gain access, would it be in two years, five years? Officers stated the council had a plan to get information out to residents this year, a plan the council have been working on since the start of the issue, so the council is hoping by the end of this year they will have significantly better chance of getting access just because of the safety information they are going to send out to the residents on a on a regular basis.
- Members asked about 5.1 of the report - no financial implications, does that mean the team were able to do the work without having to bring in external people to help out and is it done within the council budget for the department? Officers stated there is no additional support for this report, the council did do a report at the start of the issue, where there were some financial changes but for this report, there are none.

RESOLVED (Unanimous)

Members noted the contents of the report.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24

The CHP work programme details items that will be going to each meeting during the municipal year.

Meeting ended at 8.10pm