

Cabinet Housing Panel
19 February 2020

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

* Reporting to Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET HOUSING PANEL held on Wednesday 19 February 2020 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)

M.Birleson, E.Boulton, M.Holloway, T.Jackson-Mynott,
R.Lass, H.Quenet, F.Thomson, L.Musk and J.Quinton

OFFICIALS S.Russell, Corporate Director (Housing and Communities)
PRESENT: S.Pearson, Head of Housing Operations
P.Gray, Head of Property Services
K.Clifford, Neighbourhood and Enforcement Manager
D.Young, Housing Allocations Manager
L.Bradbury, Housing Allocations Manager
J.Morton, Principal Housing Development Manager
S.Keenlyside, Governance Services Officer

ALSO
PRESENT: R.Paris, Independent Representative

29. SUBSTITUTIONS

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

Councillor L.Musk for Councillor M.Cook
Councillor J.Quinton for Councillor A.Dennis.

30. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M.Cook and A.Dennis.

31. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 January were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

32. ACTIONS UPDATE

The status of actions agreed at the panel meeting on 15 January 2020 in the report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) was noted.

33. TENANCY FRAUD POLICY

Members considered the report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) on the draft Tenancy Fraud Policy which provided guidance on how the Council would tackle tenancy fraud through a framework of prevention, detection and enforcement.

The current tenancy fraud procedure was produced in May 2018 and would be replaced with a case management workflow on approval of the Tenancy Fraud Policy.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- The Council would encourage Housing Associations to take action where tenancy fraud was taking place and share data with them.
- The Council would be publicising Tenancy Fraud to encourage the public to report it.
- Tenancy fraud was estimated to cost tax payers in excess of £1.8 million per year nationally. Members asked where this figure came from and if Officers thought that the actual figure was higher. Officers thought that tenancy fraud was under reported and the Neighbourhood and Enforcement Manager would report back to Members where the estimated figure was from.
- Properties involved in tenancy fraud were more likely to be neglected, in a state of disrepair and were often more difficult to access. A future project for 2020/21 would be to look at how the Council could implement tenancy audits.

RESOLVED

- (1) That Members recommend to Cabinet the adoption of the Tenancy Fraud Policy (as set out at Appendix A).
- (2) Members recommend to Cabinet that delegated authority was given to the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities), in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Community, to review and make minor amendments to the policy as appropriate where there is a need to address operational issues, or where best practice has evolved and there is a need to incorporate this.

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34. PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR HOUSING PERIOD QUARTER THREE - 2019/20

Members received a report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) which provided a summary of the strategic Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) and comments about performance by exception for Quarter 3. The KPI's were monitored monthly by Heads of Service.

The following points were raised and discussed:

- KPI BPI 29 – Members enquired about the numbers of people living in hotel accommodation. Officers advised that levels of hotel accommodation use was very low and the Council would avoid putting people in hotel accommodation whenever possible and if more suitable accommodation was available. The Council aimed to move people out of hotel accommodation within six weeks. Members asked about the position of rough sleepers in terms of temporary accommodation. Officers advised that the Council worked within homelessness legislation and would house rough sleepers in temporary accommodation where there was a duty of care. The Councils partner Resolve visited every rough sleeper that had been reported to the Council. There should not be any priority need rough sleepers in the borough.
- KPI BPI 35 – Members asked how many tenants had attended the Universal Credit workshops. The Head of Housing Operations would circulate the information.
- Members enquired about the standard of properties in the rented sector. Officers suggested that an Officer from the Private Housing Team attend a future CHP meeting to answer any queries.

RESOLVED

That the performance report be noted.

35. HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY REVIEW AND PROPOSAL

Members considered the report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) on the Council's Housing Allocations Policy which set out rules for the Council's Housing Needs Register (HNR) and how priority was awarded to households, based on their housing need.

The report set out some recommended changes to the policy which was a result of a review following the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

Members raised questions and sought clarification on the following:

- Members asked about the number of times an applicant to whom the Council had accepted 'full housing duty' could bid on a property during the six week bidding process. Officers advised that there was no restriction on

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the number of bids within a cycle. Applicants who received priority due to being a 'separated family' or 'homeless at home' would receive one offer of accommodation only.

- Members enquired about applications from the Armed Forces and were advised by Officers that it had been agreed as part of a Community Covenant, Armed Forces personnel could go on the register as soon as they were informed that they were to be discharged. What band they were put in was dependent on their circumstances.

RESOLVED

That the proposed changes to the Housing Allocation Policy, as set out in Appendix A of the report, be recommended to Cabinet for approval.

36. AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAMME UPDATE

Members considered the report of the Affordable Housing Programme (AHP) Monitoring Report which provided an update for January 2020.

A strategic review of the AHP was completed in February 2016 and June 2016. Cabinet approved the proposed Vision Statement, key aims and delivery plan to deliver 600 affordable homes by 2021. The attached appendices on the agenda, provided an overview and update on progress.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Housing Panel noted the content of the report.

37. TENANT INVOLVEMENT UPDATE

Members received a presentation from the Neighbourhood and Enforcement Manager on resident involvement.

Officers explained why tenant involvement was important. The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard stated *that registered providers should ensure that tenants were given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved*. The Social Housing Green Paper 2018 stated that *the third principle concerns empowering residents and making sure voices are heard. This will drive better services and ensure residents have more choice and control*. Council's got better results and received less complaints when tenants felt that they had a voice.

The Council had historically had an established Tenants Panel and four sub-groups. There were ten panel members who had been previously elected but the Council was reviewing the recruitment framework which included whether panel members should be elected or selected. Last May, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Panel resigned and there had been some difficulty appointing a new Chairman of the new Panel. Some tenants had found it difficult to attend all the meetings and the Panel had agreed that they would prefer one Tenant Panel

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rather than have the sub-groups. They would also like a more co-dependent approach.

The Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) would be facilitating an independent workshop to help the Tenants Panel embed and identify exactly what they want to get out of their participation as well as agreeing roles and responsibilities.

The Council would be developing a Resident Engagement Strategy for Housing to provide the Tenant Panel with a Resident Involvement Framework and a Menu of Engagement to allow a broader spectrum of tenants the opportunity to participate at differing levels of commitment.

Resolved

That the Cabinet Housing Panel note the presentation on resident involvement.

38. 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 of the Panel be noted.

Meeting ended at 8.47 pm
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