

Brighton & Hove City Council

Housing Committee

4.00pm 28 September 2022

Council Chamber, Hove Town Hall

Minutes

Present: Councillors: Gibson (Joint Chair), Williams (Opposition Spokesperson), Fowler, Meadows, Osborne, Phillips, Powell, Barnett, Shanks and Grimshaw

Apologies: Councillors: Hugh-Jones, Mears and Mcintosh

Substitutes: Councillors: Barnett for Mears, Grimshaw for Mcintosh and Shanks for Hugh-Jones

Part One

18 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

- (a) **Declaration of Substitutes:** Councillor Barnett substituted for Councillor Mears, Councillor Shanks substituted for Councillor Hugh-Jones, Councillor Grimshaw substituted for Councillor Mcintosh
- (b) **Declarations of Interest:** Councillors Williams, Grimshaw and Osborne stated they were members of ACORN.
- (c) **Exclusion of Press and Public:** The press and public should not be excluded from the meeting when any of the following items are under consideration.

19 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 19.1 The committee agreed that the minutes of 22 June 2022 were a true and accurate record of the meeting.

20 CHAIRS COMMUNICATIONS

- 20.1 Welcome to Housing committee, in my communications I will pick out some points around today's agenda and report on other points of note including likely changes in national housing policy.

Firstly, I have to comment on the new direction of national policy and the implications for housing and homelessness. Whilst the detail is not clear the new government priority is implementing tax cuts for wealthy and business which are likely to be paid for by cuts in public services since their declared direction of travel is to achieve a "small state". The consequence for the council over the coming years is likely to mean fewer resources for tackling homelessness (these

have already been cut back in the Rough sleeper initiative funding which tapers over the 3 year horizon) and arguably less support for public enforcement standards in the private rented sector. In response to this, a report to the Policy and Resources committee next week, will be asking members to support making approaches to government calling compensation for the impact of high inflation partly by increasing Local Housing Allowances and welfare benefits (including changes to the benefit cap) to ensure that they keep pace with inflation as a minimum and for a temporary freezes in evictions and rent controls. These measures would help prevent the wave of homelessness that could result from the cost of living crisis.

At the last housing committee concern was expressed over the backlog of housing repairs and of the number of empty council properties known as voids. I'd like to record appreciation for the good progress made by officers in both reducing the end of month snapshot number of empty properties and the repairs backlog. The number of end of month empty properties has reduced from 210 reported in May to 170 at the end of August. Whereas the repairs backlog is thankfully reducing albeit this is less fast, falling by 481 up till July. A threat to this good progress comes from the current proposals contained in government consultation to restrict the expected formula rent rise. This would be fine if the government were to compensate councils for the loss of income. But since this seems unlikely so with wages materials and repair costs rocketing and we will be facing a squeeze in resources next year and have fewer resources to tackle these problems.

Today's agenda includes an update on work to improve private rented housing. Whilst it is pleasing to see the standards provided by the councils direct lets scheme are comparable to other ethical lettings agencies and pleasing that this area is moving forward and also pleasing that a voluntary ethical charter requested by campaigners is being proposed on today's agenda, nevertheless it is frustrating that the feasibility study into future options for landlord licensing got underway much later than we as elected members were expecting when this action was agreed in March and the report sets out a timeline this. However, we remain committed to reaching a decision on what kind of landlord licensing schemes (including the renewal of our existing HMO licensing scheme) later this year or early next year and will do all we can along with our joint programme partners to speed this up.

On today's agenda there are two reports covering investment to help people reduce heating bills under our warm safe homes funding covering disabled facilities grants and carbon reduction. There are some positives here, we are proposing that committee agrees, in response to the cost of living hikes to energy bills, to increase the money available for warm safe homes paid through the disabled facilities grants for low income household to £1m since we introduced the help last November The main programme of support to help households with improvements to reduce their carbon consumption and energy bills is also progressing and some good research has been undertaken into the swiftest and most effective use we can make of the warmer homes budget. We are asking members to agree to the outline guidelines for the ambitious £7.2m investment in these schemes which are scheduled to be up and running in the spring.

