

Brighton & Hove City Council

Housing Committee

4.00pm 15 March 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

Minutes

Present: Councillor Gibson (Joint Chair), Hugh-Jones (Joint Chair), Williams (Opposition Spokesperson), Fowler, Meadows, Osborne, Phillips, Powell, Sankey and Grimshaw

Substitutes: Councillor Grimshaw for Councillor McIntosh

Part One

63 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

63.1

- (a) **Declaration of Substitutes:** Councillor Grimshaw substituted for Councillor McIntosh.
- (b) **Declarations of Interest:** There were none for this meeting.
- (c) **Exclusion of Press and Public:** There no Part Two items on the agenda therefore the press and public were not excluded from the meeting when any of the agenda items are under consideration.

64 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

64.1 The Minutes of the 18 January 2023 committee meeting were agreed.

65 CHAIRS COMMUNICATIONS

Today is our final Housing Committee ahead of the May elections and we welcome a new member in Cllr Sankey at the same time as we say goodbye to a very longstanding one. This is the first time committee has met since it was announced that **Councillor Mary Mears** was stepping down due to ill health. I therefore invited Steve Bell, the leader of the Conservative Group, to provide his own tribute to his colleague. He said:

“Housing was at the heart of Mary, from Area Panels to Committee and especially the HRA. Always standing up for the tenants and leaseholders. When there was a shortage of temporary housing, and the cap was on the HRA she was fully backing of Seaside Homes to provide the necessary homes we needed. When we see Mary, she always asks how Housing Committee is going and what is happening.”

I am sure all members of Housing Committee would regret the loss of Councillor Mears from this committee. We certainly had our political differences, but she was a dedicated councillor, always polite and genuinely wanted the best for residents.

I should of course also say thanks to my co-chair who is not standing for re-election in May. This administration was the first to introduce co-chairs and I am aware that it is being adopted elsewhere in the country (such as Sheffield, for example) and of course the Labour group took this on board with having co-leaders.

Given the circumstances that led to the establishment of **Seaside Homes** have now changed, Housing Committee has decided that the Council should negotiate an end to the current arrangements for homeless households accommodated by Seaside Homes. It is financially viable for the council to buy out the loan from the bank and bring this temporary homeless accommodation in house. As well as being more efficient to manage in-house, the tenants of these 499 homes will benefit from significantly lower rents – which no doubt will be a big help as the cost-of-living crisis continues. The decision on the transfer should progress over the next 6 months.

As we approach the end of this council term in May it is worth taking stock.

On the positive side, by May we are on course to achieve almost 500 additional council homes over the 4-year term. Thanks are due to the hard work of officers on this. We anticipate delivery of around 120 homes a year on average compared to the average of 51 homes a year achieved by the previous administration.

Importantly, our newly built homes are increasingly sustainable and energy efficient – which as well as reducing carbon emissions should mean lower utilities bills for tenants. The 42 homes at Victoria Rd, which are being handed over to the council this week, have plenty of solar PV, the council's first ground source heat pump system, green walls, bee bricks and bat boxes, a communal garden and orchard. Cllr Gibson and I visited on Monday and heard some extremely moving accounts of the responses of future tenants to the new flats. Showings are continuing this week.

I believe we are the first UK council to develop a sustainability policy for our new homes. But we can also boast that this administration has made a step change in the numbers of "truly affordable" homes. We anticipate the imminent delivery of a further 119 additional homes at what the government defines as social - or what we call Living - rents. Particularly significant are the 49 new homes at Quay View in Portslade, to be handed over to the council in the middle of April. These homes are being entered for a Design South East award and we obviously hope they will be successful.

The council is now the largest provider of rented affordable housing in the city, which is something we want to maintain and build on. Maximising the supply of affordable homes is part of our efforts to mitigate the housing crisis and alleviate the impact of homelessness. One of the reports on today's agenda starts to explore options to incentivise tenants to relinquish their tenancies, thereby providing the council with additional affordable homes.

It is also pleasing to note that after a lull in the pandemic local housing associations are on schedule to exceed the target for this term of 700 additional affordable homes. Most of these homes are shared ownership.

Of course, for those in **council accommodation**, it is important to keep that accommodation up to standard. I am grateful to officers for all they are doing to address the issue of damp and mould, including arranging today's workshop, and to members for attending.

Also on today's agenda is a report on the procurement of a single source supplier/broker to meet the current and future materials supply chain requirement. The current arrangement is a hangover from when we used Mears for all our housing repairs. Under the new arrangement the provider would offer guidance on new innovative repairs products, would have better product knowledge than the council could have and would have existing relationships with a range of companies. The broker would be responsible for setting up a comprehensive supply chain, which would meet the service need to use local branches, support the city's economy and boost local trade.

