

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

RECORD OF DECISIONS taken by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Darren Sanders, at his meeting held on Tuesday, 3 July 2018 at 5.00 pm at the Executive Meeting Room - The Guildhall - Floor 3

Present

Councillor Darren Sanders (in the chair)

Councillor Tom Coles
Councillor Luke Stubbs

11. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

None, with all spokespersons present.

12. Declaration of Interests (AI 2)

Councillor Darren Sanders, the Cabinet Member for Housing had sought guidance from the City Solicitor on his declarations which were:

- i) Item 3 (Private Sector Housing Enforcement) a personal but non-prejudicial interest in that he lives in a house in multiple occupation (HMO)
- ii) Item 4 (Update on Leamington and Horatia Houses information item) a personal and non-prejudicial interest in that his mother lives in one of the blocks affected.

13. Proposed changes to the enforcement policy used by Private Sector Housing (AI 3)

Deputations were made, which are recorded as part of the web-cast of this meeting which can be viewed here (so are not minuted in full):

<https://livestream.com/accounts/14063785/Cabinet-Housing-03Jul2018>

- i) Alwin Oliver, as a landlord and letting agent
- ii) Martin Silman, Chairman of the Portsmouth & District Private Landlords Association

Both deputations were making objections to some elements of the policy, especially the onus on the landlords being fined rather than tenants who left waste, and asked that there be clear publicity on the changes and responsibilities.

Bruce Lomax, Private Sector Housing Manager, presented his report which set out the changes in legislation since the previous policy of 2007,

and it was now permissible for civil penalties to be imposed on the tenant or landlord. The manager of a property has the duty to keep it in a clean condition and provide suitable storage receptacles for waste. There is also a duty on the occupant who can be fined for breaching management regulations.

Councillor Stubbs stressed the importance of making the lines of responsibility clear to tenants of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and suggested there be a review to see how the changes to the policy were working after a year of operation.

In response to questions from Councillor Sanders, Bruce Lomax reported that this legislation only covered HMOs and not private home owners and that Portsmouth City Council (PCC) would give landlords 3 days' notice to remove litter before action was taken against them. Councillor Sanders was mindful that the number of complaints about waste accumulating in the forecourts of HMOs had been increasing (as set out in the table at 4.5 of the report). He also recognised the request by the landlords in their deputations for there to be clarity on the PCC website about what is expected for waste management at HMOs.

Paul Fielding, Assistant Director Housing, reported on the wider waste management policies with the trialling of wheelie bins for waste rather than bags being left out, and HMOs were being advised of the appropriate types of bins for forecourts. Councillor Sanders further reported that following the wheelie bin trial the capacity allowance had been increased and bin collections would be kept weekly.

Councillor Sanders invited comments from the Residents Consortium and CLG representatives Maria Cole, Richard Blackwood and Mada Abrams who welcomed the steps being taken to address the problem of rubbish accumulating at HMO properties.

A written deputation had been received from Dr Eleanor Scott (who apologised for not being able to attend the meeting) who he had met with to discuss issues, some of which were on-going regarding transparency, and her submission was in support of the proposals and he read parts of her deputation regarding her experiences of living near an HMO in Fratton.

Councillor Sanders was in support of the proposals which would help make the city cleaner and agreed with the points made on the need to educate tenants, so there would be close liaison with HMO owners, tenants and the University of Portsmouth. This policy was not being introduced in isolation but as part of a wider waste management policy (which also included seagull proof bin bags). As Cabinet Member he supported the officer recommendation but added an additional recommendation to take on board the suggested review with an extended date. He also asked that officers ensure that the changes to the policy is accompanied by clear guidance for landlords and tenants, communicated via the PCC website.

DECISIONS:

The Cabinet Member for Housing:

(1) Approved the changes to the Enforcement Policy and fixed penalty charges under Section 249A Housing Act 2004

(2) Requested that a review of the effectiveness of the revised policy be brought back for consideration by the end of 2019.

14. Update on Leamington House and Horatia House rehousing of households (information item) (AI 4)

James Hill, Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services had been asked by Councillor Sanders to provide a verbal update on the progress to rehouse households from Leamington House and Horatia House.

James Hill reported the background, that on 5th June residents in Horatia and Leamington House were informed about the issue of the concrete strength and that Portsmouth City Council (PCC) would be rehousing all residents in both blocks.

Approximately 70 staff from across the directorate (and agencies like HFRS) were involved in the initial phase as PCC officers visited residents, began the process of checking sheds, visiting flats and gathering all the information we would need to commence the rehousing. A dedicated 24 hour help line was established, dedicated email address, the area offices opening hours were extended and opened over the first weekend and the fire watch service was adjusted to a concierge/security in both blocks.

As the first few days passed it became quickly apparent that residents felt assured with the information provided and there was not the need to provide emergency temporary accommodation. In the week commencing 11th June the area office opening hours went back to normal opening hours but the help line continued to operate and a dedicated rehousing team continued to discuss rehousing options with residents in both blocks. PCC's Housing Service issued a letter to residents on the 12th June confirming those changes and the ongoing arrangements.