On the agenda is the annual report on evictions. This report shows an improvement in lowering eviction rates since the pandemic and gives helpful information about supported housing. We still need to bring eviction rates down further in the management of emergency and supported accommodation we are responsible for. We need to aim for managed moves instead of the non-consensual ending of a placement or eviction where ever humanly possible. In terms of reducing numbers of households in emergency homeless accommodation and reducing out of area placements, I like to register appreciation of good progress made by officers. Since December 2021 EA numbers have fallen by 190 to 525 in August 2022 and Out of Area placements have fallen from 177 to 104. over the same period This includes closing Kendal court. This good progress which may reflects some early success from the transformation programme and associated improved homeless prevention as face to face work increases. Sadly, it seems that some of the gains reducing rough sleeping made during the everyone in period are being reversed as we are seeing an increase in rough sleeper numbers compared to last year. This is made worse by the loss of most of No Second Night Out beds provided by St Mungos over the summer, but I am hoping that these beds will be restored, and officers will be able to bring the numbers back down over the coming weeks

Also, on the agenda the work plan review and update along with performance monitoring now includes more measures to help us monitor the effectiveness of enforcement strategy in the private rented housing the monitoring report also reports on continued good progress on providing additional council homes. We have achieved 344 by the end of quarter and hope to get to around 500 by the beginning of April next year (this would be almost 250% more than in the previous 4 years) Also in the pipeline are another 342 homes including 176 homes at the lowest rents achieved at scale coming from the joint venture within the next two years in Coldean and Portslade.

Finally, I would like to thank the Housing coalition, (who without any support or funding from the council) for organising an exciting and wide ranging Action on Housing conference on the 19 October at the Brighthelm between 2 and 9 pm. I plan to attend and would encourage others to come along too.

21 CALL OVER

21.1 Agenda items 25, 25, 27, 28, 29 and 30 were called for discussion.

22 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

22.1 To consider the following matters raised by members of the public:

(a) **Petitions:** None.

(b) **Written Questions:** There were two public questions for this meeting.

1. **From – Naomi Gann (ACORN)**

Question: *In November 2021 this Council passed a motion to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to rogue landlords. They have also secured £150,000 to invest in private rented sector enforcement and hired four staff for this department. However, this policy has still not been implemented. In the South East almost 50% of renters are victims of illegal behaviour from landlords, and in Brighton, as this Council knows, renters are being harassed, intimidated and illegally evicted by landlords. Why have you still not implemented a zero-tolerance approach to rogue landlords, as you were mandated to do a full ten months ago?*

Response: Thank you for the question. Where landlords have harassed, intimidated and illegally evicted their tenants, should the victim want to pursue prosecution, the Council will offer support through the process. If the Council does succeed in taking legal action against a landlord, this will be widely publicised.

The Council's current Enforcement Policy recognises improvements will be made most quickly by landlords through negotiation. Initially officers will meet with the landlord at the property and discuss the reasonable actions they would be required to make. If those improvements are not completed within a reasonable timescale, matters will be escalated. Ultimately, this can lead to prosecutions and fines, but these would not be necessary if the matters are resolved at an earlier stage. We are expanding the reported monitoring of enforcement with landlords to committee. This will help better understand and interrogate the improvements achieved by our expanded enforcement team and assist with future reviews of the PRS enforcement strategy which was introduced in November 2019 and is scheduled for review shortly. The resources invested into the Private Sector Housing Team are beginning to help in embedding this approach now that pandemic backlogs are being cleared.

We are also keen to establish the evidence base that would allow us to expand landlord licensing since we believe that under licensing the council can enforce standards without the tenant being so much at risk if conditions are not up to scratch.

Supplementary question: As the Green administration is making no progress what are they doing?

Response: The Green Party are working with the Labour group on the way forward and are committed to the joint programme.

2. From – Daniel Harris

“At the last HWB, I asked for a mortality review because of the museum of homelessness reports into homeless housed mortalities in BHCC, it was 61 deaths from 20/21 to 22/22. Cllr Shanks agreed and confirmed there would be discussions with housing and other departments on this, I’ve heard nothing since.

In Health Scrutiny Healthwatch said they are ready and willing to investigate. Today's report states there were almost 300 evictions in 20/21- 21/22 for those living in homeless accommodations. Do we need to take legal action against BHCC to get justice?

Can you update us on the progression please?"

Response: Thank you for your question. As you have noted this matter was discussed at the Health and Wellbeing Board in July.

The figure of almost 300 evictions for 2021/22 for those living in homeless accommodation is not accurate. The *Evictions from short term Temporary Accommodation and Supported Housing Annual Report* on the agenda, identifies 91 households whose Emergency or Temporary Accommodation was ended over 21/22 reduced to 36% of the year before. This is in relation to a total of 1,485 households who were placed. The percentage of households whose accommodation was ended was 6.10%. This is a considerable improvement from the previous year, where that proportion was 16%.

Your point about joined up working between HASC, public health and Housing on deaths in homeless accommodation is well made and I welcome the initiative of the chair of the HWB to convene discussions and I will provide a written update on these discussions once they have taken place.