There's no **rough sleeping** update as such on today's agenda so I propose to make a few comments here. Rough sleeping count and estimate numbers were released across the country at the end of February. However imperfect the counts, rough sleeping numbers are increasing, though Brighton and Hove is doing better than most areas. Last year, on average across the whole country rough sleeper numbers increased by 26%, by 19% in the South-East and by 11% in Brighton and Hove. Since 2019, rough sleeper numbers reduced 28% nationally and 53% in Brighton & Hove. March's rough sleeper count was the same as January's. However, in both cases our cold weather provision and No Second Night Out were fully operational. We are now about to lose No Second Night Out (funding for which ends at the end of March) and our winter provision. This leaves a hole in our short-stay shelter provision, so officers are looking at how to mitigate this. The Winter Provision accommodation for rough sleepers is being extended into spring and will continue to offer off street provision for women. This is only temporary, however. Officers are in negotiation with DLUHC for additional rough sleeping resource beyond this point.

The best way of reducing homelessness, both of the more visible rough sleepers and wider households, is through prevention. Early results from the homeless transformation programme suggest a higher number of households are being prevented from becoming homeless. In February, 50% of households who were threatened with homelessness were able to secure accommodation without requiring temporary accommodation because they came to us early. And since April last year 438 households have had their homelessness resolved by being assisted to secure accommodation for 6 months or more.

We continue the trend in reducing the number of households in emergency accommodation. As of the beginning of this week this was 493 households, compared to 615 in April last year.

Members will remember that this administration stopped using Kendal Court and we are now decanting Windsor Court (a 40-unit Baron Homes scheme) as part of our

programme of reducing TA costs. 27 properties here are currently empty but remain on our system during the 28-day notice period. The scheme will be empty on 31 March.

One of the main causes of homelessness is the loss of a private rented home. With high rents and a cost-of-living crisis, so many households are under pressure. Sadly “no fault evictions” have been allowed to contribute to tenants’ insecurity by governments of both political colours since 1988, and while the current one has promised to abolish these we are still waiting. Work to prevent evictions therefore remains vital. Also important has been the expansion of the council’s Direct Lets scheme, with landlords offering more affordable rents to households facing homelessness. This service enables households to access private rented accommodation, negotiating rent and tenancy terms, as well as offering deposits, rent-in-advance and deposit guarantees. Since April 2019, over 1218 households have been assisted in securing a private rented sector home.

Over the last couple of years, Housing Committee has repeatedly looked at expanding landlord licensing in line with our joint programme. While it is disappointing that new schemes are not yet in place, we have moved a long way since September 2021, when we were told that there was insufficient evidence for a scheme. Today’s report shows we now have robust evidence to support a scheme and I am delighted that on today’s agenda is a decision to work through costings prior to consultation over the summer on licensing schemes for HMOs, a selective scheme covering four wards based on poor property conditions and deprivation and a wider scheme covering a further 13 wards (which would require Secretary of State approval). The HMO scheme and the 4-ward scheme could be operational in around 12 months from now.

We were intending to bring a review of the enforcement policy and follow up actions on rogue landlords to this committee. However, we felt that the report would benefit from more detail on our enforcement performance and information about good practice elsewhere which could inform our approach. We therefore hope that whoever forms the next administration will bring the amended report to June Housing committee.

In the meantime, enforcement activity is ramping up. As of February, fines and penalty notices had been issued for £169,000, a huge increase from the £55,200 reported to committee in January (in the PRS Update Report) for the April to December period. The council has also issued statements publicising the action it takes against landlords who fail to meet their obligations to tenants.

66 CALL OVER

- 66.1 Agenda items 70, 71, 74 and 75 were called for discussion. Items 72 and 73 were not called for discussion and therefore the officer recommendations were agreed unanimously.

67 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

68 ITEMS REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

- 68.1 There were none for this meeting.

69 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

(a) Petitions: None for this meeting

(b) Written Questions: One for this meeting from Councillor Williams:

How many improvement notices have been served to private sector landlords in the past 12 month and in the past 3 years?

Response:

Thank you for your question.

Since 1 April 2022, 814 new cases were raised, requiring private sector landlords to make improvements to their property. Of these, 9 have resulted in formal notice being served.

This indicates that the vast majority of cases raised, where landlords are required to make property improvements, are resolved without formal action being required. As reported at Housing Committee in January 2023, 97% of cases are resolved through informal action.

Referring to previous years, in 2021/22 there were 634 new cases, of which 15 required Notices to be served; in 2020/21 there were 781 new cases, with 16 Notices being served.

