

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, 22 February 2024 at 10.00 am at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Darren Sanders (in the Chair)

Councillors Cal Corkery
Raymond Dent

31. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Charlotte Gerada and Councillor Daniel Wemyss.

32. Declarations of Members' Interests

Councillor Cal Corkery declared an interest as a Council tenant.

33. Proposal to consult on Portsmouth City Council's policy for allocating social housing

Shane Galvin, Head of Housing Needs, Advice & Support, presented the report, the purpose of which was to seek permission to consult on Portsmouth's policy for allocating social housing, which sets out the arrangements for allocating housing accommodation within the meaning of Part VI of the Housing Act 1996, including the selection of applicants to be offered tenancies by Portsmouth City Council and nominations to tenancies offered by private registered providers of social housing.

Resident Consortium

In response to questions, officers clarified:

- There is a split between planned temporary accommodation and unplanned temporary accommodation for homeless residents. Those in priority need are given temporary accommodation such as The Registry. There are a number of standalone complete accommodations, such as flats, for temporary accommodation. The service is aiming to expand the planned accommodation so there is very little reliance on bed & breakfast or hotel accommodation.
- There is a distinction in homelessness legislation between priority and non-priority homeless.

- The top causes of homelessness are friends and familial evictions, domestic abuse, private rented sector and relationship breakdown. The causes remain constant, but the volume has increased.
- The policy was being reviewed as, although it did not feel out of date, it had been found that it was no longer meeting the current demand on the service and there was more that could be achieved.

Members' questions

In response to Members' questions, officers clarified:

- The use of online systems to process allocations was not within the scope of the report, which was to agree the allocations policy. There were pros and cons of an online choice based letting system which would be carefully considered in the scope of the Homelessness Strategy but not directly as part of the allocations policy.

Chair's comments

The Chair noted the review was due because of concerns on how the allocation system fulfilled the current situation and demand. The Chair was pleased a consultation would be carried out and agreed the use of technology should be considered as part of the wider homelessness work.

DECISION

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness:

- 1) Agreed that a formal consultation would be undertaken on the requirements of an effective allocations policy. The Consultation would seek the views of:**
 - **Private registered providers of social housing and local authority housing service;**
 - **Local residents likely to be affected by any changes to policy, including those currently on the housing register;**
 - **Members of the Portsmouth City Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Partnership Group;**
 - **Partner organisations likely to be affected by the policy including council directorates.**
- 2) Noted that the consultation would run from around 14th May 2024 to around 24th June 2024, with officers reviewing the current policy ahead of the consultation.**
- 3) Noted that the outcome of the review and consultation would be presented to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness along with any proposed changes to the policy.**

34. Update on our preparedness for the Social Housing Regulation Act and Building Safety Act

Nicole Clannachan, Head of Housing Community Services, presented the information only report, the purpose of which was to:

- Update on some of the legislative and regulatory changes that have been introduced since the publication of the Social Housing White Paper in 2020.
- Set out the actions taken by Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services in response to legislative change and future planning.
- Notify that the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services is nominated as the 'responsible person' who is the point of contact and ensures compliance with the social housing regulatory standards.
- Notify that the Building Safety Manager is nominated as the 'responsible person' for ensuring Health and Safety in Council properties and housing owned buildings and recognising that the manager will be supported by the Corporate Health and Safety Team and that ultimate responsibility lies with Portsmouth City Council as a Registered Provider.
- Update on the recruitment to the new posts of Housing Policy Officer and Housing Complaints Lead.
- Note the following policies have been recently revised - the Lettings Policy, Domestic Abuse Policy and Safeguarding Policy.
- Update on the development of a new Resident Engagement Pledge and plan for 2024 - 2027 and note the resident engagement strategy for the residents within the Council's high-rise buildings.
- Advise that a report providing a further update on the work underway and planned would be brought forward mid-municipal year notwithstanding that other reports will be presented for decision as and when needed throughout the year.

Members' questions

In response to Members' questions, officers clarified:

- The government had advised they would publish the tenant satisfaction results for transparency and information, but the intention was not to create league tables.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness noted the report.

35. Portsmouth City Council's Tenancy Strategy 2024 - 2029

Jo Bennett, Assistant Director, Housing Need & Supply, presented the report, the purpose of which was to present the Tenancy Strategy which detailed Portsmouth City Council's approach to tenancies for all registered providers of social housing across the city including the local authority as a registered provider.

