

Cabinet Housing Panel
18 September 2017

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the CABINET HOUSING PANEL* held on Monday 18 September 2017 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

* Reporting to Cabinet

PRESENT: Councillors J.Boulton (Chairman)

H.Bower (substituting for S.Glick), M.Cook, J.Cragg,
B.Fitzsimon (substituting for M.Perkins), H.Holloway,
T.Mitchinson (substituting for K.Holman), F.Thomson,
P.Zukowskyj (substituting for H.Quenet)

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Tenants' Panel Representatives

R.Read and B.Rhodes (for B.Robbins)

Independent Representatives

R.Paris and S.Smith

ALSO PRESENT: Executive Member (Governance, Community Safety, Police and Crime Commissioner and Corporate Property) (Councillor R.Trigg)
Contracts Manager, TSG Building Services Plc (M.Bevens)
Assistant Operations Manager, TSG Building Services Plc (D.Sandford)
Chief Executive, Mears (D.Miles)

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Executive Director (Housing and Communities) (S.Russell)
Head of Community and Housing Strategy (S.Chambers)
Head of Property Services (Housing) (P.Gray)
Principal Housing Development Manager (J.Morton)
Governance Services Officer (M.Lowe)

22. SUBSTITUTIONS:

The following substitutions of Panel Members had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules 19-22:

Councillor H.Bower for S.Glick
Councillor B.Fitzsimon for M.Perkins
Councillor T.Mitchinson for K.Holman
Councillor P.Zukowskyj for H.Quenet.

23. APOLOGIES:

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Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M.Birleson, S.Glick, K.Holman, M.Perkins, H.Quenet and B.Robbins (Co-opted Member, Tenants' Panel Representative).

24. MINUTES:

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 August 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

25. ACTIONS UPDATE:

The status of actions agreed at the Cabinet Housing Panel meeting on 7 August 2017 in the report of the Executive Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) was noted.

26. REPAIRS PRESENTATION:

The Panel received separate presentations from Mears and TSG on their work with the Council and the measures in place to ensure service delivery to housing tenants.

Members of the Panel raised a number of points with the contractors and received the following clarification.

- There were a number of apprentices employed in the Welwyn Hatfield area. Due to the current workforce demographics, which was mainly within the age ranges of 55+ and 18-25 years of age, it was difficult to ensure that all apprentices worked with an individual mentor. This situation was well known in the industry and it was anticipated that there would be a skills shortage over the next ten years. There were steps and initiatives being taken to address this issue.
- There was an aim to replace every kitchen and bathroom over a period of time. This rolling programme was on target.
- Following a survey, it had been ascertained that less roofs needed to be replaced as originally planned. This was due to the existing roofs being in better condition than first thought.
- Although the aim to replace a boiler within three days or a maximum of five days seemed a lengthy period to leave residents without hot water or heating, it was often more beneficial to replace the whole heating system at that time rather than replacing other parts of the system at a later date.
- It was well known that emergency heating and hot water were known to be very expensive to run when the heating and hot water system failed in a property. Housing Officers supported and worked very closely with tenants and supported the very vulnerable. The repair or replacement process was diligently monitored with the aim to resolve the issue within 24 hours. TSG and the repairs team managed the situation on behalf of the Council and took steps to aid tenants as much as possible. Spare electrical heating appliances were carried on vehicles.

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- Some flexibility had been built into the budget for ad-hoc repairs. There was also a discretionary budget to cover additional repairs identified when upgrading large items such as kitchens.
- All spending was properly accounted for and audited.
- Tenants' satisfaction regarding repairs carried out to their property was paramount to the Council and contractors. Constant improvements to the repairs service were made. There was also a very vigorous review process in place with regards to complaints. Very regular customer satisfaction surveys were carried out from which lessons were learnt. The data behind the statistics was very important and robust key performance indicators were set and monitored by the Council.
- Repair operatives entering tenants' properties were aware of the importance of being alert to wider issues, such as safeguarding or dementia. All operatives received training to report such issues and concerns to the control centre.
- Notifications to tenants of when an operative was due to arrive at a property was closely monitored. Systems and processes for this were regularly reviewed. Those tenants who did not have the facilities to receive texts were contacted by the landline.
- Out of hours heating failure such as over long weekends by tenants who had the emergency call line facility were dealt by the contact centre which was open 365 days a year 24 hours a day.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Members of the Panel, thanked the representatives from TSG and Mears for their very informative presentations.

RESOLVED:

That the presentations from Mears and TSG on their work with the Council and measures in place to ensure service delivery be noted.

27. **FIRE SAFETY UPDATE:**

The Panel Members received the following verbal update from the Head of Property Services on works being undertaken at Queensway House, Hatfield.

Fire door replacement

- To date, 75% of doors were installed and it was anticipated that all doors would be installed by the end of September 2017.