(c) Letters: None for this meeting

(d) Notices of Motion: One for this meeting from the Green Group:

Over the last 3.5 years there has been a joint Labour–Green housing and homelessness work programme. With great thanks to the hard work of officers, this programme has helped deliver:

- 500 additional council homes (projected by May 23);
- 49 truly affordable new council homes at Living rents (projected May 23);
- New private rented housing additional and selective licensing schemes going forward for consultation;
- A 53% reduction in rough sleeper numbers since 2019 (compared to 28% reduction nationally);
- A threefold increase in the number of “Housing First” placements;
- The expansion of PRS enforcement capacity and, as of February 2023, including the issue of £169K in fines;
- Warmer Homes grants to those in greatest need and a wider scheme with funding of £2.5m to be launched in April;
- The adoption of a New Build Housing Sustainability Policy and 42 new homes built in Victoria Rd with the Council’s first ground source heat pump as well as solar panels and green walls.

Believes:

That working together on a jointly agreed programme has helped achieve progress for the benefit of the city and its residents.

Proposes that:

1. The achievements of the joint programme be noted;
2. In the event a) of no party achieving an overall majority in the May 2023 local elections and b) of the manifestos of the two larger parties being compatible in terms of their housing content, that Housing Committee consider adopting a similarly prepared joint programme on Housing and Homelessness at its meeting in September 2023.

Proposed by Cllr Gibson

Seconded by Cllr Siriol Hugh-Jones

69.1 Councillor Gibson presented the Notice of Motion to the committee.

Debate

- 69.2 Councillor Williams considered there were some benefits, however they were not impressed by the motion as they could not pre-empt a future administration. The councillor was impressed by work done by officers; however, they did not feel they could congratulate themselves and were against the motion.
- 69.3 Councillor Meadows considered the work was started under their chairmanship and so should be congratulated as well.
- 69.4 Councillor Powell thanked the Labour Group for their work however they were surprised at the re-action.
- 69.5 Councillor Fowler considered it was great so much had been done, however, they did not feel they could tell the next administration what to do.
- 69.6 Councillor Sankey did not support the motion as it was political posturing. Cross party working can be good; however, they did not support the motion.
- 69.7 Councillor Hugh-Jones considered valid points had been made, however the motion does not bind a future administration. The councillor stated that should there be no overall control after the elections, please consider joint working. The councillor supported the motion.
- 69.8 Councillor Gibson considered there was value to working together, and the motion was not telling the next administration what to do but asking for coalition working to be considered. The councillor was proud of working together and supported the motion.
- 69.9 A vote was taken, and by 5 to 4, with 1 abstention the motion was agreed.

70 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING: DISCRETIONARY LICENSING EVIDENCE

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

70.2 Following questions the Committee Members were informed that: the Budget Review Group was cross party and currently consisted of Councillors Gibson, Appich and McNair; the fourth recommendation was due to come back to committee; the consultation process was a twelve week cycle and includes landlords outside the city, local area and UK; the costs of any repair works would be the landlord's responsibility; the age of the property is not a factor.

Debate

70.3 The Committee Members debated the report and commented on the following matters: pleased to see the report on an acute and desperate problem after a long wait; the report is a positive step, and it was noted that further work was required; the licensing will take the pressure off residents and the phased approach makes sense; the report was important to the city as some residents were not supported by landlords; a proactive enforcement policy is needed with robust evidence.

Vote

70.4 A vote was taken, and by 9 to 1 abstention the committee agreed the recommendations.

70.5 **RESOLVED:**

- 2.1 That Housing Committee notes the findings of the Private Sector Housing: Housing Stock Condition & Stressors Report that evidences the need for a citywide approach to discretionary licensing (Appendix 1).
- 2.2 That Housing Committee approves Option 3 (see 3.31), which will be subject to 12 weeks of consultation (to commence once a revised fee structure is agreed by Members). This is:
 - (1) Citywide Additional HMO Licensing covering properties which have two or more storeys, and three or more tenants are living there as more than one household.
 - (2) Selective Licensing on all non-HMO private rented sector homes in four wards where the evidence demonstrates a clear link between poor property conditions, deprivation and private rented homes. These wards ⁽¹⁾ are:
Kemptown, Moulsecoomb & Bevendean, Queen's Park and Whitehawk & Marina. With a further option in 13 wards in the city on the grounds of poor property conditions. These wards are: Brunswick & Adelaide, Central Hove, Goldsmid, Hanover & Elm Grove, Hollingdean & Fiveways, Preston Park, Regency, Rottingdean & West Saltdean, Round Hill, South Portslade, West Hill & North Laine, Westbourne & Poets Corner and Wish.
- 2.3 That Housing Committee notes that the Budget Review Group has provided £100,000 to fund non-recoverable costs (such as consultation) needed in developing a scheme and that budget council has allocated a further £20,000.

