

Cabinet Housing Panel
20 September 2018

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

* Reporting to Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET HOUSING PANEL held on Thursday 20 September 2018 at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors J.Boulton (Chairman)
T.Kingsbury (Vice-Chairman)

M.Cook, S.Elam (substituting for T.Jackson-Mynott),
C.Gillett, S.Glick, M.Holloway, R.Lass, H.Quenet,
F.Thomson, J.Weston (substituting for M.Birleson)

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: Co-opted Members:-

Tenants' Panel Representatives

R.Read and B Rhodes

Independent Representative

R.Paris and S.Smith

OFFICIALS
PRESENT: Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) (S.Russell)
Head of Community and Housing Strategy (S.Chambers)
Head of Property Services (P.Gray)
Head of Housing Operations (S.Pearson)
Commercial Manager (D.Murphy)
Governance Services Officer (M.Lowe)

21. SUBSTITUTIONS

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

Councillor S.Elam for Councillor T.Jackson-Mynott
Councillor J.Weston for Councillor M.Birleson

22. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M.Birleson and T.Jackson-Mynott.

Cabinet Housing Panel
20 September 2018

23. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 August 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

24. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Independent Co-opted Representative, R.Paris, declared an interest in Item 16 – Asset Assessment Contract Procurement on the agenda by virtue of working, on occasion, as a contractor for Red Loft consultants.

25. SCRUTINY PANEL - REVIEW OF REPAIRS CALL CENTRE

Report of the Chairman of the Scrutiny Sub-Group of the Tenant's Panel.

The Chairman, in consultation with the Chairman of the Scrutiny Sub-Group, proposed that the report would be deferred until the next meeting of the Panel to enable additional time to consider further issues in relation to the report.

RESOLVED:

That the report and recommendations of the Scrutiny Sub-Group of the Tenant's Panel be deferred until the next meeting of the Panel on 25 October 2018.

26. UPDATE ON QUEENSWAY HOUSE

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) provided an update on progress and outlined the actions undertaken to Queensway House which had been or were necessary to comply with the requirements of the fire risk assessment (FRA) and Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Members noted that, whilst the design details for the update for the additional unforeseen works were awaited from the consultants, the Council continued to take every possible measure to manage resident and leaseholder's expectations regarding timescales and the challenges faced. Members also noted that the additional unforeseen works had not been detailed in the original FRA (new ventilation and fire suppression sprinkler system).

The post-Grenfell Hackitt report and subsequent overhaul of areas of fire safety had meant that progress with certain elements of the work had been slower than expected. However, residents had been kept updated of the areas of fire safety work that this related to and how this affected them.

In response to questions, Officers reassured Members that, at the time of procurement, the fire safety doors had met all Government standards. The situation had arisen because the Government was questioning the original specification. The work to replace the fire safety doors had virtually been completed, with two or three leaseholder doors remaining to be replaced.

Cabinet Housing Panel
20 September 2018

Officers were closely monitoring the situation and would keep Members updated regarding new concerns raised nationally about the effectiveness of fire doors.

Officers reported that, following the request of the mother of a Queensway House resident to hold a meeting to inform of the reasons for the delay and length of time it had taken to carry out the works, a resident's meeting had been held the previous week. It had been a highly charged meeting which had been very difficult to control and to convey messages to the residents due to the atmosphere at the meeting. At the conclusion of the meeting it was agreed that an action plan would be produced and progressed to the conclusion of the works.

The Corporate Director provided the background to the reasons why the bathroom windows had been blocked up. The Fire and Rescue Service had raised the windows as the area of most concern in relation to the safety of residents in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. As the priority of the Council was to maintain the safety of residents, the decision had been taken to carry out the work to fill in the window spaces.

Members were asked to note that a complicated electronic ventilation system would be installed to compensate for this. However, it would take time for this to be sourced and installed.

Officers confirmed that Ward Members were regularly updated about the progress made with the works to Queensway House and would continue to be.