Bathroom window infilling

- Two pilot properties had been completed (with minor making good still to be completed).
- The full infill programme started on 18 September 2017 and with a schedule of three per day the estimated completion was the end of October 2017.

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Ventilation from bathrooms

- A suitable specification (i.e. compliant with Building Regulations and meeting Fire Service recommendations) had been agreed and work would be programmed to ensure that the ventilation installation minimised periods with reduced ventilation.

Other works

- Sprinkler system to bin store

Completed on 13 July 2017.

- Refuse chutes

Work had been completed to install secondary doors (incorporating smoke seals) to the refuse chutes.

- Flaking paint in communal area

Redecoration of the communal areas would be added to the major works programme in 2018/19.

- Dry- riser mains inlets

Incorporated into future routine maintenance schedules.

- Lightning protection

Would be checked annually commencing in quarter 3 of 2017/18.

- Door entry systems

Fail-safe open would be added to the service schedule.

- Landing ventilation

The existing fixed louvre vents to either end of the landings were recommended by the Fire Service to be upgraded to AOVs (automatically opening vents). This element of work required specialist design (which was underway and which would follow a formal competitive tendering procedure).

- Enhanced CCTV

Working collaboratively with Videcom and the St Albans monitoring station had produced a specification to link smoke alarms with the CCTV system. Each CCTV camera and the recording equipment in the

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basement would require upgrading and quotation for the work was expected imminently.

Consultation and resident engagement

- One to one consultation had taken place with residents as and when requested.
- 4 x letter drops had explained the scope of works and timescales.
- A drop-in session was held at the Hatfield Housing Office on Wednesday 13 September 2017 between 3.00pm and 7.00pm. Eight residents attended. Only minor queries were raised.

In response to concerns raised by Members regarding those tenants who had slight doubts about the proposed extraction system being installed in their property, Officers advised that the pilot properties were near to completion and would be available to view shortly. One to one consultations had been carried out and as much as possible had been done to alleviate concerns of residents.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the works being undertaken at Queensway House, Hatfield be noted.

28. **REVIEW OF THE HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY (HAP):**

Report of the Executive Director (Housing and Communities) setting out the proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocations Policy (HAP) following consultation.

The Council's Housing Allocation Policy (HAP) set out the rules for the Council's Housing Needs Register (HNR) and how priority was awarded to households based on their housing need. The HNR was a list of all applicants looking for affordable, rented accommodation in the Borough. The HNR reflected issues such as overcrowding, health problems and homelessness.

The Panel noted that following consultation the proposed changes had been summarised and the full proposal set out in the report.

The Panel considered the proposed changes and raised the following concerns.

- Consideration was given on a case by case basis where there was a tenancy breach for a current tenant in arrears as it was unlawful to have a blanket policy were there was such a breach. The policy document would provide a fuller explanation.
- The proposed changes did not impact on the legal requirement for armed forces personnel or where they had previously been in the armed forces, who attracted additional priority. Training had recently been given to front-line staff in the Housing Team about the requirements.
- To ensure fairness, the distinction had been made between current and former tenants.

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- In situations where someone was living in unsanitary conditions and was declared to be homeless this should not affect the rights they had in the bidding process.
- The proposal to prevent applicants who were in breach of their tenancy to join the HNR having a negative impact on people with a disability, as they might be more likely to have issues in managing their tenancy was considered to be a low risk. The aim of the Council was to prevent and mitigate any risk by supporting those who had a disability.
- Officers recognised applicants' most pressing housing needs and hence wanted to give priority to those with a child over and above an applicant who was pregnant in terms of property eligibility.
- Members asked that the complete section of the Housing Allocations Policy document relating to dealing with applicants with arrears be circulated prior to consideration by the Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed changes as set out in the report of Officers to the Council's Housing Allocation Policy be referred to the Cabinet and the Council for approval.

29. WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18:

The pro-forma which set out the Panel's work programme had been updated since the last meeting to enable forward planning of items to be considered.

The Chairman asked Panel Members to consider for the next meeting the affordable housing stock options available to the Council, including the advantages and risks associated with the options.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That following the meeting the updated version of the Cabinet Housing Panel work programme be circulated to Members and Officers.
- (2) That an item on the direct provision of social housing be considered at the next meeting of the Panel.

30. 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 14 (Minute 21 refers) on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of confidential or exempt information as defined in Section 100A(3) and paragraph 4 (consultations or negotiations relating to labour relations) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

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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.

31. HOUSING OPERATIONS CUSTOMER FIRST TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME – UPDATE:

The Panel received a verbal update from Executive Director (Housing and Communities) on the Customer First Transformation Programme, which clarified a number of issues raised at the previous meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Customer First Transformation Programme be noted.

Meeting ended at 9.00pm
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