

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE
4.00pm 15 NOVEMBER 2023
COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL
MINUTES

Present: Councillor Czolak (Deputy Chair), McLeay (Opposition Spokesperson), Baghoth, Fowler, Grimshaw, Meadows, Nann, Oliveira, Sheard and Cattell (Substitute)

PART ONE

30 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

30.1 **a) Declaration of Substitutes:** Councillor Cattell substituted for Councillor Williams.

b) Declarations of Interest: None for this meeting.

c) Exclusion of Press and Public: As there were no Part Two items on the agenda, it was agreed that the press and public would not be excluded from the meeting when any of the agenda items were under consideration.

31 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

31.1 The Minutes of the 20 September 2023 committee meeting were agreed.

32 CHAIRS COMMUNICATIONS

32.1 The chair, Councillor Czolak, addressed the committee: Welcome the November housing committee. We begin on a sombre note as Brighton and Hove, as well as many other local authorities is contending with housing crisis like no other. According to the latest government published figures, there are now more households in temporary accommodation in England than there has ever been.

Our homeless prevention services are seeing more and more people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and while the number of households in temporary accommodation is relatively stable, compared to the national trend, we really want, and need, this number to be coming down. Living in temporary or emergency accommodation has been described as 'living in limbo' and we want to reduce the number of people often facing many years living in this insecure and unsettled provision. The Private Rented Sector Offer Policy, on today's agenda, is one of the ways we propose to do this.

We are also delivering more new social housing. We are about to complete the purchase of the Kubic Apartments at the end of this week, and the first of the new council homes in Coldean Lane will be advertised for letting in January. This will create 79 new council homes. With other schemes being completed later in the year, and our continuing success with buybacks, we're predicting the new number homes we would have developed in 2023/24 as 316 – a real stepping up on last year's results of 111.

Earlier this year at the official opening of the Victoria Rd Social Housing - I was afforded the opportunity of being shown around one of the properties by a resident living with a disability. It was an eye-opening experience seeing just how transformational adapted properties can be to disabled residents, allowing them an unrestricted enjoyment of their home, which they otherwise may not have elsewhere. We are committed to ensuring that the joy and pride with which the resident at Victoria Rd had in her property, is available to as many of our disabled residents as possible. Our plan for mobility classified properties will take us a step closer to achieving that outcome.

We are wanting to make it easier and more transparent for disabled households who require an adapted property to access this by removing the queuing criteria currently applied to 'mobility categorised homes'. This will bolster our equality commitment to ensure there is no disadvantage to disabled people.

Recently, the city was hit by Storm Ciaran. In response to this, the council triggered its Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, commonly known as SWEP, for the first time since April. As a City we apply a lower threshold than many parts of the country. As such we were in a position to activate our response, unlike Local Authorities elsewhere, ensuring provision was made for rough sleepers.

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This also enabled us to trial our new site for SWEP, which will enable more people to be served from a single site, as well as some additional capacity should there be a surge in demand. Additionally, we recently secured funding to support people being discharged from hospital when they are likely to be rough sleeping. This post is currently being advertised and is part of a wider package of support and accommodation we offer to people sleeping rough, including the approval of three grant funded schemes on today's agenda.

Services for rough sleepers are absolutely essential. We are committed to providing a safe place to sleep and to support rough sleepers to stay off the streets wherever possible. Despite the awful rhetoric we've witnessed in recent weeks, nobody deserves to be without a roof over their heads. It is utterly tragic that these numbers are rising across the country. We are continuing to do everything within our power to alleviate this. As such, we aim to continue with grant agreement for three services funded through the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) 'Rough Sleepers Initiative' to ensure that there are places to stay and help at hand. Service One is part of BHCC's Off Street Offer for rough sleepers. The service provides 30 bed spaces direct for people sleeping on our streets. Service Two is part of the longer-term pathway for Single Homeless and Rough Sleepers in the city. The Seagulls Project provides 36 rooms in HMOs across the city. Service And Service Three then provides floating

support for adults or young people moving into independent accommodation and manage their tenancy. These services are not only in place to assist in getting people off the streets, but also to help them remain off the streets.

The Housing Management landlord waste collection, service provides tenancy sustainment support to highly vulnerable residents to enable them to live safely in their homes as well as managing waste arising from the operation of our Housing Repairs & Maintenance and Estates services. This is currently delivered under two waivers that end on 31 March 2024 and by spot purchase arrangements. We seek to combine the separate arrangements into new contract/s for the Housing Management service. This will streamline the service and make it more efficient and cost effective.