Supplementary question: *"Which leads to our own assets such as priory house / Green Diamond, which is a former council building now private sector holiday lets. Some apartments are up for £100s per night.*

The Directors own Moretons, baron Homes and £100's million in assets in this city. plus have contracts with the council for the homeless. We must Ensure the council make use of our assets to bring our emergency and temporary accommodation in house.

Please can the council tell me the full term of the lease and how much that was sold to West Acre Investments for?"

Response: An officer will provide a response in writing.

(c) **Deputations:** None.

23 ITEMS REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

23.1 To consider the following items referred from the Council.

- (1) Petition - none for this meeting
- (2) Deputation - none for this meeting
- (3) Notice of Motion - none for this meeting

24 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

24.1 To consider the following matters raised by councillors:

(a) Petitions: None

(b) Written Questions: Three written questions were received.

Question 1: Councillor Meadows to Chair of Housing Committee**Housing Repairs Figures**

At the last meeting of this Committee the Chair presented the following housing statistics for May 2022:

a) Empty homes (210)

b) Repairs backlog (9,608)

c) Capital cost of accumulated repairs (£1.5m)

d) Lost rent from empty homes (£1.343m, exceeding the void rent lost budget of £636,000)

e) Average re-let time (177 days)

Can the Chair update these figures for a-e to the latest available? With void rent lost currently running at more than double what has been budgeted for this item, can the Chair advise the number of the current empty homes that would need to be filled in order to bring this back within budget.

Response: Thank you for your question, Updated figures are as follows:

- a. Empty Homes 170 (August 2022)
- b. Repairs Backlog 9127 (July 2022)
- c. Capital cost of accumulated repairs (£1.5m)
- d. 2022/23 forecast rent loss £1.005m exceeding the void rent lost budget Of £0.721m
- e. Average re-let time 150 days (August 2022)

Officers in the council's Housing Repairs & Maintenance service have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to provide tenants with an essential repairs service.

However, as reported to Housing Committee, a backlog of routine repairs and empty council homes has built due to Covid19 impacting staffing levels and contractor capacity required to complete the typical number of jobs raised each month.

The Housing Repairs & Maintenance service continues to make good progress in its Covid recovery programme, in particular, improving performance in relation to empty council homes.

The number of re-lets during 2021/22 (472) was up on 2020/21 (213) and above pre-pandemic levels seen during 2019/20 (445). In August y 2022 the service let 62 empty council homes.

The average 'key to key' re-let time for previously occupied homes was 150 days in August 2022 compared with 177 days in May 2022 and 210 days in 2021/22. While re-let times continue to improve, they remain higher than we would wish, In particular, as we re-let some homes which have been empty for long periods of time.

Our performance on forecast rent loss from empty homes has improved from 1.343m in May 2022 to £1.005m. The focus for rent loss reduction is to increase turnover and reduce the key-to-key time to a minimum. It is not possible at this stage to convert this into a number of void properties as the impact on rent loss of each property is variable. However, if we can improving on estimated void rent loss at the current pace it will be possible to bring the actual rent loss by the end of the year in line with budget. When we get the updated figures in January it will be clearer whether we are on track to achieve this

Officers continue to focus on void recovery. During the first 5 months of this financial year the % of council homes empty on the last day of the month as measured by Housemark has fallen from 2.1% in April to 1.5% in August 2022, The overall figure for the last financial year (2021/22) was 2.2%.

In December 2021 the number of outstanding repairs was had not yet stabilised. At that time, the Council was part way through its recruitment process and therefore the incoming works still exceeded officer capacity. With recruitment now complete, the number of outstanding repairs has begun to level off and reduce, dropping from 9,608 in May 2022 to 9127 in July 2022...

To put these figures into context, over 2000 responsive repairs are completed each month. This level of performance is resulting in a reduction in the volume of work outstanding.

To further speed up progress, the Council is employing additional trade resources, and officers are part-way through recruitment, which will be completed in October 2022. The additional resource should being to show a return to a more typical work-in-progress figure during the next financial year.

As outlined in our Performance Report considered on today's agenda, Housing Repairs & Maintenance service performance against key performance indicators on emergency repairs completed within 24 hours and calls answered by Repairs Helpdesk both show significant improvement and our KOI on surveyed tenants satisfied with repairs standard of work is on target at 96%.

Supplementary Question: Repairs are backing up, and there are 500 have been actioned than before. If the £1.5m budget is not enough what will happen and how many visits are duplicates, and what is the cost?

Response: A written response will be sent to the councillor.

Question 2: Councillor Barnett to Chair of Housing Committee**Estate Inspections and Council Offices**

The Council's Housing Officers used to conduct fortnightly ward inspections of the council's housing estates, which the ward councillors also attended. In my ward these inspections used to take place on Tuesday mornings, every fortnight. They were always in the diary - sometimes the Housing Department had to cancel but not very often.

