

**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**

**HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE**

**4.00pm 11 NOVEMBER 2015**

**FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE, SHIP STREET, BRIGHTON**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillor Meadows (Chair); Councillors Hill (Deputy Chair), Mears (Opposition Spokesperson), Gibson (Group Spokesperson), Atkinson, Barnett, Lewry, Miller, Moonan and Phillips

**PART ONE**

**34 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

**34a) Declarations of Substitutes**

34.1 There were none.

**34b) Declarations of Interests**

34.2 There were none.

**34c) Exclusion of the Press and Public**

34.3 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

34.4 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the item contained in part two of the agenda.

**35 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

35.1 Councillor Mears referred to paragraphs 23.4 and 23.5 relating to the report on New Homes for Neighbourhoods – Small Site Strategy. Councillor Mears had noted that £5 million had been set aside in the HRA and had asked how this was to be used. The Acting Executive Director had promised to provide a breakdown and this had not been received. The Acting Director Environment, Development & Housing apologised and

stated that he would make sure a breakdown was sent to Councillor Mears and all other committee members.

- 35.2 Councillor Gibson referred to paragraph 26.13 relating to the report on Review of the Long Lease held by the Brighton Lions at Lions Court. He asked for the last line to be amended to read "He **expected** to see a tighter register and tighter criteria for people on the housing list".
- 35.3 Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 28.2 relating to her question about gas canisters. She had received a detailed reply but stressed that the issue she had raised related to gas canisters in vehicles on the highway. There was the potential for an accident to occur. Councillor Mears asked for a response to her specific question. The Acting Executive Director Environment, Development & Housing replied that he would discuss this matter with Councillor Mears to try and meet her concerns.
- 35.4 Councillor Gibson referred to paragraph 30.14 in which the Acting Director of Environment, Development & Housing had stated that members of the committee were able to ask for a briefing on resident involvement and that officers were happy to talk to Councillor Gibson or any other member about the process. Councillor Gibson stated that he was keen for a briefing as soon as possible. The Chair informed Councillor Gibson she was sure this could be arranged.
- 35.5 **RESOLVED** - (1) That the minutes of the Housing and New Homes Committee held on 23 September 2015 be agreed and signed as a correct record subject to the amendment outlined in paragraph 35.2 above.

### **36 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS**

- 36.1 The Chair welcomed Tracy John, Head of Housing to her first meeting of the Housing & New Homes Committee.
- 36.2 The Chair reported that she was very pleased to hear that the council had received planning permission to take forward a scheme for 57 new homes at the former Library site on Findon Road, Whitehawk, under the council's New Homes for Neighbourhoods programme. The team had also made a short film available about the programme which could be viewed via the New Homes for Neighbourhoods page on the council's website or on the council's You Tube channel.

### **37 CALL OVER**

- 37.1 It was agreed that all items be reserved for discussion.

### **38 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

- 38.1 There were no Petitions

38.2 A question had been submitted by Damon & Rebecca Brown. They were not in attendance at the meeting. The question was as follows:

“In light of the reports that Mears and/or council subcontractor have been suspended for overcharging, will all Mears major works projects now be suspended until a resolution has been found?”

38.3 The Chair replied as follows:

“The Mears group provide a comprehensive responsive repairs; planned maintenance and major works service for council homes across the city.

The contract value is split into 46% planned maintenance, 32% major works and 22% responsive repairs and empty properties (based on this year’s budget).

Through their on-going contract monitoring checks council officers have identified possible irregularities in a small part of the responsive repairs contract. This does not impact on the major works programme and therefore we do not need to delay the significant investment programme for our council homes through our major works contract.

We will, however, continue to review all our processes and quality controls to ensure value for money and contract compliance across all our contracts”.

38.4 **RESOLVED-** That the Public question be noted.

38.5 Sarah Carter asked the following public question:

"An investigation has begun into overcharging by Mears for repairs. Mark Turner, GMB branch secretary, said: ***“There should be a root and branch investigation into this contract to make sure that public money is not going somewhere else.”*** Is the committee aware of the existence of two independently commissioned, pre-works, RICS building surveys which show that over-charging and unnecessary works could run into millions of pounds for council-owned major housing works in Brighton and Hove? Can existing investigators widen enquiries to include this potential area of overcharging?”

