

Brighton & Hove City Council

HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 47 (b)

Subject: Public Questions

Date of Meeting: 24 January 2024

Report of: Executive Lead Officer for Strategy, Governance & Law

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Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

1.1 To receive any questions submitted to Democratic Services.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.2 That the Committee responds to the questions.

Public Questions:

1. From Charles Harrison

Looking at Appendix 3 - HRA Capital Investment Programme New Supply, I note the following:

- 769 Homes were delivered in the previous 5yrs from 2019 to March 2024
- 154 Homes are to be delivered in the next 5 years from April 2024 to March 2029

I also note that significant budget allowances have been allocated to health & safety and major works (e.g., structural and fire safety). Whilst I appreciate the importance of public safety, I am concerned that, despite the increasing demand for social housing, the Council has reduced its commitment to only 20% of what was previously achieved.

In the face of a deepening housing crisis in Brighton and nationwide, would you agree that this is unacceptable and what steps are the Council taking to bring this to the attention of central government?

Supplementary Question:

Although it is difficult to quantify, has anyone accessed and communicated the knock-on effect of failing to provide sufficient social housing and how it impacts physical and mental health, well-being, education, productivity, crime levels, etc?

2. From Diane Montgomery

Since 1981 national UK governments of all colours have supported the Right to Buy, Brighton and Hove have experienced a net loss of over 5,800 council homes which are no longer available to meet housing need (and many ex-council homes are now being rented privately at around 300% more rent). Governments in Scotland and Wales have abolished the right to buy. Our city cannot afford to lose any more social housing, so we ask the Housing committee to write to government and all 4 opposition parties urging a commitment to abolish the right to buy in England.

Supplementary question:

It is estimated that over £20 billion of public asset has been given away in RTB discounts. Given the great need for truly affordable housing in our city will the housing committee issue a public call for national government to refund the money lost through discounts.

3. From Maggie Gordon-Walker

A decision was taken in March last year to bring seaside homes in house enabling lower rents for nearly 500 homeless households also saving money for the council. At the time officers advised that it would take around 3 months. In June, the chair of housing re-assured that this was a priority for the administration. 10 months have now passed and if the council doesn't get a move on predicted future falls in interest rates will increase the loan buy out costs for the council. Is bringing seaside in house still a priority and why is it taking so long?

4. From Lynn-Ora Knott

*The average time that rough sleepers on the streets when SWEP and winter provision is not operating was around **6-8 weeks** for the off-street offer. This is detrimental to vulnerable people's health. In the spirit of the Homeless Bill of Rights agreed by council, can the housing committee monitor and report how long people are waiting and put in place measures to shorten the time people are spending on the streets such as agreeing to make offers of emergency accommodation to verified rough sleepers?*

5. From Sarah McCarthy of Phoenix Community Association

Rent Controls: It was reported in the Guardian (11.12.23) that Britain has seen its highest rent increase for a decade at 10.2%. Rents in Brighton and Hove are already unaffordable and so high that many have been forced to move away from their hometown away from family and community. The Living Rent Campaign believes that our city needs a form of rent controls capable of reducing rents. Will the Housing Committee declare their support for rent controls able to lower rents in the city?

6. From Dr Fiona Wright

Given the all-party commitment to carbon neutral 2030, why does the HRA budget propose to abolish the £4.8 million reserve set aside for sustainability and retrofitting of council homes which should be spent making homes cheaper to heat?

7. From Amy White

After being placed out of area for nearly 5 years, away from all my family and friends. It's lonely and detrimental to mental health when you rely strongly on help from others who still live in Brighton. I strongly agree with prioritising households who have been placed out of area in long term temporary accommodation, whom have a local connection for over 5 years to band A, or higher priority bidding. How have you considered/prioritised households who are placed out of area with local connection, who has needs to come back to the area?

8. From David Gibson

The Moulsecomb hub project has planning permission and was on track to deliver over 200 much needed new council homes over the next couple of years. This is a big part of the 800 additional council homes promised by Labour in the election yet looking at the appendix 3 of the HRA budget report there is no budget outlined for 25/6 and only sufficient to deliver around 30 homes in 2024/5. Can you assure me that there are no plans to downsize this flagship project for new council homes?

Supplementary question:

If there are financial challenges to delivering the Moulsecomb hub project, any gap could be closed by either accepting that not every new homes project has to 100% break even (especially if it is delivering a huge social good) or use the £4 million + profit from the joint venture (previously earmarked for re investment in social housing) or both of these suggestions to make up any shortfall, please offer some thoughts how we can ensure this flagship project is not downsized and goes ahead?

9. From Paul Norman for Hanover Action

Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF): Noting that Lewes District Council are bidding for £2.845m over 2 years from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) to make homes more energy efficient, has Brighton & Hove City Council taken the opportunity to apply to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF)?

Supplementary Question:

Assuming that the Council has taken the opportunity to gain this additional resource for its carbon neutral responsibilities for the city, please confirm the sum applied for with any breakdowns as appropriate.

10. From Nichola Woolven of Home Move Action Group

I'd like to question the fairness of changing the Band start date policy within the home move bidding system. For instance, a family of six has been part of the system since 2005, initially in Band D, later upgraded to Band C with a new start date of 2015. This shift resulted in them losing 10 years of bidding, creating an unfair disadvantage compared to others in the same Banding. Despite their 18-year involvement, the adjusted banding start date reduces their effective bidding time to only 8 years. Could the committee review and rectify this policy for equal opportunity within the home move bidding system?

11. From Ian Needham

At housing and new homes committee in June, when asked to confirm the Labour election pledge of 800 additional council homes, we were told there was a target of 318 schemes already in the pipeline from the previous administration for the financial year and that a review expected numbers for future years were under review. Please could you tell us of the outcome of the review and whether the election pledge of 800 additional council homes over the 4 years of the current administration (May 2023-May 2027) still stands?

12. From Daniel Harris

I am a preciously looked after child. I would like to broadly praise a lot of the amendments to the allocations policy suggested but want to raise concerns. I see nothing written about care leavers; we are facing a real crisis locally. I've suggested an amendment to add care leaver priority, rebutted. We know they are dying young here in B&H, 1/4 prisoners were/are care leavers, 1in2 leave care with an undiagnosed mental

health condition, can you explain why this report is presented but with no actual mention of care leavers let alone a full draft of the policy to digest?

13.From Magdalena Okeke

Many families facing benefit caps and the third child rule in the private rental sector endure financial strain due to deductions from their £22k cap, impacting their ability to afford high rents. With LHA increases benefiting landlords but leaving capped households with less, the situation raises concerns. How many benefit-capped households are currently on Homemove waiting for social housing, highlighting the urgency to address this disproportionate impact on vulnerable families?