These inspections were warmly welcomed by the residents and helped resolve issues that had emerged on the estates and put a human face to the council's housing department.

Then in 2018 the then Labour Council decided to change all this and bring in Field Officers instead under its new policy and the regular estate visits immediately stopped. The Field Officers policy has failed housing and left residents in the council's estates feeling completely disconnected from the council.

The problem is that field officers have responsibilities for seven areas, not just housing: including parks, seafront services, community safety, planning enforcement, environmental health and noise nuisance. There is a sense that currently Field Officers are more focused on people dropping cigarettes in the city centre than visiting the housing estates to engage with issues there.

Under the Field Officer policy a disconnect between the council's housing department and housing tenants has opened up. Not only have the regular estate visits from housing officers stopped but housing tenants and leaseholders are now no longer able to visit the housing offices as they used to before the pandemic as these offices are not open, which has put up another barrier.

We recently heard that estate inspections might be starting up again and that there was one in Portslade.

Can the Chair advise:

a) Are estate inspections being brought back?

b) When will the Council's Housing offices fully reopen again for residents so that people can walk in and see someone as they did before the pandemic?

c) Does he accept the Field officer policy has failed Housing?

d) How many of the seven FTE field officer equivalent positions are currently filled and what proportion of their time is currently allocated to housing?

Response: Thank you for your questions.

A) Between May and August this year the Council ran an Estate Walkabout Pilot across the city.

The walkabouts were facilitated by area Housing Managers and involved Residents, an Environmental surveyor, Councillors and Community Engagement Officers.

During the pilot 12 different estates were visited, with an overall aim to improve the look and feel of the local environment. The walkabouts also aimed to raise awareness of the funding available to residents to improve their neighbourhood, such as the Environmental Improvement Budget, and create the opportunity for officers and councillors to engage with residents.

- Following the walkabouts, Officers made several improvements to the estates. Such as, improving bin storage, raising vegetable beds, removing graffiti, and cutting back of overhanging vegetation.

The Community Engagement Team were also able to discuss setting up new tenants & residents associations in areas that don't have representation.

The Council is now reviewing the feedback, gained from Residents, Councillors and council staff, during the pilot to help inform future Estate Walkabouts.

Once this is complete, the Council will promote the walkabout schedule for the year remaining year will be promoted. Officers will also publish and celebrate the improvements made as a result of the walkabout.

- B) The Housing Service aligns to Corporate guidance on opening of customer facing officers.

The Customer Service Centre is open at Bartholomew House, Bartholomew Square, Brighton. This has a drop-in self-help area supported by customer service advisors including telephone and computer facilities. The advisers are linked in with our Housing Customer Services team.

- C) A review of the Field Officer service is currently being undertaken by the Safer Communities team with the expectation that a report on its findings will be presented to TECC in January.
- D) All posts in the service are currently filled. It is difficult to assess what proportion of their time is currently allocated to Housing due to the diversity of the tasks they carry out for a number of services.

Supplementary Question: The misuse of drugs and cuckooing are an issue. Is this monitored?

Response: Monitoring is being carried out and more visits are being arranged. A review is underway, and more walkabouts are being scheduled.

Question 3: Councillor Nemeth to Chair of Housing Committee

Re Knoll House

Please provide an account of the situation from a housing perspective following what was ultimately an eviction by Brighton & Hove City Council of 37 residents of Knoll House in Wish Ward.

Response: Thank you for your question.

The legal relationship of occupation at Knoll House was between those living at the property and the company that in effect employed them to ensure that property was secure. The Council and East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (ESFRS) have worked with the company in question to ensure appropriate safety measures were put in place but when it became clear actions were not being followed through, ESFRS had little choice but to serve notice that the property was unsafe.

Being aware that such an outcome was likely, the Housing team put in place measures in advance, to prevent those living there from becoming homeless. Several advice surgeries were run on-site, to provide information and assistance to those affected. On the day the closure notice was served, we ensured none of the occupants were street homeless as a result. Where required, temporary accommodation was provided. For those who were unable to find alternative accommodation, individual Personalised *Housing Plans* (PHP) have been agreed setting out the *reasonable steps* both they and the Council would undertake to prevent or relieve their homelessness.

Supplementary Question: How are the council helping residents moving out and why such short notice?

Response: The scenario was unfortunate; however, officers and Members considered this the best way forward. Any one become homeless was supported. It is noted that the council has a statutory need to supply housing and advice surgery's have been held on site and temporary accommodation has been provided.