The health and safety of our residents and those who visit and work on our council homes is a key housing service priority. We as a council owe a duty to approximately 11,900 rented properties and approximately 2,300 leasehold properties. With regard to compliance with legislation and regulation related to buildings maintenance and fire safety investment. This investment is to make sure we continue to provide safe, good quality council homes in line with the legislative and regulatory changes impacting council housing. Hence, we aim to procure contractor to ensure that we fulfil our duty as quickly and as effectively as possible.

And finally... I want to remind you that we are about halfway through our consultation on selective licensing in the private sector. We have one more in-person consultation event at the Brighthelm Centre this Saturday at 10am but will also be arranging one final on-line event for people who have not been able to attend the other consultation session.

If you can't make either of these, and want to express your views on the proposals, there is still time as consultation is open until midnight on 3 January. If you want more details, please visit the council's website.

33 CALL OVER

33.1 All the items on the agenda were called for discussion by the committee Members.

34 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

34.1 **a) Petitions:** There were none for this meeting.

b) Written Questions from Members of the Public: There were 3 for this agenda:

1. From: Daniel Harris

Question: This is in relation to agenda item 37 Lettings Plan: Mobility classified properties.

In light of the absence of consultation on the significant changes proposed for Social Housing Allocations, which we deem as not minor but rather major, driven by a discriminatory policy highlighted as early as January publicly, we ask: Can the council provide a firm commitment to collaborate with and actively consult both services and members of the Homemove Brighton Action Group moving forward?

Every action has a reaction, and it's crucial to recognise that these changes may potentially leave those in Band B & C Transfers with no meaningful alteration to their circumstances and longer waits.

Response: Thank you for your question. The recommended changes regarding mobility classified properties do not reflect a major change in policy.

The proposals will have a positive impact for applicants on the Housing Register who require mobility classified accommodation. These households form a minority of applicants on the Housing Register. They will have no noticeable disproportionate adverse impact on other households on the Housing Register because they will not be eligible to bid for mobility classified accommodation. The recommended changes will in effect will remove the 'queuing system' applied to mobility classified accommodation, meaning allocation to these properties will only be determined by banding and waiting time. Those households impacted will have the same single protective characteristic. Because of this, the proposals would be a minor amendment to the Allocations Policy.

The recommended changes would not adversely impact Band B and C Transfer applicants. The changes will allow people with a mobility coding to access a wider pool of properties, as they would be able to bid on properties from every queue.

This would have a positive impact for those with a Band B and C Transfer banding who require mobility classified properties. Band B and C Transfer applicants who do not require mobility classified properties will be competing for different properties and will not be disproportionately adversely affected by the recommended changes.

There is no requirement for the Council to consult when making a minor change to the Allocations Policy.

In January 2023, the Committee agreed to review the Allocations Policy, with a view to making substantial changes to the scheme. This review is underway. Options for substantially changing the Allocations Policy will be proposed in 2024. The Homemove Brighton Action Group will have the opportunity to respond to a consultation which will be undertaken as part of that review.

Supplementary question: Please look across all bandings and monitor for information regarding ques and waiting lists.

Response: The council are looking at accessibility and note the comments.

2. From: Paul Norman

Question: Given that the Annual Report of the 20230 Carbon Neutral Programme 2021-22 sets out the corporate carbon footprint of the Council Housing comprises 24% of the carbon corporate footprint (18% Housing Heating, 6% Housing Electricity) please can you confirm the number of Council housing units by EPC Rating (or equivalent) for each Band from A to G?

Paul Norman (Hanover Action: towards a sustainable community)

Response: Thank you for your question. A buildings level of energy efficiency is established through the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) this methodology is a list of detailed calculations that determines a property's Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) band. The EPC bands run from A to G, with A being the most energy efficient and G being the least.

Based on a combination of lodged EPC's, our own asset data and modelling provided through specialist software the calculated average SAP rating for HRA tenanted properties is 74.1 equivalent to an average EPC C. In terms of the total number of properties in each band, the majority of our homes, 8,845 are EPC C, we have 1283 homes in band A or B. 1298 homes are in Band D, and 88 homes are band E or below.

Supplementary question: what are the targeted measures being taken in the next 4 years to improve housing units' ratings for those currently in Band G, Band F, Band E, and Band D?

Response: Targeted support measures in support of our tenants and the energy efficiency of our homes are outlined below.