James Hill then expanded on the Re-Housing Project (from the current day until Spring 2018). The Rehousing team led by Joanne Bennett remains dedicated to supporting the rehousing of all the households in the blocks. There are New Tenancy Officers, Support workers and specialists assigned to the project. The Area Housing Team (Somerstown Hub) led by David Mearns and Dave Sambells will continue to provide regular communication updates, monitor the security arrangements and Housing offices will continue to be assigned to each block .

The Technical Team led by Steve Groves will focus on securing the building and look at the options for the strengthening, recladding and installation of sprinklers. The Project team are meeting every two weeks with oversight provided by an Assistant Director of Housing and regular reports available to James as Director and the Cabinet member for Housing.

The dedicated 24 hour help line Tel: 02392 841311 remains in place and a dedicated email address: towerblocks@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

James Hill took the opportunity to publicly thank the staff in his directorate, from other directorates within PCC and from partner agencies that worked tirelessly in the run up to the announcement and through those first few weeks. Many working long hard hours and beyond the normal day jobs, showing flexibility and compassion in their response. He also thanked the residents of the two blocks for their calm response (as had been seen when the cladding issue had been discovered) There are naturally concerns but the residents have shown a great understanding of the situation and are cooperating with the PCC teams.

The latest position and statistics on the rehousing were:

- There are 272 flats in total in both blocks (136 flats in each) on the 4th June there were 252 properties occupied. Two households have since moved out on planned management moves that were already in progress and we have re-provided four EC Roberts Centre flats leaving us with 246 households to be re-housed.

The current position Re-housing (as at 2nd July):

- PCC officers have spoken to all 246 households and have a good understanding of their rehousing needs
- Housing officers have started to allocate properties matched to need and based on the properties available
 - There are 54 households who have been allocated a different property, of which
 - 28 have been made offers and will be viewing
 - 26 are offered, viewed and accepted and moves are planned (e.g. 1 x move date planned for 20 July)
- 54 of 246 represents 21% (approx. 3 weeks in)

(this position can change daily as other matches are made)

The current position on Areas of Choice (as at 2nd July):

Whilst noting that households can express a preference for more than one area and also circumstances change, of the 246 households:

- 201 households would like to remain in the City South areas
- 78 households have said they would like to remain in either Somerstown (40) or the surrounding area (38) (walking distance)
- 8 households would like to move to the City North areas
- 18 households would like to move out of the City (Leigh Park/Wecock Farm)

James Hill then reported on the communications with residents. An update letter was delivered to residents in both blocks on the 29th June 2018 and further updates will be sent regularly. The letter also referenced the

publication of the structural reports and explanatory note which PCC published on 2nd July 2018.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had invited Portsmouth to be part of a discussion to set up a Large Panel System building forum. Steve Groves, Head of Building Maintenance, would be attending the first of those meetings the following day. This would be useful in sharing information and practice as well as discussing funding arrangements.

The PCC website has dedicated pages for Leamington House and Horatia House and carries all the communications, structural reports and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

In response to a question from Councillor Tom Coles on the effect on residents of moving and the possibility of protecting their rental levels, James Hill reported that whilst there may be instances of different rent charges, the rehousing officers were talking individually to residents regarding affordability.

There were also questions from the Residents Consortium and CLG representatives Maria Cole, Adrian Blackwood and Mada Abrams on the timescales, the costs to PCC budgets and impact on the housing waiting list. It was reported that some of the offered properties would need some works before residents could move in. There are home-loss payments being made, a statutory one of £6,100 per household. There are also separate costs for the cladding works and options are being considered for the strengthening of the tower blocks. There are on-going discussions with the MHCLG on their funding for cladding and it would affect the Housing Revenue Account. It was acknowledged that the unexpected rehousing of tenants from two tower blocks would have an impact on waiting times but there are an estimated 900 voids each year, so there would still be other properties available to those with priority needs. There had been use of the communal rooms at both Leamington and Horatia Houses for the early contact with residents with officers on site but the use of this facility had declined as one-to-one contact was made on rehousing issues.

Councillor Luke Stubbs asked on the progress of the discussions with the government beyond the cladding issues - it was reported that the strengthening works would be discussed through PCC's involvement in the Forum being attended by Steve Groves.

Councillor Darren Sanders was grateful for the comprehensive update, especially as no questions were being asked on this subject at the forthcoming Council meeting. He asked James Hill to reiterate the timescales envisaged which were for the rehousing to be completed by Spring 2019. In response to Councillor Sanders question Meredydd Hughes, Assistant Director Buildings, reported that the original cladding of Horatia and Leamington Houses had been paid for by the Housing Revenue Account.

Councillor Sanders, as Cabinet Member for Housing, thanked the residents for their stoicism and patience during this process. He was confident that the voids available to PCC would enable everyone to be rehoused suitably by

Spring 2019. He also thanked all the officers involved for their professionalism and their efforts in rehousing residents.

The verbal update given by the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services was noted.

The meeting concluded at 6.15 pm.

Councillor Darren Sanders
Cabinet Member for Housing