

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND TACKLING HOMELESSNESS

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Tackling Homelessness held on Wednesday, 20 March 2024 at 10.00 am at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Darren Sanders (in the Chair)

Councillors Cal Corkery
Raymond Dent
Charlotte Gerada

38. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Daniel Wemyss.

39. Declarations of Members' Interests

Councillor Corkery made a declaration of interest as a council tenant.

40. Council Housing Maintenance and Improvements and Non-Dwelling Capital 2024/2025

Adam Hardwick, Assistant Director Building Services, Alan Denford, Housing Finance Manager, and Merrick Trevaskis, IT Business Partner, presented the report, the purpose of which was to inform Members of the spending proposed for the financial year 2024/25 for revenue and capital funded maintenance and improvement programmes for the City Council's retained housing stock together with the HRA Assets (Non-Dwelling) capital scheme (including Housing IT Business software) and to seek approval to incur expenditure in respect of the capital schemes and rolling programmes.

The report was also to update the Cabinet Member on the year end position on the delivery of the 2023/24 Repairs and Maintenance programmes, the forecast spends against the approved budget and to highlight any future issues.

Resident Consortium

There were no comments or questions.

Members' questions

In response to members' questions, officers clarified:

- The service needed to prioritise and target their work, particularly on the capital side. The scope of the service was around the asset management strategy and providing clarity on what may or may not be repaired and would provide clarity to residents and service providers in their understanding of the scope.
- There was a detailed service criteria for service providers on Voids to ensure the right repair is completed at the right time. For instance the

guidance on when to replace a kitchen or bathroom whilst still maintaining these to a good standard, had led to a reduction in replacements, resulting in cost savings but ensuring good standards for the next tenant coming in.

- The Charles Dickens heat network replacement would be with a gas powered system. For the scale of installation, there were no alternative renewable energy sources that could be used without leading to additional works to the building. The Charles Dickens heat network was in Barkiss, Nickelby, Copperfield and Pickwick Houses.
- The service had been undertaking numerous surveys of all blocks which was still ongoing. The reports were due back in the next couple of months and the programme of works would then be reviewed and resourced accordingly.
- Part of the reason for the increase in the Building Safety Budget was to allow for additional works in relation to cladding. The service was registered with the Government Cladding scheme and would be making an application for funding to cover the replacement costs and offset the internal expenditure.
- Nontraditional properties had been chosen for decarbonisation works as they were often hard to treat properties with the inherent construction types. The aim was to increase the EPC energy rating to at least a C. Nontraditional properties are typically post-war system built of concrete or steel framed.
- The whole housing stock was being assessed within the Asset Management Strategy and would consider many aspects including energy efficiency.
- Management of temporary accommodation and the provision of white goods sits within the Housing General Fund despite there being a contribution within the HRA for white goods in temporary accommodation. The Housing Needs and Temporary Accommodation Team would be asked to provide members with further information in writing in relation to this aspect.
- The Stamshaw Youth Project Hub was a partnership between the Careers and Youth Service and would provide youth activities in the evenings in line with the play and youth offer already existing. There will also be an offer developed by the careers service to support young people into employment and to understand what apprenticeship opportunities are available. The funding was for ages 14 - 19 and then up to 24 for those with learning disabilities.

Members' comments

Members were keen to be kept up to date on any changes to the service criteria such as for Voids.

Members noted the Council had signed up to a journey to Net Zero and that it was important to always consider alternative renewable energy sources that may cost more in the short term but would be better in the long term for the environmental cost.

Members observed the service was run very well with a lot of good work going on including to maintain the housing stock and to ensure people have a decent place to live.

Chair's Comments

The Chair noted the following points:

- local authorities don't have the financial freedom to fund all the projects they would like to.
- The system in PCC had been changed to put the residents and workers at the heart of the system meaning less cuts than other local authorities.
- It would be useful to have more information regarding energy alternatives with their associated costs going forward.
- The Council priorities were ensuring people have a safe, green home and to plan for future decent communities.
- He was pleased to see a damp and mould budget now included.
- He was pleased to see the money for the Adventure Playgrounds and the provision of youth services in housing estates but noted there was not enough youth provision in the rest of the city.
- Cladding replacement of housing blocks was crucial to keep residents safe.

DECISION

The Cabinet Member:

- 1) Noted the allocation of finance for the funding of the Revenue Budgets for repairs and maintenance of dwellings listed in Appendix A;**
- 2) Approved the allocation of capital budgets listed in Appendix B and Appendix C for 2024/2025, and the approved that the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services be authorised to seek approval from the Director of Finance and Resources (Section 151 Officer) under Financial Rules, Section B11, to proceed with schemes within the sums allocated;**
- 3) Noted the year end position and progress of the 2023/24 Repairs and Maintenance budget plan and capital spend;**

- 4) **Requested that a mid-year report be brought to provide an update as to in year revenue expenditure and progress of the HRA capital programme.**

41. Local Authority Housing Landlord Services Complaints Policy

Louise Jones, Business Compliance & Projects Manager, presented the report, the purpose of which was to inform members of new Local Authority Housing Landlord Services Complaints Policy and to seek approval for implementation of the policy. She noted the policy would apply to anyone who had been directly affected by Local Authority Housing Landlord services.