- Solar PV - Technical surveys have been carried out on the first tranche of our new solar PV programme with the first installs to begin before Christmas. This programme of 800-1000 homes is targeted at homes with an EPC D and below, the surveys on properties will also include checking for loft installation which may be installed or topped up as a part of the programme.
- Planned and responsive works - Opportunities for both cavity wall insulation and loft insulation are identified and installed as part of our day-to-day repairs and maintenance, planned and major works programmes.
- Window replacement programme – will replace old single and double glazing that will have a positive impact on property energy efficiency and EPC ratings.
- Low carbon heating and hot water – we have been targeting energy inefficient electrically heated properties for upgrades for Air Source Heat Pumps, High Heat retention heaters and solar thermal batteries, to date the programme has focussed on properties with lower EPC ratings.
- Where feasible we look to combine the above works to multiply the benefits for residents in terms of energy efficiency and thermal comfort.

Targeted programmes and projects will continue to be developed and delivered with a focus on the worst performing properties, this will be supported through initial piloting of new technology and external funding where possible. An example of this will be producing a 5 year plan in 2024 specifically for the decarbonization of Seniors Housing communal gas fired systems.

This and wider work will be reflected in a revised Housing Revenue Account Energy Plan as part of our wider HRA Asset Management Strategy.

3. From: David Gibson

Question: The policy proposed by November's committee which now deems the private rented option as "suitable" and potentially forces people to accept less secure, more expensive and often poorer quality private rented accommodation (and out of our area accommodation) under the threat of losing housing support is a step backwards for homeless people. Surely it is better that private rented is a choice rather than a compulsion. Having previously opposed forcing homeless people into insecure private rented housing against their will, please can the new administration explain what has changed their view and why this new approach is preferable now?

Response: Thank you for your question. Private rented accommodation has long been 'suitable' accommodation and a well-established means to resolve homelessness. Instead of facing many years in temporary accommodation, which can be insecure, unsettled and more expensive, the private rented sector can, and does, provide suitable accommodation to numerous people and is frequently the best option for those who are very unlikely to be allocated Council properties. As the questioner knows, almost a third of people in the city live in such homes. In fact, during 2022/23 – a period which covers a time when he himself was joint Chair of Housing Committee, 275 households had their homelessness resolved through assistance provided by the local authority to secure private rented accommodation.

The questioner appears to be focused on accommodation being offered outside the area under this policy. I would like to assure him, that this would only be the case as a last resort. There may be households already living outside the city for good reasons, for example it may be unsafe for them to be in Brighton & Hove. In many of these situations, those households could be settled in the area they live – their children may be settled in the local school; they may be engaging with support services in that area. However, even in those circumstances, we will ensure the household are presented with an option that enables them to return to Brighton. It would be their choice if this was the option they wanted to be pursued.

Supplementary question: There are serious concerns that private rented accommodation is the first option when there are 10,000 empty homes in the city. Landlords should open up properties.

Response: The comments are noted.

c) Deputations: There were none for this meeting.

35 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

35.1 **(a) Petitions:** None for this meeting.

(b) Written Questions: None for this meeting.

(c) **Letters:** None for this meeting.

(d) **Notices of Motion:** None for this meeting.

36 PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR OFFER POLICY

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

36.2 Following questions the Committee Members were informed of the following: there is no consultation as this was not a policy change, which has been adopted by other authorities across the country; all decision letters contain information on how to access legal advice; suitability reviews need to be carried out promptly; if the private rented tenancy fails in the subsequent two years, that household will still have the opportunity to reactivate their homelessness duty, from the point at which this was previously accepted; an offer under this policy would only be made if it was first assessed as being suitable. Approving the policy will also provide a clear means to challenge the offer, where the household believes it is not suitable; when placed in temporary accommodation outside the area, households will be prioritised to move into B&H, however it may be appropriate for private rented accommodation, under this policy, to be offered outside the city; all cases are dealt with individually; properties are chosen by council knowledge of landlord, and residents self-finding, all supported by the council; tenancies are checked by the council; the council have tools to look at suitability of landlords; carers and travel arrangements are taken into consideration; a safety net supports tenants for the first two years; if tenants are placed outside of the BHCC area the local connection is not broken and the local authority continues its responsibility.