38.6 The Chair replied as follows:

“Further to the answer outlined in question (i) above, the council is aware of two surveys that an individual leaseholder has provided to the council in relation to a specific dispute relating to their leasehold property. The leaseholder’s enquiry has been dealt with through the council’s leasehold dispute process. It does not relate to the on-going contract monitoring checks through which council officers have identified possible irregularities in a small part of the responsive repairs contract.

The council does take the monitoring of contracts very seriously and we will continue to monitor contract compliance across all our contracts”.

38.7 Ms Carter asked the following supplementary question:

“There have been arrests & convictions in more than 8 other councils where bills of up to £28,000 per leaseholder have found to have been grossly overcharged and unnecessary. Is the committee aware that combined service charge bill estimates of over £42,000 per leaseholder are being sent out in Brighton? How can these bills be

legitimate if bills of £28,000 in Islington, Greater London for the same works have found to have been over charged?”

38.8 The Chair thanked Ms Carter and informed her that she would receive a written reply to her supplementary question.

38.9 **RESOLVED-** That the Public question be noted.

38.10 The Committee considered the following deputation which had been submitted by Barry Hughes, Charles Penrose, Ron Gurney, Chris El Shabba, Bob Spacie and Linda Shaw. The deputation was presented by Barry Hughes.

### **Area Panel Housing Representatives – Reinstatement of Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee**

“At the last round of Area Panels all panels agreed that a proposal for the reinstatement of the Housing Management Consultative Sub-Committee (HMCSC) should be presented to the Housing & New Homes Committee (HNHC) for consideration.

Council Officers have presented Area Panels with various reasons as to why the HMCSC was abolished and why it should not be reinstated, however these have been rejected point by point. Given that the City Council faces severe financial constraints it would seem to be negligent to turn away from the considerable resource of voluntary talent, expertise and knowledge that is available from within the committees represented by Area Panels and by extension HMCSC.

Area Panels also suggested that Councillors on the HNHC should engage with tenant and leaseholder representatives by meeting with the Chairs of the Resident Only Meetings and the Special Interest Groups to discuss the way forward. We are disappointed to have heard nothing further regarding this suggestion.

We note that the matter of reinstatement of HMCSC was raised “ex situ” at the last HNHC Meeting and that it was indicated by the Chair that “the process was unlikely to be completed in time for the next meeting”. We do hope that this does not indicate procrastination on the part of the executive.

We do not think that Councillors are taking our concerns regarding the reinstatement of HMCSC with due seriousness and we would urge that HNHC make a formal commitment to engage with tenant and leaseholder representatives to reverse the decision of the previous administration and reinstate HMCSC.”

38.11 The Chair thanked Mr Hughes and replied as follows:

“I would like to thank residents for raising this matter for consideration at the Housing & New Homes Committee. I very much appreciate the time, enthusiasm and passion that involved residents commit to being engaged about their housing service, and I wholeheartedly welcome any suggestions that will improve services for our diverse group of residents.

There is no doubt that councillors have serious regard for issues facing tenants, and my desire is to see more involvement that gets to the heart of these issues and enables us to work together to have an impact upon them.

It was unfortunate that the matter was raised as an amendment to an existing committee paper to which it did not directly relate. The committee meeting necessarily followed procedural business by focussing on what was already a substantial agenda.

Many things have changed since HMCSC was in place. We are seeing a general decline in people wishing to attend meetings. People are leading increasing busy lives, and it can be hard for tenants with young families; working households and carers to make on-going commitments to be involved through regular formal meetings.

I want to ensure that we are delivering value for money. We must be mindful of the budget restraints; including the reduction in income to the Housing Revenue Account that will result from rent reduction to be introduced next April.

Whilst I am keen to continue to tap into the knowledge and expertise of our involved tenants and leaseholders; I also need to be mindful of the need to engage with harder to reach groups. Currently the work disproportionately falls on a small number of involved residents and there have consistently been vacancies for involved tenant roles which have not been possible to fill.

It is in this light that I want us to review resident involvement. I want to make sure that we are moving with the times, looking forward, noting what is on the horizon, and making sure that as councillors we can work collaboratively with residents and officers to jointly meet our challenges and secure better outcomes for a larger number of residents; giving tenants the opportunity to choose a level of involvement that suits them.