Resident consortium Questions and Comments

In response to Resident questions, officers clarified:

- Complaints are dealt with by the Complaints Manager who would work with the complainant to understand the nature of the complaint and the resolution being sought. It would then be passed to the relevant manager to investigate and provide a full written response.
- The new policy goes through a similar process but would be more visible within the Housing Directorate leading to a better focus on the learning outcomes.
- The final point of redress now lies beyond the internal investigation to the Housing Ombudsman. Currently complaints go to the Local Government Ombudsman. There is now a distinct Local Authority Complaints Policy which covers all Tenant and Leasehold Complaints.

Member's questions

In response to members' questions, officers clarified:

- The complaints process is currently managed corporately. The team track the timing of responses to ensure deadlines are met. Stage one complaints are signed off by a Head of Service or Senior Manager. Stage two complaints are investigated by a more senior manager (via the Director). After this it will be referred to an ombudsman. The change in process now is that a complaint can be referred to the ombudsman at any point, not just after completion of stage two.
- Face to face meetings were offered, usually for more complex complaints, but the new policy offers the chance to refresh the process and training for officers and to promote this where appropriate.
- Statistics on all directorate complaints and compliments are reported corporately to the Governance, Audit & Standards Committee. The new policy will allow further differentiation of those that are to do with the local authority. Statistics will be published to tenants and leaseholders in Housetalk and a report brought to the Housing meetings.

Chair's Comments

The Chair requested an additional recommendation to ensure an annual update of complaints and compliments, as part of the wider communication strategy to tenants and leaseholders, is brought to a future decision meeting.

The Chair also requested that face to face meetings, where possible, are promoted to tenants and leaseholders.

He noted how complaints are handled was important and should be via a clear and open process. The addition of a Housing Ombudsman was a positive step forward.

DECISION

The Cabinet Member:

- 1) Approved the Local Authority Housing Landlord Service Complaints Policy (Appendix A - Local Authority Housing Landlord Service Complaints Policy V1.6) and approved that Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services implement the policy from 1 April 2024 to support the ongoing response to The Charter for Social Housing Residents, Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 and Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code.**
- 2) Noted the key points within the policy which would complement the Corporate Complaints Policy.**
- 3) Requested an annual update at a future Decision meeting providing an update of complaints and compliments as part of the wider communication strategy to residents and council.**

42. Local Authority Housing Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

Lauren Rackham, Head of Community Safety, presented the report, the purpose of which was to update members of the Council's Housing Services processes for managing Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and to approve the ASB policy. Also to seek approval to implement the new policy for dealing with ASB which would cover all incidents that:

- Involved local authority homes owned by PCC and tenants or members of their household;
- Occurred within a neighbourhood in which PCC manage properties and the ASB involved PCC residents;
- Take place at PCC 'workplaces' affecting or caused by tenants and leaseholders in Portsmouth and Havant, taking into account the wider strategic picture.

Members' questions

In response to Members' questions, officers clarified:

- Permission of the people involved in reports of Anti-Social Behaviour is required before they can be passed over to the mediation or assessment service.
- The Assessment service will look at mediation to understand the root cause and to look at acceptable agreements, dependant on what the complaint is and what ASB is involved. All complaints go to a housing officer in the first instance.
- The current partnership working with Police is the strongest it has ever been. There is a designated neighbourhood officer who is closely linked with the local housing officers to stop complaints being passed back and forth.
- The website had been updated to make it clearer how to report ASB and the distinction between what is a Police matter or a housing related matter.

Chair's Comments

The new process and the relevant numbers should be included in the New Member Induction pack following the local elections on 2 May 2024 as part of the induction process.

DECISION

The Cabinet Member approved the new ASB policy (Appendix A - ASB policy) and asked Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services to implement the new policy with immediate effect.

43. HNBS Estate Services self-assessment for meeting requirements of the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 and proposed Neighbourhood and Community Standard.

Phil Bentley, Head of Estate Services, presented the information only report, the purpose of which was to outline the approach taken by the Estates Services team within the Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services Directorate and considered how this met the requirements introduced by the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 and the proposed Neighbourhood and Community Standard due to come into effect from April 2024.

There were no questions or comments.

DECISION

The Cabinet Member noted the information only report.

Before closing the meeting, the Chair noted this was the last meeting of the municipal cycle and thanked everyone for their hard work throughout the year. He also thanked his Councillor colleagues for their challenge and comments which were appreciated.

The meeting concluded at 11.17 am.

Councillor Darren Sanders
Chair