(c) Letters: Two letters were received

Letter 1: Councillor Barnett to Chair of Housing Committee

Dear Cllr Gibson,

Member Letter (Procedure rule 23.3): Housing policies relating to Travellers

The Housing section of the Council's website states that the St Michael's Way Traveller site (also known as Horsdean Traveller site) has 12 permanent caravan pitches and 21 transit pitches where caravans can be stationed for up to 3 months.

It states all transient pitches have access to water and electricity amenities and a communal shower block. There is a management building for the Traveller Liaison Team that provides links to other council services such as health and education.

In 2012 the Greens and Labour voted for this site to be built on South Downs National Park land at great expense to the city (£2.3 million) and a cost to the environment. This site opened in July 2016 and has been open for six years.

Residents are extremely disappointed that despite this facility having been built, travellers continue to use city public parks for their housing instead – including, this week, St Helen’s Park in Hangleton in my ward, which is within a conservation area.

This letter requests that the Committee Chair:

- 1. Outlines the Council’s current housing policies relating to travellers.*
- 2. Informs the committee how many travellers are passing through the city each year and how this has changed over time since the Horsdean facility opened.*
- 3. Advises housing take-up rates at the Horsdean Traveller site over the six municipal years it has been open.*

*Yours sincerely,
COUNCILLOR DAWN BARNETT*

Response: Thank you for your letter

1. Current Housing Policies relating to Travellers

The Council aims to balance the needs of the settled and Traveller communities. Unauthorised encampments are jointly assessed by the Traveller Liaison Team and Sussex Police.

Within 24 hours of a report of an unauthorised encampment, welfare checks and a Community Impact Assessment are carried out by officers during joint visits., and the outcome of this assessment determines the enforcement measures that are used to bring an encampment to an end.

The capacity of the 21-pitch transit site allows the Council to ask the Police that they use their powers to re-direct any Traveller households, from an unauthorised encampment to the Council’s transit site.

The transit site has water, electricity and washing facilities, and affords households a maximum stay of 12 weeks, during which time Travellers can access health and education services and explore other accommodation options.

In the event of Travellers declining pitches on the transit site, police powers require them to leave the city for 12 months.

In the example of the recent incursion of Travellers on St Helen’s Green, the council requested that the Police use their powers to direct the households to the transit site. This was agreed, and notices were served. The families declined the transit site pitches and left the city.

The capacity of the transit site, that enables the use of these powers, is effective in reducing the length of stay of unauthorised encampments, and in returning public land back to use for the local community.

The average length of an unauthorised encampment is three days.

2. Data for Travellers passing through the city.

The number of unauthorised encampments in the city peaked in 2015 at 123, when the transit site was closed whilst the permanent site was being built. The number of unauthorised encampments has reduced over subsequent years since the transit site re-opened in 2016 when there were 79 encampments, to 18 encampments in 2022.

3. Occupancy figures at St Michael's Way.

Since opening in 2016 the permanent Traveller site has been fully occupied.

4. Transit site occupancy rates since 2018:

2018/19	35%
2019/20	30%
2020/21	40%
2021/22	53%

The percentages shown for 2018/19 and 2019/20 are based on 21 available pitches; the percentages for 2020/21 and 2021/22 are based on a reduced capacity of 10 available pitches, due to the pandemic and measures put in place to reduce the spread of infection.

The committee agreed to note the letter.

Letter 2:

Councillor Meadows to Chair of Housing Committee

Dear Cllr Gibson,

Member Letter (Procedure rule 23.3): Tents and the council's homeless bill of rights

I am writing this letter to bring the committee's attention to the high number of tents present in public places and parks in the city over the course of the summer, which has potentially been caused by the Council's new Homeless Bill of Rights policy.

Over the summer, the council has tolerated tents being camped along Valley Gardens and other places for extended periods. The lack of action from the council to remove these encouraged them to multiply further and it reached the point where tables and chairs were being put out by tent occupants.

When Valley Gardens was opened in August 2020 the Council provided assurances to residents that it would not allow these new public gardens to become a place for tents to be pitched. However, since then the Greens and Labour have introduced a Homeless Bill of Rights, changing the City's policy on tents in public spaces.

I am concerned that this new policy is restricting the ability that officers once had to remove tents and keep parks and public places free for the safe enjoyment of residents. Residents' Associations such as the Old Steine Community Association are deeply concerned about the lack of action from the Council on tents.

Can you please advise whether the council's adoption of the Homeless Bill of Rights will be reconsidered in light of the impact it is having on permitting tents in the city's parks: and respond to these concerns expressed by residents and their associations.

*Yours sincerely,
Cllr Anne Meadows*

Response: Thank you for your letter

The Administration has been clear the Council will not tolerate unauthorised encampments in the City and that tents will be removed as quickly as possible.