To enable this to happen, I would urge existing tenant representatives to contribute to the review; thinking about how we can achieve broader tenant involvement and continue to drive up customer satisfaction for all council tenants.

I think that if our aim is to improve outcomes for residents, then we stand a better chance of achieving this by looking at resident involvement in the round, rather than solely looking back to the reinstatement of HMCSC.

There is an exciting range of work taking place here, and in other areas that a review will help us build upon. Officers are working hard to pull together ideas and establish a timetable for a full review of resident engagement, which, please be assured, will include looking at HMCSC”.

38.12 **RESOLVED** - That the deputation be noted.

### 39 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

39.1 There were no Petitions, Written Questions, Letters or Notices of Motion from Councillors.

**40 RESPONSE TO THE TENANT & RESIDENT SCRUTINY PANEL ON RESPONSIVE REPAIRS**

- 40.1 The Committee considered the report of the Acting Executive Director Environment, Development and Housing which set out the Housing response to the recommendations of the Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel in their report on responsive repairs. The scrutiny panel report was attached as appendix 1.
- 40.2 David Murtagh, Chair of the Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel on Responsive Repairs addressed the Committee to present the findings and recommendations of the scrutiny panel report. Mr Murtagh stated that the Panel had come away with a very positive view of the service that was provided and in particular the Mears Repairs Helpdesk at the Housing Centre. The main recommendation was around the lack of tenant involvement in assessing repairs after they had been carried out. The Panel strongly supported the tenant assessor scheme that was in place already and felt that it should be used more widely to improve honest feedback from tenants. The Panel also wished to see the re-introduction of the Rate Your Estate scheme as a key part of the responsive repairs service. Mr Murtagh thanked Chief John Blackbear and others for their contribution to the panel and also thanked members of staff and officers for their help and support.
- 40.3 Mr Murtagh read the list of recommendations of the Panel as set out on page 34 of the agenda.
- 40.4 The Partnering Business Manager explained the council's response to the Panel recommendations. This was set out in paragraph 4 of the covering report. He thanked the Panel for their hard work. Useful challenges and recommendations had been taken forward.
- 40.5 The Chair confirmed that the Scrutiny Panel report had already been submitted to the Housing Area Panel meetings.
- 40.6 Councillor Mears thanked the Panel for their work. She had attended a Panel meeting and had heard an open and honest discussion. It was clear that the Panel had concerns and Councillor Mears was not sure these concerns had been taken on board. Meanwhile, Councillor Mears stated that she wanted to make it clear that she had no connection with the Mears contracts.
- 40.7 Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 7.4 on page 39 of the agenda. She supported the Panel's view that the Mears Group should not be carrying out their own surveys.
- 40.8 Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 7.7 on page 39 on the agenda. This stated that the Mears Group had moved to a telephone based system, where a member of the Mears team called tenants to ask for their feedback on the service they have received. Councillor Mears considered that this was not an appropriate way of receiving feedback. The Council should be monitoring the service. Councillor Mears noted that the service had never gone out to open book and that there was an issue with regard to apprenticeships. Councillor Mears welcomed the Scrutiny report and thanked tenants for bringing it forward.

- 40.9 Councillor Phillips referred to paragraphs 4.13 and 4.14 of the cover report on page 25 of the agenda in relation to resident inspectors. She felt that clarification was needed. She suggested that residents could be asked if they were happy to be visited by resident inspectors.
- 40.10 David Murtagh agreed that tenants could be asked if they wanted tenant inspectors to visit them. He felt that the council were being very short sighted about this matter. Tenants were looking to see if empty properties were up to standard. Too many obstacles were being put in the way of tenants.
- 40.11 Councillor Hill observed that if she were a tenant she would not sure she would be comfortable with another tenant looking at repairs.
- 40.12 Councillor Gibson thanked the Scrutiny Panel for the work carried out. He stressed that it was important that Scrutiny Panels were supported. With regard to the monitoring of repairs, Councillor Gibson felt that it did not make sense that the contractors were asking for feedback on their own work.
- 40.13 Councillor Atkinson stressed that any commercial organisation worth its salt would carry out customer surveys. The Council needed to monitor the work. Councillor Atkinson praised the scrutiny review.
- 40.14 The Partnering Business Manager reported that resident assessors had initially focused on empty properties. He understood the desire to obtain resident feedback in some form. This matter would be taken up with the Resident Inspector Group and with Scrutiny. The Council was already carrying out online resident satisfaction surveys. Officers could look to working with the resident inspectors as well.
- 40.15 David Murtagh stated that he felt that the council did need to find out more about the repairs they paid for. Tenants should be used far more than they were at present. Mr Murtagh felt that if tenants were phoned up and asked if they wanted a tenant to inspect work, they would have the opportunity to say no.
- 40.16 The Chair thanked Mr Murtagh and everyone who took part in the Scrutiny Panel and stressed that she appreciated their input.