Members' Questions

In response to Members' questions, officers clarified:

- Registered Providers are able to make their own decisions on how they act, particularly with different forms of rented accommodation. A strong policy and collaborative working should encourage them not to charge more in rent than the Local Housing Allowance.
- The service works to ensure that the need to provide rent in advance does not prevent someone from taking up an occupancy and will work with providers to that effect.
- Fixed term tenancies are used in very specific circumstances but in general the greatest length of tenancy is recommended.
- The new Neighbourhood and Community standards introduced by the regulator places an additional expectation on all social housing providers to work in partnership with the local authority and have strong regard to the policies set down.
- In relation to the flexibility of the strategy and adapting to external changes, the Housing needs Team have money advisors within the frontline team to ensure that affordability of tenancies are understood and this would be taken into account should there be any dramatic external changes and the Cabinet Member would be kept abreast of any changes needed.

DECISION

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness:

- 1) Approved the council's Tenancy Strategy 2024 - 2029 (Appendix 1) to be effective from 1st April 2024;**
- 2) Noted that the publication of the Tenancy Strategy does not constitute a major change to the existing Tenancy Strategy. The changes to the strategy remove reference to the local authority as a registered provider allowing for the publication of the Local Authority Housing Lettings policy.**
- 3) Noted that there were no changes to the strategy which impact registered providers within the city and accordingly the strategy was not being consulted on. Copies of the republished strategy would be shared with registered providers explain the change.**

36. Damp and Mould Policy

Steve Groves, Head of Building Maintenance presented the report, the purpose of which was to update members of a review of the Council's Housing Services processes for managing damp and mould in council housing and to seek approval to implement a new damp and mould policy.

Resident consortium

In response to Resident consortium questions, officers clarified:

- There were a lot of factors that contribute to damp and mould issues. The important part of the policy was the face-to-face engagement and follow up with residents and understanding those issues to see if there was any support that could be provided to ensure officer advice could be implemented. The follow up was key and looking at both resident and building factors to understand the root cause.
- The service was starting to use technology such as thermal imaging to pinpoint issues in some of the older acquired housing stock which are more prone to damp and mould issues.

Members' questions

In response to Members' questions, officers clarified:

- The spike in quarter 3, 2023 of the report was from a combination of seasonal factors. The third quarter, from October onwards, was the season when it was more prevalent in terms of demand and was when there are the most calls from repair surveyors. It was noted that damp and mould can occur all through the year.
- When the issue was structural within the whole block, there was a twofold approach. There was more proactive engagement with the residents and condition surveys would be more of a primary focus. The knowledge and information can inform the planned programmes and link into other work streams, assisting in prioritising which blocks would be focused on.
- The leaflets would be given out when staff are doing home visits. They would be part of the pack for the residents coming over from Clarion Housing and the information was also on the website and would continue to be regularly included in Housetalk.
- A specific training module for the wider organisation was being developed with the Learning and Development Team. There had been briefings for the Surveying Team, Housing teams and Housing Officers.

Members' Comments

Members were pleased to see the policy being implemented already and in particular the clear process for escalation when issues are not being resolved first time.

Chairs' comments

The Chair noted it was crucial that everybody who visits any resident or housing block, such as social care, environmental services as well as housing staff, was aware of the issue and knew how to report and escalate when needed.

The Chair was pleased to see the comprehensive proactive approach within the policy, as it was important to keep tenants as safe as possible in their own homes.

DECISION

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness:

- 1) Approved the new damp and mould policy (Appendix A - Damp and Mould Policy, version 1.1) and asked Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services to implement the new policy with immediate effect.**
- 2) Approved the implementation plan set out in section 5.**
- 3) Requested an information only report be brought back mid-year to update on the progress of the work.**

37. Park Homes Pitch Fee review 2024 & Park Homes Policy

Samuel Rickeard, Housing Regulation Manager, presented the report, the purpose of which was to make recommendations regarding the Park Homes pitch fee review, and agree the approach that will be applied to the upcoming annual pitch fee review process for April 2024. The report also made recommendations for officers to conduct a resident consultation regarding the implementation of a Park Homes Policy.

There were no questions or comments.

DECISION

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness:

- 1) Agreed to increase the Park Homes pitch fees by 4% in the new financial year (2024/25) starting 1st April 2024. The increase was in line with the January 2024 Consumer Price Index (CPI) rate for England and was the latest published figure 28 days before the review date (1st April 2024).**

- 2) Agreed that an annual report would be brought to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness for decision before each pitch fee review process commences.**
- 3) Instructed officers to conduct a 4-week resident consultation starting 1st March 2024 regarding the implementation of a Park Homes policy and instructed officers to bring back a report to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness, regarding the findings of the consultation and a further recommendation regarding the implementation of the policy.**
- 4) Noted that, regardless of any consultation, the current policy of not charging any sales commission was confirmed.**

The meeting concluded at 11.12 am.

Councillor Darren Sanders
Chair