

Cabinet Housing Panel  
13 August 2019

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

\* Reporting to Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET HOUSING PANEL held on Tuesday 13 August 2019 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors N.Pace (Chairman)  
J.Boulton (Vice-Chairman)  
  
E.Boulton, M.Cook, A.Dennis, M.Holloway, T.Jackson-  
Mynott, R.Lass, H.Quenet, F.Thomson

CO-OPTED MEMBER: Independent Representative  
R.Paris

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) (S.Russell)  
Head of Property Services (P.Gray)  
Head of Housing Operations (S.Pearson)  
Head of Community and Housing Strategy (S.Chambers)  
Housing Strategy Manager (R.Sesstein)  
Governance Services Manager (G.Seal)

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11. APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from Councillor M.Birleson.

12. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

13. ACTIONS UPDATE

The status of actions agreed at the Panel meeting on 1 July 2019 in the report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) was noted.

14. HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019-2024

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) on the new draft Strategy for 2019-2024 which was produced, informed by a recent review of homelessness in the Borough and engagement with all key stakeholders and

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had been considered by the Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 12 June 2019 (Minute 9 refers).

The Homelessness Act 2002 required all housing authorities to carry out a 'Review of Homelessness' in their area and formulate a strategy based on the results of the review. Although, the statutory obligation to formulate a Housing Strategy was removed under the terms of the De-regulation Act 2015, the Council had a number of statutory housing functions and as such it was appropriate to set out its plans and priorities for doing this in order to demonstrate how needs were assessed, determine local priorities and plan for the delivery of good quality affordable housing.

The review of homelessness identified a number of key issues that had influenced the priorities in the Strategy and would impact on how homeless and housing services were delivered over the next five years.

The new draft Strategy set out the challenges these issues represented and the Council's short, medium and longer term plans to address those challenges.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation by placing duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas. It also required housing authorities to provide a homelessness service to all those affected, not just those who had 'priority need'.

As a strategic housing authority the Council was required by statute to carry out a review of homelessness in its area and to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy based on the results of the review.

The strategy must set out the authority's plans for the prevention of homelessness ensuring that sufficient accommodation and support were or would be available for people who became homeless or who were at risk of becoming homeless.

Members also noted that the Strategy and associated documents referred to legally defined terminology and as such, these were not open to review.

The final draft Strategy was approved at the Cabinet meeting on 9 July (Minute 20.2 refers) and recommended to the Council meeting on 22 July 2019 for adoption.

The item had been withdrawn from the Agenda for the Council meeting for further consideration by the Panel and report back (Minute 19.4 refers).

Following further consideration it was

RESOLVED:  
(unanimous)

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That the Cabinet be recommended to approve the final draft of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for 2019-2024 and recommend it to the Council for adoption.

15. UPDATE ON QUEENSWAY HOUSE, HATFIELD

The Head of Property Services gave a verbal update to the Panel on Queensway House Hatfield.

1. Resident Liaison / Communication with residents.

A notice board in the communal area was regularly updated,  
A comments / suggestion box for residents who wanted to leave feedback was sited in the foyer. No comments had been received, monthly newsletters were ongoing,  
A coffee morning was held on 6 July 2019 and six residents attended (mostly leaseholders who asked about options for selling their flats).

2. Lift Renewal - the lift work was completed and it was working as designed.

3. Major Planned Works - these were currently on hold pending the outcome of consultation.

4. Waking Watch - this was still underway monitoring the block on a 24/7 basis.

5. 6 Week Consultation Period – visits commenced on 12 August and the team completed appointments with 26 residents. A further three were being seen shortly, two others had been contacted and were away, but would be seen in the next few weeks. There were a total of 51 to see (seven of these were absent landlords), so there was a target of 44 for the block. In summary 31 from 44 had either been seen, had an appointment to be seen or had at least been contacted / engaged. The absent leaseholders had also been invited to meetings and one of these meetings had been held so far. On completion of the consultation exercise, recommendations would be brought to the Cabinet.

The Chairman on behalf of the Panel, thanked Officers for their work on this.

16. HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING ACT 1919 (THE ADDISON ACT)

Verbal report from the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) on a celebration event to mark the centenary of the Act.

This year was a celebration of the 1919 Housing and Town Planning Act (the Addison Act, named after the Minister for Housing at the time, Dr Christopher Addison) marking what was viewed as the official birth of Council Housing.

An event was being arranged on Friday 11 October 2019 to which the Minister of State for Housing would be invited. There would be a tour of the Council's new

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housing sites and a public exhibition at Campus West with artefacts from the first Council housing in the Borough.

17. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR HOUSING PERIOD QUARTER ONE - 2019/20

Report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) providing a summary of the strategic key performance indicators (KPIs) and comments about performance by exception for Quarter One of 2019/20. The KPIs were monitored monthly by Heads of Service.

BPI 29 – The total number of households living in temporary accommodation in the Borough (where the Council had a duty). It was noted that numbers in hotel accommodation had dropped to almost zero with the provision of new temporary accommodation sites.

BPI 37 – The average void property re-let time for standard general needs Council homes. It was noted that a continuing improvement in re-let times was expected as efforts were made to turn round voids as quickly as possible. Bedsits could be more challenging depending on location and desirability.

BPI 34 – The percentage of Council properties with a valid gas safety certificate.

**(Note:** - In response to Members' questions it was subsequently confirmed by the Head of Property Services after the meeting that the three cases of overdue landlord Gas Safety Records (LGSR) had been escalated through the access procedure and referred to Legal Services to commence the injunction process. Cold calling by the Council's contractors continued and access was gained to successfully complete the LGSRs and these three addresses would be flagged up on the system to commence next year's access process earlier).

RESOLVED:

That the performance report be noted.

18. WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

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

RESOLVED:

That the updated work programme for the Panel be noted.

Meeting ended 8.10pm  
GS