40.17 **RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That the evidence, findings and recommendations of the Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel relating to the responsive repairs service, be noted.
- (2) That the actions proposed in the report in response to the Tenant & Resident Scrutiny Panel's recommendations, be agreed.

**41 RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY PANEL REPORT ON PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING**

- 41.1 The Committee considered the report of the Acting Executive Director Environment, Development and Housing which informed members that in 2014 a request was received from the Citizen's Advice Bureau to look at the private rented sector using a

scrutiny panel, because of the ‘...worrying increase in the number of people seeking advice from the CAB’ in relation to the private rented sector and letting agents. A Scrutiny Panel was established and the Panel’s formal report and recommendations were published in March 2015 and presented to the Housing and New Homes Committee on 17 June 2015 with a proposal that officers bring a report back to the Committee with a formal response to the recommendations.

- 41.2 The current report was the formal response. It was proposed that the scrutiny recommendations within the remit of Housing & New Homes Committee were taken forward as part of the development of the Housing Strategy Action Plan. The report was presented by the Interim Head of Property & Investment and Head of Housing Strategy, Development & Private Sector Housing.
- 41.3 Councillor Hill stated that as lead councillor for private rented sector housing she had participated with some of the task and finish groups with the universities. She hoped to see work with various organisations in the city in terms of areas outside the remit of the council. A task and finish group could be set up with the strategic housing partnership. A workshop had been held on HMOs which highlighted a number of issues. There needed to be closer working with community groups such as LATs.
- 41.4 Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 3.12 (number 7 – Improve the identification of empty private sector homes and voids, and maximise the use of these properties). She asked how this could be achieved. The Interim Head of Property & Investment and Head of Housing Strategy, Development & Private Sector Housing replied that the council had a successful empty properties service. The council were looking to review the enforcement protocol to ensure that it was using all the protocols available.
- 41.5 Councillor Mears referred to page 55 of the agenda in relation to Article 4 directions. She felt that there was not a clear policy on student housing. She recommended that the council looked at this matter carefully and brought forward a policy.
- 41.6 The Chair shared the concerns that prime spots were taken for student accommodation.
- 41.7 Councillor Miller referred to page 84 of the agenda relating to selective licensing. Would these options be taken back for committee consideration? The Interim Head of Property & Investment and Head of Housing Strategy, Development & Private Sector Housing replied that further reports would be brought back to the committee.
- 41.8 Councillor Atkinson referred to page 78 which referred to intermediate rents and housing market intervention and increasing the supply of more affordable homes. He asked for more information about these matters. Councillor Atkinson referred to page 80 which referred to exploring ways of increasing the supply of affordable social housing for key workers. Councillor Atkinson could not see much information about key workers.
- 41.9 The Interim Head of Property & Investment and Head of Housing Strategy, Development & Private Sector Housing replied that these issues were linked. The Housing Strategy identified a gap with regard to key worker housing. In October 2014, a report was taken to Policy & Resources Committee about the potential of the council having options to buy and build homes off plan for key workers. The council had received some funding from DCLG to investigate this matter.