There is a joined up and coordinated approach between several partners, led by Safer Communities Team and the commissioned Street Outreach Team.

We will always attempt to engage with occupants via the outreach service to ascertain whether they may be homeless and in need of advice and support in the first instance. This is in line with our 'welfare first' approach which has been in place for some time and prior to the Council's adoption of the Homeless Bill of Rights.

There are no plans to reconsider the homeless bill of rights.

The committee agreed to note the letter.

(d) Notices of Motion:

Housing Repairs Task Force

Councillor Meadows introduced the Motion. Councillor Barnett seconded the Motion.

The chair invited Councillor Williams to introduce the Labour Group amendments. Councillor Fowler seconded the amendments.

Debate

Councillor Gibson supported the amendments.

Councillor Meadows accepted the amendments.

Vote

A vote was taken, and the committee agreed unanimously to accept the amended Notice of Motion.

RESOLVED: This Committee:

- 1) Notes that since the housing repairs service was insourced in March 2020, a backlog of repairs has accumulated due to primarily the Covid crisis;
- 2) Notes that tenant and leaseholder representatives were advised in August that the council is now looking to establish a housing repairs task force and will employ 11 separate contractors to try and address the backlog;
- 3) Requests that a report be presented to this committee that:
 - a. Clarifies the council's current housing repairs policies regarding insourcing and the use of contractors; and
 - b. Outlines how a proposed housing repairs task force will address the current backlog, including how much this will cost and how it will be funded;
 - c. Provides statistics on the progress on addressing the backlog.

Recognition of Mr Andy Winter

Councillor Barnett introduced the Motion to the committee and Councillor Meadows seconded the Motion.

The Chair invited Councillor Williams to introduce the Labour Group amendments. Councillor Grimshaw seconded the amendments.

Debate

Councillor Shanks supported the amendments.

Councillor Gibson noted that homelessness and addiction are issues.

Councillor Meadows considered that Andy Wynter had strong views and they supported the third section of the motion.

Councillor Grimshaw requested that the third section be removed.

Vote

A vote was taken, and by 8 to 2 abstentions, the committee agreed the Labour Group amendments.

RESOLVED: This Committee:

- 1) Records and sends its appreciation to Mr Andy Winter for his work as CEO of Brighton Housing Trust over 20 years, following the announcement of his retirement.
- 2) Recognises the positive impact Mr Winter's work has had on the lives of tenants and clients of Brighton Housing Trust.

Ethical Landlord's Charter

Councillor Osborne introduced the Motion, which was seconded by Councillor Gibson.

The Chair invited Councillor Williams to introduce the Labour Group amendments, which were seconded by Councillor Fowler.

Debate

Councillor Williams expressed concerns regarding the motion and who the Green Group have been working with and considered the charter would need more work. The councillor considered that section 1 should be removed, and number 2 kept.

Councillor Osborne requested an adjournment to discuss the motion. The adjournment was seconded by Councillor Powell. The Chair agreed to a 15 minute adjournment.

Following the adjournment Councillor Osborne stated that they had agreed with Councillor Williams a cross party agreement to remove all actions.

Councillor Meadows expressed concerns on the motion and requested that they be invited to cross party talks on the matters raised.

Vote

A vote was taken, and by 8 to 2 abstentions the committee agreed the following:

RESOLVED: Committee notes that:

- Housing Committee has previously received a deputation on a Minimum Standards Charter from ACORN in 2019 which demanded on behalf of renters in the city a commitment to better standards relating to affordability of rents, security of tenancies and evictions, expected quality of repairs and general service, and discrimination;
- Housing Committee has also previously agreed to support the idea of an Ethical Landlords Charter;
- Other councils have previously produced their own versions of ethical landlord charters, including Bristol, with had a Bronze, Silver and Gold standard which with varying asks for each, as well as several London Boroughs, Norwich, and others;

Committee agrees to:

- establish a cross-party task and finish member working group to work towards drafting and adopting such a charter.

25 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING GRANTS & LOANS POLICY

25.1 The Assistant Director Housing Needs & Supply introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

25.2 Councillor Meadows was informed that the means test is for under 5,000 persons and has been introduced to speed up the grants process. It was noted that the private sector policy doesn't refer to council tenants. The Assistant Director Housing Needs & Supply stated they would respond in writing to the councillor on the following matters: under 2.2 of the report, how many times is a household able to claim a non means tested benefit; table on pages 61, 62 & 63 of the report, 2 x 20,000 is possible under Warm Safer Homes, why not one grant, and who has a say-so on Grants; disability facilities grant is supported, but why no restrictions; all repairs should be done at one time - is there any monitoring; page 69 of the report - if resident have had grants, why can they get them again.