- 2.4 That Housing Committee requests the findings of the consultation and appropriate recommendations be brought back to a future committee for Member decision.

(1) New Brighton & Hove wards from May 2023

71 HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE – PROCUREMENT OF MATERIALS SUPPLY CHAIN

- 71.1 The Senior Programme Manager introduced the report to the committee.
- 71.2 Following questions the Committee Members were informed of that: the contracted would be for five years with a possible extension for a further five years if performance was satisfactory; any agreement would be an umbrella agreement with the council; materials would come from a robust catalogue that was sustainable and of a high standard; the council will work closely with residents following the Procurement Advisory Board (PAB) annual review of the contract; a quality assurance programme would be agreed through PAB; a broker will bring together local suppliers and workers; of the contractor under performs, PAB will be able review the situation even before the first five years are completed; the council money will stay local; the Contract Management Board is not supported.

Vote

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

71.4 RESOLVED:

That Housing Committee delegates authority to the Executive Director of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities to:

- 2.1 Take all steps necessary to procure and award a contract for the materials supply chain for the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service, with a contract term of 5 years.
- 2.2 To approve an extension to the contract referred to in 2.1 above for a period of up to 5 years following the initial 5 year term, subject to satisfactory performance.

72 HOUSING MANAGEMENT AREA PANEL REVIEW

- 72.1 The report was not called for discussion by the committee Members therefore the recommendations were taken as agreed unanimously.

72.2 RESOLVED:

- 2.1 Approves the revised Terms of Reference for Housing Area Panels in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Recommends to Policy & Resources Committee:

- i) that it agrees the revised Terms of Reference as set out in Appendix 1
- ii) that the revised Terms of Reference come into force on 25th May (Annual Council).
- iii) that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to amend and re-publish the Council's constitutional documents to incorporate the revised Terms of Reference.

2.3 That Policy & Resources Committee:

- i) agree the revised Terms of Reference as set out in Appendix 1
- ii) agree that the revised Terms of Reference come into force on 25th May (Annual Council).
- iii) that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to amend and re-publish the Council's constitutional documents to incorporate the revised Terms of Reference.

73 HOMES FOR BRIGHTON & HOVE – EXTERNAL COMMUNAL AREA MANAGEMENT AT COLDEAN LANE, BRIGHTON.

73.1 The report was not called for discussion by the committee Members therefore the recommendations were taken as agreed unanimously.

73.2 RESOLVED:

That Housing Committee:

2.1 Recommends to Policy & Resources Committee that it delegates authority to the Executive Director of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities to enter into a 250 year head lease of the HBH site at Denman Place, Coldean Lane, Brighton.

That Policy & Resources Committee:

2.2 Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities to enter into a 250 year head lease of the HBH site at Denman Place, Coldean Lane, Brighton.

74 DEVELOP A POLICY TO INCENTIVES HOUSEHOLDS TO RELINQUISH COUNCIL TENANCIES AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO RIGHT TO BUY

74.1 The Head of Tenancy Services introduced the report to the committee.

74.2 Following questions the Committee Members were informed that: a new report will come back to committee with a full cost analysis; other authorities contacted for comparisons were London Boroughs and others who are comparable; the scheme was to enable moving into another home, not extend the existing property; the existing transfer scheme would be looked into.

Debate

- 74.3 The committee debated the report and raised the following matters: the transfer incentive scheme was ripe for review and the financial assessment was much needed; it was good to explore all options; particular care is needed, and shared ownership required reviewing.

Vote

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

74.5 RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Housing Committee note this report.
- 2.2 That Housing Committee agree to a full report coming back to a future Housing Committee which will consider options for a policy.

75 HOUSING COMMITTEE WORKPLAN PROGRESS UPDATE AND HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 3 2022/23

- 75.1 The Assistant Director Housing Management introduced the report to the committee.
- 75.2 Following questions the committee Members were informed that: there were no access issues to prevent checking of gas safety records; the post Pandemic recovery programme has made improvements, however, further improvements can be made; the existing customer services call centre covers repair enquiries; the next administration will decide whether the advice and forum are to be restarted; the estate walks were agreed as a good idea, with next steps being to increase staffing levels and response times to residents; bad weather had resulted in an increase in assistance requests; the reintroduction of monthly spot counts would be a decision for the new committee after the elections.

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

75.4 RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Housing Committee notes the report.

76 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL

- 76.1 None from this meeting.

77 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

- 77.1 There were no Part Two items at this meeting.

The meeting concluded at 6.42pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