Members noted that Building Control had been made aware that the bathroom ventilation was not currently compliant with Building Regulations. However, it was acknowledged that the fire safety of the building overrode this requirement.

In response to a question, Officers undertook to inform Members separately to the meeting, of the timetable for the final tenders for the proposed integrated ventilation / sprinkler system at Queensway House.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That a further update be brought to the next meeting of the Panel.
- (3) That the timetable for the tenders for the proposed integrated ventilation / sprinkler system at Queensway House be circulated to Members separately to the meeting.

Cabinet Housing Panel
20 September 2018

27. HOUSING NEEDS UPDATE - HOUSEHOLDS IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) provided an update on the current numbers of households in temporary accommodation and a summary of the situation in other Hertfordshire local authorities.

At the last meeting of this Panel Members asked for further detailed information about the homelessness situation locally and the impact of the Homeless Reduction Act.

A report was presented to Cabinet on 4 September 2018 which set out the position with regard to the increased caseload of the Housing Options team and the increased numbers of families who were being accommodated in bed and breakfast at that time.

Members had also asked for information about the position that other neighbouring authorities were in, following the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act.

Members welcomed the information reported by Officers that the number of families affected had slightly improved since the last meeting, with 112 families in temporary accommodation and 18 in bed and breakfast.

Members asked that Officers be congratulated and thanked for their hard work in achieving the reduction in the number of families reported to be in temporary accommodation or bed and breakfast, for which the Council had a duty.

In response to questions raised, Officers reassured Members that the workload of the current homeless officers was being monitored very carefully to ensure that they were supported and not affected by stress.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

28. SOCIAL HOUSING GREEN PAPER

The Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) presented a summary of the proposals contained in the Government's Social Housing Green Paper.

- A new deal for social housing
- Five key themes to "underpin a new, fairer deal for social housing residents" (MHCLG)
- Ensuring homes are safe and decent
- Effective resolution of complaints
- Empower residents and strengthen the regulator
- Brief summary on regulation
- Empower residents and strengthen the regulator

Cabinet Housing Panel
20 September 2018

- Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities
- Expanding supply and home ownership
- Two other consultations launched – use of receipts from right to buy sales and rents for social housing
- Response to Consultation Being Prepared

Next Steps

The Draft Consultation Response

- Final draft will be brought back to Cabinet Housing Panel on 25th October 2018
- Approved by the Executive Member for Housing
- Submitted to MHCLG by 6th November 2018
- Members were encouraged to follow the weblink to view the green paper and additional two consultations

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/social-housing-green-paper-a-new-deal-for-social-housing>

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the presentation on the Government's Social Housing Green Paper be noted.
- (2) That Members submit their comments on the Green Paper to the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities).
- (3) That the proposed response to the consultation be brought back to the Cabinet Housing Panel on 25 October 2018.

29. WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19

The pro-forma setting out the Panel's work programme had been updated since the last meeting to enable forward planning if items to be considered to take place.

RESOLVED:

That the updated and amended work programme be noted.

30. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Panel 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 items 15 to 17 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of confidential or exempt information as defined in Section 100A(3) and Paragraph

Cabinet Housing Panel
20 September 2018

3 (private financial or business information) 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 is considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

31. HOUSING MAINTENANCE SERVICE RE-PROCUREMENT

Exempt report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) set out details of the approval for the re-procurement of the Housing Maintenance Service in accordance with the Council's Financial Standing Orders and the Procurement Policy.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

32. ASSET ASSESSMENT CONTRACT PROCUREMENT

Exempt report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) advised Members on the results of a recent tender for a contract for a consultant to assess and made recommendations in respect of the development potential of the Council's Housing Revenue Account assets.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

(Independent Co-opted Representative, R.Paris, having declared an interest withdrew from the meeting during consideration of this item).

33. QUEENSWAY HOUSE LIFT REPLACEMENT PROJECT

Exempt report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) provided an update on progress and outlined the actions undertaken and necessary works to comply with the requirements of the Fire Risk Assessment and Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service in respect of Queensway House, Hatfield.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

Meeting ended 9.05pm
ML