- 41.10 Councillor Gibson thanked officers for a thorough report. With regard to recommendation 1 (to support a strong and buoyant local private sector housing market); Councillor Gibson felt that in reality the private rented market in the city was overheated. There needed to be a focus on working with the private sector. There were different ways of dealing with this issue. Councillor Gibson referred to page 64 which referred to the loss of student accommodation. He asked if there was any evidence for that statement. Page 63 referred to pressure points. Councillor Gibson asked where these were. Councillor Gibson welcomed the idea of living wage rent models. The average rent in the private sector was 50% of a person's income. Councillor Gibson suggested that due to the housing shortage in the city, couples with a spare room should be encouraged and supported to take in a lodger. Councillor Gibson suggested a review in 6 months.
- 41.11 Councillor Miller concurred with Councillor Gibson with regard to his comments about spare rooms. He stated that people should be encouraged to downsize in both the council's own stock and the owner occupied sector. He stressed that one way of making the Private sector work more functionally was to have a smaller private sector. Councillor Miller stressed that the most security someone could have was to own their own home. He asked what work was going on to help people buy their own homes.
- 41.12 Councillor Hill referred to Councillor Mears' comments on the need for a policy on student housing. The report did refer to some research being done at the moment which would lead to a student housing strategy. She agreed that there needed to be a much clearer idea about how to deal with this situation. Councillor Hill considered that a progress report on the HMO licensing scheme was a really good idea. Councillor Hill also considered that the report should be reviewed again in six months and broken up into themes.
- 41.13 The Interim Head of Property & Investment and Head of Housing Strategy, Development & Private Sector Housing stated that in terms of lost student housing, comments had been incorporated in the report from a number of different people. Some of the comments had been from students at risk of losing their accommodation because landlords continued to let it despite not having planning permission. The Council had therefore agreed with the universities to have a much more proactive protocol around article 4, so that students did not rent properties that were not compliant with planning permission. With regard to pressure points, a great deal of work had been carried out with the universities with regard to encouraging more head leasing schemes.
- 41.14 The Chair stressed that a progress report would need to be submitted to a future committee.
- 41.15 **RESOLVED:-**
- (1) That the proposed response to Scrutiny Panel Report on Private Sector Housing (Appendix 1) in relation to matters within the remit of the Housing & New Homes Committee, be approved. Other non-Housing matters will be reported to the relevant policy committee for consideration.

**42 SENIORS HOUSING SCHEME REVIEW**

- 42.1 The Committee considered the report of the Acting Executive Director Environment, Development and Housing which reminded members that in January 2015 Housing Committee members accepted in principle the recommendations of the seniors housing stock review. One of the recommendations addressed the need to decommission a small number of senior schemes which could not be feasibly or viably made fit for purpose. A confidential report was brought to the September 2015 committee proposing the decommissioning of Stonehurst Court, a non-purpose built seniors scheme, built in 1951, consisting of 25 studio flats and communal facilities.
- 42.2 Closing a seniors' scheme was a sensitive matter requiring early and sensitive consultation with the tenants concerned. For this reason at the last meeting members granted permission to consult the tenants on this proposal and their re-housing options prior to the public release of any report. The current report informed members of the outcome of the tenant consultation meetings and sought to obtain a decision on whether to close Stonehurst Court. Members were also asked to note the future short and medium term options for the re-development or conversion of the scheme, in the event of a decision to close the scheme. The report was presented by the Housing Stock Review Manager.
- 42.3 Councillor Mears referred to the proposal to provide temporary accommodation to vulnerable people. She questioned how moving vulnerable people to a settled community would work. Councillor Mears mentioned that in the past there had been a scheme being looked at to save money through Adult Social Care for extra care. She wanted to be clear if Housing Services was working with Adult Social Care to bring their budget deficit in line. Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 3.2 which listed previously de-commissioned seniors schemes including Patching Lodge. She asked how a new build could be de-commissioned. Councillor Mears referred to the financial issues on page 90 of the agenda. There were many people on the waiting list for sheltered accommodation. She asked for the current figure. Councillor Mears asked about timescales and how this tied up with the council's finances.
- 42.4 The Housing Stock Review Manager explained that the proposal for using the empty flats would be subject to risk assessment. There was a need to ensure the statutory homeless households would settle in well. Each case would be handled sensitively case by case. The Adult Social Care reference related to a potential future use of providing new or converted accommodation. One of the possibilities could be for people with learning disabilities. However, that was a possibility not a proposal. The Housing Stock Review Manager said he would confirm the history of the Patching Lodge site to the Committee. The Housing Stock Review Manager did not have the exact number of older households on the housing register. When he last checked 3 to 4 months ago it had been between 800 to 900. He would confirm the figure with the Committee. With regard to financial comments, officers had looked at finance in a corporate way. There was a growing demand on the general fund. The proposal could help this situation.
- 42.5 Councillor Mears referred to the pressure on the HRA and stressed that she wanted to keep track on where the money was being spent.