36.3 Councillor Fowler proposed amendments to the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Nann.

Vote

36.4 A vote was taken on the proposed amendments, and they were agreed by the committee.

36.5 A vote was taken, the committee agreed the recommendations as amended.

RESOLVED: That Housing Committee:

1. Agree to insert into the policy that any out of city placement would only be undertaken as a last resort and in consultation with each household.
2. This will be inserted as an amendment therefore point 3.26 will be amended to state:

The policy allows the Council to also offer accommodation outside of the city to someone accepted as homeless by Brighton & Hove City Council. Any out of city placements would only be undertaken as a last resort and in consultation with each household. This means we will always present an option which would enable the household to be accommodated within Brighton & Hove. It would be that household's choice whether they wanted to pursue the offer within Brighton & Hove. Examples where they may not want to consider this could be it is unsafe for them to live in the

city; or they are already settled outside the city and feel moving back would cause disruption. This will be based on individual circumstances, but where a household choose the option within Brighton & Hove, this will be the option we prioritise.

37 LETTINGS PLAN: MOBILITY CLASSIFIED PROPERTIES

- 37.1 The Head of Homelessness & Housing Options introduced the report to the committee.
- 37.2 Following questions the committee Members were informed of the following: private rented accommodation is not covered by the policy; a list of properties with adaptations will be provided; there is a mobility register; adaptations are not removed from properties and are used again; mental health issues are to be included in the review of service.
- 37.3 The Chair presented the recommendations to the committee.

Vote

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

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Committee notes the requirement for compliance with the public sector equality duty in respect of the needs of disabled persons.
- 2.2 That Committee agrees Option 1 as minor amendments to the Lettings Plan and Allocations Policy, set out at paragraph 4.2 in the report, to be effective from 20 November 2023.

38 ROUGH SLEEPERS' INITIATIVE 5 GRANTS

- 38.1 The Head of Temporary & Supported Accommodation presented the report to the committee.
- 38.2 Following questions the committee Members were informed of the following: regarding grant funds, the service is under constant review; provision includes men, women and those with no access to public funds; 121 reconnections were carried out from August 2022 to August 2023, information for previous years will be provided.
- 38.3 The Chair presented the recommendations.

Vote

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

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Committee agree the continuation of the three services through the grant funding from Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

39 PROCUREMENT OF WASTE CONTRACTORS FOR HOUSING REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE AND TENANCY SERVICES

- 39.1 The Senior Programme Manager introduced the report to the committee.
- 39.2 Following questions the committee Members were informed of the following: the social value of free skips for communities will be looked at; local businesses, near the city centre, are encouraged to bid for contracts; local charities are used for recycling materials such as wood; progress will be reported back to councillors at future meetings; delegation of smaller contracts is over seen by procurement and internal audit; determination of procurement can not be delegated to an individual; vulnerable tenants receive safeguarding; contractors will not be using resident bins for electrical items.
- 39.3 The Chair presented the recommendations.

Vote

- 39.4 A vote was taken, and by 9 to 1 abstention the committee agreed the recommendations. (Councillor Meadows abstained)

RESOLVED: That Housing Committee grants delegated authority to the Executive Director of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities to:

- 2.1 Procure and award waste management contract/s for the provision of collection and disposal of waste from the three separate service areas within the Housing Management service, Repairs & Maintenance, Estates and Tenancy Sustainment, with an initial term of three years with the option to extend for up to a further two years;
- 2.2 Grant the optional extension of the contract referred to in 2.1 subject to satisfactory performance of the contractor.

40 BUILDING AND FIRE SAFETY ACT COMPLIANCE, PROCUREMENT OF CONTRACTORS

- 40.1 The Assistant Director Housing Management introduced the report to the committee.
- 40.2 Following questions the committee Members were informed of the following: there is a significant budget, however, the committee will be informed should more be required; there is a value for money check; Members always have oversight; a review will be coming to committee in early 2024; previous committees have received reports on safety in tower blocks; lessons have been learnt from the authority in Bristol; the Members will receive more updates.
- 40.3 The Chair presented the recommendations.

Vote

- 40.4 A vote was taken, and by 9 to 1 abstention the committee agreed the recommendations. (Councillor Meadows abstained).

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Housing & New Homes Committee delegates authority to the Executive Director of Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities to procure and award contracts exceeding £500,000 for works and services related to compliance with the Building Safety Act and relevant fire safety regulations including Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022.

41 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL

- 41.1 There were no items from the agenda referred to Full Council.

42 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

- 42.1 There were no Part Two items on the agenda.

The meeting concluded at 6.24pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of