25.3 Councillor Powell was informed that the policy needs to be approved by the committee and the Assistant Director Housing Needs & Supply will respond in writing regarding whether residents knew about the Brighton Fund.

25.4 Councillor Shanks was informed that the residents know about grants via the council website and references from partner organisations.

25.5 Councillor Gibson considered the report was very positive.

Vote

25.6 A vote was taken, and the recommendations were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: That Housing Committee:

2.1 Approves the revised policy up to 2025, including the recommendations of the Carbon Reduction in Housing report already approved at Housing Committee in November 2021.

2.2 Notes a change in grant conditions: *Dispensing with the Means Test* for works up to £5,000. Previously all cases were subject to a Primary Test of Resources (PToR) regardless. This has now been updated to avoid unnecessary PToR taking place and PToR will now only be applied to cases £5,000 or over (or where the proposed works are likely to exceed £5,000).

2.3 Notes the allocation of current resources in 2022/23, including a proposal to increase their year budget allocation for Warm, Safe Homes Grant (paras 3.25 - 3.28)

26 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE

26.1 The Assistant Director Housing Needs & Supply introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

26.2 Councillor Williams was informed that the lead officer on the report had left the authority and the council were still dependant on the availability of consultants. The tier one census data was released this year. The HMO (Homes of Multiple Occupancy) licensing scheme is still in place, even though it was intended to be short term lasting 5 years. To extend the scheme more evidence will be required. It was noted that it was not possible to guarantee the timing of the next steps. The council are looking at other local authorities and note that others have taken 21 to 24 months to approve schemes.

26.3 Councillor Gibson was informed that it was hoped that the completed report would come back to committee in January 2023.

26.4 Councillor Shanks was informed that the landlords need to adhere to standards and the enforcement team will make site visits to ensure improvements are made. There is online advice for residents regarding letting standards. It was noted that there is a difference between standards and management practices.

26.5 Councillor Meadows was informed by the chair that the financial implications were not to be agreed at this meeting as they were being explored and the quarter 1 housing report will include monitoring of efficiency work and effectiveness. The councillor was also informed that the costs would not be known until they had been explored and the council were adopting a 'belt and braces' approach to licensing.

26.6 Councillor Grimshaw was informed that future pressures could not be predicted.

26.7 Councillor Gibson was informed that the tier one census data will sufficient if the council has supporting evidence.

26.8 Councillor Williams requested that costs be reported back to the committee.

26.9 Councillor Williams proposed the Labour Group amendments to the recommendations and was seconded by Councillor Fowler.

26.10 The committee voted on the amendments to the recommendations and agreed 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6 and 2.7 unanimously. 2.5 was not agreed.

RESOLVED:

2.1 That Committee notes the updates made to the Council's website, providing advice to private renters on what to do if they feel discriminated against, and encouraging landlords to support the Council's commitment to prevent homelessness.

2.2 That Committee agrees that the council website is updated, in line with the Labour Group motion passed at Housing Committee on 17 November 2021, to reflect the agreed zero-tolerance policy on rogue landlords, including a link to the national rogue landlord database.

- 2.3 That Committee notes the information made available on minimum standards by the Council when assisting households to access more affordable private rented accommodation as enforceable *Good Landlord Standards* (see Appendix 2).
- 2.4 That Committee agrees the Council explore becoming members of an arms-length ethical lettings agency as a possible alternative to establishing an in-house Ethical Lettings Agency and reports back to this Committee on the potential benefits and costs.
- 2.6 That Committee notes the potential changes to private rented accommodation, should the proposals set out in the New deal for private renters' white paper be adopted into future legislation, and agrees the Director for Housing writes to the Government's Housing Secretary, to lobby for the standards set out in the white paper to be enacted as a bare minimum.
- 2.7 That Committee notes the additional monitoring agreed in the Quarterly Housing Performance Report.

27 EVICTIONS FROM SHORT TERM TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORTED HOUSING ANNUAL REPORT

- 27.1 The Assistant Director Housing Need & Supply introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

- 27.2 Councillor Williams was informed that evicted residents commonly go to relatives or friends. If residents evicted end up on the street, they receive support from outreach service.
- 27.3 Councillor Meadows was informed that the recommissioning of supported housing was time tabled, and the contracts would be phased.
- 27.4 Councillor Grimshaw was informed that evictions were different for each person and difficult to be specific. The Assistant Director Housing Need & Supply stated they would reply in writing to the councillor regarding a YMCA occupier being distraught at mixed gender accommodation.
- 27.5 Councillor Gibson noted there were no 'in-house' evictions.