- 42.6 Councillor Miller welcomed the proposal in general. He stressed that there was limited space in the city and welcomed increasing density. Councillor Miller asked about the 2 privately owned units on the front of the development. He asked if the owners had been approached so density could be increased further by purchasing those units. Councillor Miller asked what happened when the temporary accommodation was taken out of the scheme. How were people asked to leave and where would they go to? Councillor Miller stated that the option he preferred was the option that provided the city with the most homes.
- 42.7 The Acting Executive Director Environment, Development & Housing referred to the question about temporary accommodation. If people were being housed under a statutory duty, he understood that they would be housed under a licence which would mean that the council could give short notice to move those statutory households on.
- 42.8 The Senior Lawyer explained that her understanding was that they were non-secure tenancies and the council could guarantee to re-gain possession. The court had to give the council possession normally within 14 days. The court could extend it to 6 weeks if it would cause exceptional hardship.
- 42.9 Councillor Moonan supported using stock as temporary accommodation in principle. She questioned what would happen if vulnerable people went into the properties. How would they be supported? Meanwhile, Councillor Moonan referred to the people who did not want to leave. She asked about the progress in finding suitable alternative accommodation for these tenants.
- 42.10 The Housing Stock Review Manager explained that some tenants had already asked to view other sheltered schemes. Detailed discussions would not happen until the committee had made a decision. If the proposals were agreed there would be individual re-housing and housing needs meetings. There were one or two homeless households with mobility problems & the downstairs accommodation would be suitable for those tenants.
- 42.11 Councillor Philips referred to paragraph 3.6 in terms of living rent properties rather than owner occupied properties. It would have been helpful to see an explanation as to why they should not be disposed of on the open market as there had been in the Oxford Street report. The Housing Stock Review Manager explained that the next report would have development appraisals.
- 42.12 Councillor Gibson informed the Committee that he had the impression that most people in the flats were quite happy and wanted to stay. He welcomed the proposal to retain the 6 flats at the front of the property. However he stressed that these tenants would need support when they lost their senior status. He asked what support they would receive. He stressed that long term residents felt connected to the community. Councillor Gibson welcomed the proposal for temporary accommodation given the safeguards that would be in place.
- 42.13 The Head of Tenancy Services reported that if the recommendations were agreed, the council could use Care Link services to support the tenants who remained. There was a need to think about what more could be done to ensure support was provided for the most vulnerable residents.

42.14 **RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That the conclusion of the scheme review, summarised in this report be agreed, and after due consideration of the results of the consultation with the current residents, it is agreed that Stonehurst Court should be decommissioned for use as seniors accommodation.
- (2) That it is noted that the 6 flats which are part of the street frontage will not form a part of any redevelopment due to the difficulties relating to proximity to neighbouring owner occupied properties; and therefore it is agreed that that priority for any vacancies in these 6 properties be given to any tenants who are required to be decanted from the remainder of the site and who would suffer particular detriment (health or social) in moving away. These flats would not be retained as seniors housing.
- (3) It is agreed that in the event of the scheme closing, the remaining available accommodation, namely the studio flats in the centre of the site, be made available as temporary accommodation for statutory homeless people to whom the council owes a duty, subject to a property by property business case and risk assessment.
- (4) That the update on the range of potential medium term future options for the site in paragraph 3.6 be noted. A report on options for the future use of the site will be brought to a future Housing & New Homes Committee in the event of the scheme closing.

**43 FORMER OXFORD STREET HOUSING OFFICE - REVIEW OF FUTURE OPTIONS**

- 43.1 The Committee considered the report of the Acting Executive Director Environment, Development and Housing which explored a range of future options for the site of the former Oxford Street housing office. This was a vacant Housing Revenue Account (HRA) asset. A decision to close the office was taken in November 2014, by the then Interim Head of Housing, as a result of an adverse health & safety report. The report was presented by the Housing Stock Review Manager.
- 43.2 The Chair stated the background documents made available to Members had been confusing as the matter had moved on since the papers had been produced.
- 43.3 Councillor Mears informed the Committee that she had raised questions about the background documents at the 30<sup>th</sup> October Council meeting. The questions related to the cost of consultants with regard to the report dated 18 July 2014. Councillor Mears was concerned that Committee members were never shown the reports. She had been given copies by a journalist who had obtained them under the Freedom of Information Act provisions. Councillor Mears stated that she would like to see an investment plan for the last 8 years and steps being taken to protect the property. She asked who was responsible for allowing the building to deteriorate and why the committee had not been kept informed.
- 43.4 The Acting Director Environment, Development and Housing explained that the reports Councillor Mears referred to were background information. The responses to the Freedom of Information request were available on the Council's website. The Acting

Director had not brought information to the committee with regard to the cost of consultants or the investment plan. However he was happy to provide information to members on what had happened. In the meanwhile decisions were required about the future options for the building.

