

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND TACKLING HOMELESSNESS

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness held on Thursday, 26 October 2023 at 9.30 am at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Darren Sanders (in the Chair)
Councillors Cal Corkery
Raymond Dent
Charlotte Gerada

20. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Daniel Wemyss.

The Chair began the meeting by giving thanks to Maria Cole, Resident Consortium Representative who was attending her last meeting after several decades. The Chair gave thanks, on behalf of all the Councillors and Officers, for all that Maria had done over the years and expressed their gratitude to her.

21. Declarations of Members' Interests

Councillor Cal Corkery declared a personal interest as a council tenant.

22. Interim Report on Progress of Council Housing Maintenance and Improvements Programme 2023/2024

Adam Hardwick, Assistant Director, Buildings presented the report the purpose of which was to update the Cabinet Member on the delivery of the Council Housing Maintenance and Improvements Programme 2023/2024, the spend against the approved budget and to highlight any future issues. The report also provided an 'industry update' highlighting the wider financial and operational context impacting on repairs and maintenance.

Resident Consortium Comments

Maria Cole agreed with the report and considered it good news that voids were now being cleared so quickly with new tenants being housed. She noted that although the increase in costs had slowed down, she had not yet experienced this in her day-to-day shopping.

Maria was concerned at the thought of the council having to use any reserves (especially the Major Repairs Reserve) which needed to be available for any future unexpected events such as with Horatio and Leamington House.

In relation to the Integrated Impact Assessment and the section on social values, Maria considered this very important especially for tenants who may have had many works carried out on the properties they live in.

Member's questions

In response to Members' questions, officers clarified:

- Under the Building Safety Act, a key action is to improve resident engagement, making residents aware of works happening in their buildings. 9 Resident engagement events had taken place to date and these events would be ongoing.
- Sprinkler work was being carried out and Ladywood House had been completed. Work on Handsworth House would commence this financial year. Residents would be communicated with about the works once the works were due to commence and not during the evaluation stage.
- In the next financial year, fire safety works will form a large part of the programme.
- Housing meets quarterly with Hampshire Fire Service and updates them on the programme of works with a focus on high risk blocks. The fire service had not raised any issues in relation to the current programme of works. Fire risk assessments are carried out every year and joint inspections are carried out with the Fire Service annually.
- When gas safety checks are carried out, boilers are serviced at the same time. CO2 detectors are now fitted as standard during the service. In addition, any day-to-day contractors also install CO2 detectors if there are none in the property.
- The Major Repairs Reserve is anticipated to hold £9million at the end of the year. The Capital programme is based on a programme where expenditure is equal to the major repairs allowance made in the year and there are no plans to run that balance down below £9million. Any overspend would impact the reserve. The service is keen to retain the reserve balance for emergency works but the balance between essential works now and potential emergency works is a fine balancing act.

Member comments

Members requested that some of the Resident engagement events take place in the evenings or at weekends.

Members observed that in relation to fire doors and sprinklers, residents did not appear to have been communicated with sufficiently on when these works would actually take place.

Chair's Comments

The Chair noted the issue of flat income and increasing costs. Drawing on the reserves could lead to them running out, but the current situation was bleak. The Chair referred to a letter by the Local All Parties Groups of the LGA which highlighted the current issues.

The Chair was pleased with the increased number of repairs being carried out to the housing stock and that the number of new council tenant homes was

increasing. He observed that the first priority for the council was the safety of the buildings and fire doors and sprinklers should be part of the mix.

The Chair asked that the service, as part of future engagement events, should look at holding some in the evenings and weekends.

Decision

The Cabinet Member:

- **Noted the progress of the budget plan and revenue and capital expenditure and the ongoing pressures on both the revenue and capital budgets.**
- **Approved to amend the allocation of budgets within the capital programme to allow for it to be reviewed and reprogrammed, prioritising demand to meet the legislative requirements under the Building Safety Act 2022 with available budgets and the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services be authorised to proceed with schemes within the sums approved under Financial Rules, Section B11.**

23. Development of Council Homes - Twyford Avenue, Stamshaw

Jo Bennett, Assistant Director, Housing Need and Supply, presented the report the purpose of which was to seek approval from the Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness to deliver a development of 6 council homes on the site of the current block 305, 305A, 307 and 307A Twyford Avenue, Stamshaw. The report was also to seek approval of a capital spend of £1.49m to deliver 6 new council housing dwellings to be held in the Housing Revenue Account. Adam Hardwick, Assistant Director, Buildings, outlined the building issues that were found in the properties.

Resident Consortium Questions

In response to Resident Consortium questions, officers clarified:

- The tenant waiting to be moved would be entitled to home loss and disturbance payments.
- The plan has been to design all new homes to Passivhaus standards, but consideration would be given to what that means for residents and what parts are important to help keep residents bills low and allow for good quality homes.
- It was not known if the houses, when built, were private homes or if they were built and owned by the Council. They were converted in 1974 to four flats by the Council. Structural inspections were carried out when the houses were converted to flats. The plans from the conversion showed that the walls were rebuilt.

Members' questions

In response to Members' questions, officers clarified:

- In relation to the current remaining tenant, as soon as the property issues were found in 2015 the property was no longer let, and monitoring of the building was commenced. There have been ongoing discussions with the residents for some time with the Council working in full consultation with the residents and the ward councillors. The current tenants are waiting for their second offer.
- The main residual risk of carrying out any identified remedial work is that further issues would surface. This would not deal with the core issues of a property of that age and standard.
- In relation to carbon emissions and demolition, materials would be reused as much as possible to mitigate any emissions. In the longer term, using Passivhaus standards means the carbon use of the property would be far lower than the existing building.
- The aim for the ground floor property was to be as accessible as possible but the design is not for full disabled use.
- The development is compliant with parking restrictions. Consideration had been given to how residents would live in the property and there would be a communal outside space for them to use along with parking.
- The unit costs of development take into account a number of factors. The flats are larger than a lot of private developers, they are of a higher standard especially with the Passivhaus standards, and due to the nature of the site the development does not have the benefit of economies of scale available to private developers. A full competitive tender would be carried out.

Members' comments

Members were pleased to see new homes being developed and liked the indicative design, which was innovative, good quality and modern.

Members were pleased about the decision not to transfer poor quality housing stock to the private sector.

Members considered, in future reports, it would be useful to quantify the actual financial costs of the environmental impact of demolition to compare with the positive environmental impacts of the new building.

Chairs' comments

In addition to the economic and environmental costs of the development, the social cost also had to be considered in relation to living in a property that was sub-standard. The Chair stated he was keen on decarbonising the whole housing stock and it was important for there to be full transparency on decisions made.

Decision

The Cabinet Member

- **Approved the addition of the Twyford Avenue scheme to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme, with estimated expenditure of £1.49million to deliver 6 new council housing dwellings.**
- **Delegated authority to the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services, in consultation with the Director of Finance and Resources & S151 Officer, to amend the composition and spending profiles of the proposed scheme in order to meet planning and design requirements and agreed the use of unsupported borrowing, along with either grant funding or retained capital receipts, whilst ensuring that the schemes remain financially viable following any necessary changes.**

The meeting concluded at 10.35 am.

Councillor Darren Sanders
Chair