

Cabinet Housing Panel
10 December 2018

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

* Reporting to Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET HOUSING PANEL held on Monday 10 December 2018 at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors J.Boulton (Chairman)
N.Pace (Vice-Chairman)

M.Birleson, S.Glick, M.Holloway, T.Jackson-Mynott,
T.Kingsbury, M.Larkins (substituting for M.Cook),
R.Lass, H.Quenet, F.Thomson

ALSO
PRESENT: H.Bower, M.Cowan, S.Elam, P.Mabbott, S.Markiewicz,
R.Trigg

CO-OPTED
MEMBERS: Co-opted Members:-

Tenants' Panel Representatives

R.Read and B.Rhodes

Independent Representative

R.Paris

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)
Principal Housing Development Manager (J.Morton)
Income and Home Ownership Manager (S.Kiff)
Governance Services Officer (M.Lowe)

44. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was noted that the Cabinet at the meeting on 4 December 2018, appointed Councillor N.Pace as Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2018/2019.

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45. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

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

Councillor M.Larkins for Councillor M.Cook

46. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D.Bell, H.Bromley, M.Cook and B.Sarson.

47. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

48. ACTIONS UPDATE

The status of actions agreed at the Panel meeting on 25 October 2018 in the report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) was noted.

49. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED

The Chairman announced that a verbal update report on Queensway House would be taken at item 14 of the agenda. The reason for this was to provide Members with an update on various items relating to Queensway House since the last meeting of the Panel.

50. MANAGING THE IMPACT OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Members received a presentation by the Income and Home Ownership Manager on managing the impact of Universal Credit.

Members noted the arrangements with the Citizen's Advice Bureau, with whom the Council worked very closely which ensured that residents received clear advice and as much support as possible during their application for migration to Universal Credit.

Members also noted the difficulties around the lack of information made available by the Department of Work and Pensions to the Council and not knowing when the migration would take place.

Members welcomed the proactive approach taken by the Council in managing the impact of Universal Credit.

RESOLVED:

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That the presentation on how the Council managed the impact of Universal Credit be noted.

51. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR HOUSING PERIOD QUARTER 2 2018-19

Report of the Executive Director (Housing and Communities) provided a summary of the strategic key performance indicators (KPIs), and comments about performance by exception for Quarter Two. The KPIs were monitored monthly by Heads of Service.

The KPIs being reported, as shown in Appendix A, were the corporate KPIs published in the Council's Action Plan for 2018/19.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Panel note the contents of the attached report.
- (2) That information be supplied on the ratio of private housing inspections in relation to the number of decent homes.

52. RENT ARREARS POLICY - COUNCIL TENANTS

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) seeking approval and adoption of a new Rent Arrears Policy which sets out the Council's approach to recovering rent arrears.

The aim of the policy was to set out the Council's approach to recovering rent arrears in order to be as effective as we can be in minimising tenant debt and maximising rental income from Council tenancies.

Members noted that the policy would be applied in a firm, but fair way, underpinned with early contact and support through the whole recovery process in order to prevent arrears from accruing and to ensure that a tenant could receive the right advice at the earliest opportunity and offered at every opportunity.

The Tenants Panel had been consulted and provided comments which had been incorporated into the draft policy.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Rent Arrears Policy be approved.
- (2) That Cabinet be recommended to adopt the Rent Arrears Policy as set out in the report of Officers.

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53. FORMER TENANT ARREARS POLICY

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) seeking approval and adoption of a new Former Tenant Arrears Policy which sets out the Council's approach to recovering former tenant arrears on both Council (housing) tenancy and garage rent accounts.

Members noted that a new dedicated staff member was in place to prioritise former tenant debts, which had been created as part of the wider Housing Operations Transformation Programme.

Members also noted that the policy endorsed a proactive approach in collecting Former Tenant Arrears (FTA), used a range of methods in a flexible, but fair and consistent way. The methods which would be used were those which were considered to be the most effective on a case by case basis and that delivered value for money.

The effective recovery of former tenant debts would ensure that the Council maximised income to continue to deliver services.

The Tenants Panel had been consulted and provided comments which have been incorporated into the draft policy.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Former Tenant Arrears Policy be approved.
- (2) That Cabinet be recommended to adopt the Former Tenant Arrears Policy as set out at in the report of Officers.
- (3) That details of the total outstanding housing tenancy former tenant arrears (FTA) broken down by debt range be provided to Members.

54. AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAMME MONITORING REPORT DECEMBER 2018

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) providing an update on the Council's Affordable Housing Programme (AHP).

At the meeting of the 4 December 2012, Cabinet agreed a range of methods to deliver the Council's Affordable Housing Programme (AHP) and that a monitoring report be presented to the Panel, setting out the budget and progress in delivering new affordable homes across the Borough. An overview of progress to date was attached at Appendix A and B.

The AHP was managed via an Officer project group, which met monthly and was overseen by a steering group which met bi-monthly. The Leader of the Council was a member of the steering group, which provided strategic direction,

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considered the budget and recommended any reallocation of funds between different delivery methods as required.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the report be noted.

55. 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 of items to be considered to take place.

RESOLVED:

That the updated and amended work programme be noted.

56. URGENT BUSINESS - UPDATE ON QUEENSWAY HOUSE

The verbal report from the Head of Property Services updated Members on a number of issues at Queensway House. These included the actions which the Council had taken in relation to fire safety, the planned maintenance programmes already in the planning stage prior to the fire at Grenfell Tower and an update on the malfunctioning lift located at the property.

Officers drew Members attention to the following points.

- The decision had been taken to decommission the lift completely on 20 December 2018, six weeks ahead of the planned works to replace the lift.
- As per Council policy, the team had worked with the vulnerable residents of Queensway House to plan alternative accommodation for either the duration of the works or as a permanent move. This had been brought forward and currently the teams were working with five residents. Two of these five people had already been found alternative accommodation and Officers were working to re-locate the remaining three within the next few days.
- There was a planned works programme in place in relation to other items, details of which was given.
- A public meeting would be held on Monday 17 December 2018, to which Queensway House residents were invited to attend.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the verbal report on Queensway House be noted.
- (2) That a hard copy of the verbal briefing will be sent to Members after the meeting.

Meeting ended 9.25pm

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