43.5 The Housing Stock Review Manager stated that the cost of the consultant's report dated 18 July 2014 was £1550.

43.6 Councillor Miller stated that he felt that the office was closed by the back door. However, as the building was empty, he was happy to support the provision of more housing.

43.7 Councillor Gibson commented that he was interested in the option set out in paragraph 4.3 (Conversion or Redevelopment by the Council's Estate Regeneration Team). This development would look at modelling homes at social and living wage rents. Councillor Gibson stated that he would like officers to explore whether it was possible to build an extra storey on top of the building.

43.8 The Chair agreed that it was probably possible to have another storey built on top of the building and she wanted that suggestion explored. The options could be looked at again when they were fully costed. A report would be brought back to the committee for consideration.

43.9 **RESOLVED:-**

(1) That the range of future options for this HRA owned commercial property set out in paragraph 4 be noted.

(2) That it be agreed that a further, fully costed report be brought back to Housing & New Homes Committee for consideration, focussing on options which make best use of the asset, meet housing needs in the city and / or generate a financial return for the council, whether revenue or capital.

#### **44 HOUSING AND PLANNING BILL - PRESENTATION**

44.1 The Board considered a presentation with slides from the Interim Head of Property & Investment & Head of Housing Strategy Development & Private Sector Housing. The Housing & Planning Bill was expected to become legislation in late 2016/early 2017. Members were given details of key provisions and implications of the bill which related to: The extension of the right to buy; The sale of high value vacant local authority homes; High income social tenants: Mandatory rents; Rogue landlords and letting agents; Starter Homes; Brownfield Site Registers; Planning Permission in Principle (Pip).

44.2 Members were also informed of the key provisions and implications of the Welfare Reform and Work Bill 2015/6 which was expected to become legislation in 2016.

- 44.3 Councillor Gibson had a question about the reduction estimated over 4 years because of the rent reduction on the HRA. He stated that this depended on assumptions made on CPI and wondered what these assumptions were.
- 44.4 The Interim Head of Property and Investment & Head of Housing Strategy Development & Private Sector Housing confirmed that the reduction in social housing rents, 1% p.a. over 4 years was a real term reduction. There was no CPI increase.
- 44.5 Councillor Gibson stated that the council would be £14.1m worse off had there been an increase of CPI plus 1% which was the previous formula. An assumption must have been made about what the CPI was in order to calculate that difference.
- 44.6 The Head of Financial Services (EDH) replied that she thought that the CPI was ½% but would have to confirm that figure.
- 44.7 Councillor Atkinson stated that he had read in the Local Government magazine that Lord Gary Porter had stated that the resilience of local government could not be stretched further. He was talking about plans to make savings between 25% to 40%. The 1% reduction in social housing rents would add to the pressures on local government.
- 44.8 The Head of Finance – Business Engagement explained that the 20% and 40% reductions would be made to the general fund budget, whereas these proposals would relate to the HRA budget which was not party to those reductions.
- 44.9 Councillor Miller welcomed the proposals. It was about trying to create more homes and making the most of existing homes.
- 44.10 The Chair thanked the Interim Head of Property & Investment & Head of Housing Strategy Development & Private Sector Housing for giving the presentation. It set in context the current situation and the difficulties and challenges the council faced in moving forward.
- 44.11 **RESOLVED** – That the presentation be noted.

#### 45 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL

##### 45.1 **RESOLVED:-**

That the following item be referred for information to the next Council meeting on 17 December 2015.

Item 41 – Response to Scrutiny Panel Report on Private Sector Housing (referred by Councillor Hill).

**46 PART TWO MINUTES**

**46.1 RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That the part two minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2015 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

**47 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS**

**47.1 RESOLVED:-**

- (1) That the part two minutes remain exempt from disclosure to the press and public.

The meeting concluded at 6.15pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