Vote

- 27.6 A vote was taken, and the committee unanimously agreed the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Housing Committee notes the performance and evictions reported.
- 2.2 That Housing Committee notes the measures the council is incorporating in future contracts for emergency and temporary accommodation to minimise the risk of evictions, in addition to measures to minimise the risk of unplanned moves from Supported Housing.

28 CARBON REDUCTION IN HOUSING

28.1 The Sustainability & Energy Manager introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

28.2 Councillor Fowler was informed that the significant numbers of council homes were well insulated, and any gaps reported would be looked into. It was noted that the air heat source pump programme checked the insulation of a property.

28.3 Councillor Grimshaw was informed that the if a property has 100mm of insulation this would need to be topped up to 300mm. It was noted that a national data base holds data on insulation. The council can top up any works done in the past and the stock condition survey is used to identify properties.

28.4 Councillor Meadows was informed by the chair that the Warmer Homes investment budget had been agreed, and this would be the source of funding. The Sustainability & Energy Manager noted that the delivery model assessment found that a managing agent would be the best way forward to manage the scheme. The costs of this were not in the report and no permission to procure has been obtained. The report asks for authority to procure. Details will be brought back to the committee.

28.5 Councillor Gibson considered the scheme to be good and was pleased to see carbon reductions.

Vote

28.6 A vote was taken, and the committee agreed the recommendations unanimously.

RESOLVED:**Council homes**

2.1 Note the progress of the joint work through the 'Retrofit Taskforce' across the Greater Brighton sub-region.

Private Sector Homes

2.2 Note the outcome of the assessment of options for the delivery of a Brighton & Hove Warmer Homes Programme and accept the Delivery Model Assessment recommending a Managing Agent led model.

2.3 Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Housing Neighbourhoods and Communities to procure and award a contract for a Managing Agent to deliver the Brighton & Hove Warmer Homes Programme.

2.4 Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities to further develop the details of the Brighton & Hove Warmer Homes Programme including the eligibility criteria, mix of measures and level of financial support outlined below in paragraphs 3.15 to 3.18.

- 2.5 Note the timetable for the commencement of a Brighton & Hove Warmer Homes Programme outlined in para 3.11.

New Build housing Sustainability Policy

- 2.6 That Committee approves the New Build Housing Sustainability Policy found at Appendix 1 of this report.

29 HOUSING HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATE - LEASEHOLDER FIRE DOORS

- 29.1 The Head of Housing Investment & Asset Management introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

- 29.2 Councillor Meadows was informed that the number of non-compliant landlords was not known, and landlords could improve by adhering to standards. It was noted that previous doors were not compliant and would need replacing with new compliant doors.

Vote

- 29.3 A vote was taken, and the committee unanimously agreed the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That the Housing Committee note the progress on the programme of works for the replacement of non-complaint (Manse Masterdors) front entrance doors and frames.
- 2.2 That the Housing Committee approve the recommended approach with regard to charging of leaseholders for replacement of non-compliant front entrance doors and frames.

30 HOUSING COMMITTEE WORKPLAN PROGRESS UPDATE AND HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 1 2022/23

- 30.1 The Assistant Director Housing Management introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

- 30.2 Councillor Meadows was informed by the chair that a report would be coming to committee to update on Hollingbury Library, along with a legal report on the £3m budget. The chair agreed that the minutes of the Homeless Reduction Board should be shared with Housing Committee Members and noted that all boards report back to committee. It was noted that Seaside Homes will be reporting costs to the committee, as will allocations. The Assistant Director Housing Management noted that the Housing Committee were the decision making body and not any boards.
- 30.3 Councillor Grimshaw was informed by the Assistant Director Housing Management that they would be written to regarding the costs of long term care for those with a flat, but not occupying the property once details were supplied.

30.4 Councillor Osborne was informed that the data for drawing reports is connected, however the number of HMOs (Homes of Multiple Occupancy) were at 60% and this has increased since June 2022.

Vote

30.5 A vote was taken, and the committee agreed the recommendations unanimously.

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Housing Committee note the Housing performance report Quarter 1 - 2022/23 and Housing Committee Work Plan progress update.
- 2.2 That Housing Committee note the additional performance indicators relating to private sector housing included in the Housing Committee Work Plan progress update and Housing performance report, Appendix 1, page 16 of 25.
- 2.3 That Housing Committee approve the re-scheduled and reviewed Housing Committee Work Plan attached in Appendix 2.
- 2.4 That Housing Committee note progress on each area of work set out in the 2019-2023 Housing Programme under Appendix 3.

31 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL

31.1 None from this committee meeting.

32 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

32.1 None from this committee meeting.

The meeting concluded at 8.17pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

