

Cabinet Housing Panel
2 March 2021

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

* Reporting to Cabinet

Minutes of a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL CABINET HOUSING PANEL held on Tuesday 2 March 2021 at 7.30 pm via Zoom.

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

M.Birleson, E.Boulton, M.Cook, A.Dennis, M.Holloway,
R.Lass, H.Quenet, F.Thomson and F.Marsh

ALSO PRESENT: C.Andews Co-opted Member:- Tenants' Panel Representative

OFFICIALS PRESENT: S.Russell, Corporate Director (Housing and Communities)
S.Chambers, Head of Community and Housing Strategy
S.Pearson, Head of Housing Operations
P.Gray, Head of Property Services
D.Murphy, Commercial Manager
E.Manzie, Compliance Manager
P.Horsley, Asset Manager
J.Anthony, Principal Governance Manager

58. SUBSTITUTIONS

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

Councillor F.Marsh for Councillor T.Jackson-Mynott

59. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor T.Jackson-Mynott.

60. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2020 were approved as a correct record and noted by the Chairman.

Cabinet Housing Panel
2 March 2021

61. ACTIONS UPDATE

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

62. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor F.Marsh declared an interest by virtue of being a leaseholder of a property where the Council was a freeholder. It was agreed that this would not be a reason to preclude Councillor F.Marsh from the meeting.

The Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) declared an interest in Agenda Item 13 by virtue of being Directors of Now Housing Limited.

63. AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAMME UPDATE

Members considered the report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) which provided an update on the Council's Affordable Housing Programme (AHP).

The following points were raised:

- It was noted that the programme is impacted by several external variables and challenges, making it difficult to provide a high degree of certainty as to when the programme would be completed. However Officers had estimated that it would take approximately four years to deliver the programme and good progress had been made in the initial 18 months to date
- Members welcomed the progress made, especially given Covid-19 lockdown restrictions and challenges
- Members welcomed the initiative to investigate the inclusion of green technology into the housing stock
- Members supported the Council's effort to help Hertfordshire County Council social care team by providing a particular property for supported living for young people transitioning from other accommodation provisions
- Members welcomed the fact that there were a variety of designs being used, which reflected that each site was being designed according to its particular location

RESOLVED:

- That the Affordable Housing Programme report be noted.

Cabinet Housing Panel
2 March 2021

64. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT FUNDING AND USE OF BETTER CARE FUND

Members considered the report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) on the proposed use of surplus funds in the Better Care Fund (BCF).

The following points were raised and noted:

- The funding was ringed fenced for the purpose of providing adaptations or other enablement which improves independence in the home
- Hertfordshire County Council, via the Strategic Supported Accommodation, Board, are supportive of the proposal to utilise some of the funding to provide a staff resource to facilitate the utilisation of the funding and agree that the pilot project would be a legitimate use of the funds
- Hertfordshire County Council would also play an active part in shaping the role profile, recruitment and ongoing engagement with the post holder
- The proposed pilot project would be a first for the county
- Other options included in the report would be explored, and if viable, be brought back to Members for consideration
- The pilot project and post would be delivered under a 2 year fixed term contract, with a very high level of confidence that the funds would be available even if there was a surge in Council Disabled Facilities Grant payable under the Better Care Fund

Members welcomed the proposal and noted that it was a good use of the underspend in this area. Officers were investigating to explore additional actions that could be taken to ensure those that required Council Disabled Facilities Grants knew of its existence and could access it.

RESOLVED

- (1) Members unanimously agreed to recommend that Cabinet agrees to the council entering into a pilot joint initiative with Hertfordshire County Council for the provision of a dedicated specialist support to advise and support older and disabled people about their housing options
- (2) Members unanimously agreed that the Executive Member for Housing and Community be given delegated authority to action this recommendation

65. AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS POLICY

Members received a report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) detailing a revised and updated Aids and Adaptations Policy which applies to Council housing. Members noted that private tenants would be referred to the Community and Housing Strategy team.

Cabinet Housing Panel
2 March 2021

RESOLVED

- (1) Members unanimously agreed to recommend that Cabinet adopts the revised and updated Aids and Adaptations Policy with the following amendment;

at paragraph 6.2, the policy to include the contact telephone number residents should use to contact their occupational therapists if the need to discuss their individual requirements

- (2) Members unanimously agreed that the Executive Member for Housing and Community be given delegated authority to action this recommendation

66. RESPONSIVE REPAIRS SERVICE UPDATE

Members received a report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) providing an update on the responsive repairs service. It was noted that this area was being reviewed by an Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Panel.

The following points were raised and noted:

- Whilst there had been a significant backlog of work created as tenants held back from reporting faults during earlier lockdowns, this has been resolved and the team is aware of a potential upsurge after the current lockdown restrictions and are preparing accordingly
- Whilst emergency issues are resolved within 24 hours, the average wait for repairs is 17 working days. However Members noted that some have taken longer where they are complex
- It was noted that communication on site, with the tenant, could and should be improved. The team were utilising furloughed staff from other teams in the council to address this issue by being dedicated to making contact with tenants and have already experienced positive feedback
- Members welcomed the use of 'MCM Live', a new digital service, to allow tenants to track their Mears operative, share information about repairs and receive an estimated time of arrival

RESOLVED:

- That the Responsive Repairs Service Update be noted

67. WINTER GAS PLAN

Members received a report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) which provided an update on the Winter Gas Plan. Members congratulated Officers on the 100% success rate for completing annual gas safety checks, acknowledging the cross service team effort involved. Members

Cabinet Housing Panel
2 March 2021

also noted that electric heating properties were also checked, but not under a dedicated Winter Plan as they tended to be less impacted during this time.

RESOLVED:

- That the Winter Gas Plan report be noted

68. NOW HOUSING PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Members received a report of the Head of Housing Operations (the council's advisor) on behalf of Now Housing Limited Shareholder Group, providing an update on Now Housing.

The following points were raised and noted:

- A new performance dashboard had been recently agreed by the Now Housing Board, and would be shared with Members to allow them to track performance
- The Loan Agreement in place between Now Housing and the Council had a fixed interest rate, but the facility was negotiated annually
- The loan arrangements ensured that should there be any default by Now Housing, the Council would be able to exercise rights over the assets in place
- Now Housing has its own financial advisor who meets regularly with the Council's Section 151 Officer
- The flexible products contained in the business plan were part of Now Housing's ambitions and would be developed further. At present the focus was increasing housing options where rents were within the housing allowance cost range
- Members noted the positive feedback from tenants
- Members noted that rent collection was at 100% and received confirmation from Officers that whilst Now Housing did have its own policies with regards to rent collection, they were very much in line with the approach taken by the Council and shared the same guiding principle. In fact the same personnel (via a service level agreement with Now Housing) were responsible for rent collection for both Now Housing and the Council

RESOLVED:

- That the Now Housing update report be noted

Meeting ended at 8.38 pm
JA