

HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel held remotely on Thursday 24 March 2022 at 10 am

Present

Councillor Cal Corkery (in the Chair)
Stuart Brown
Lynda Symes

Steve Groves - Head of Building Maintenance
Meredydd Hughes - Assistant Director, Buildings

5. Apologies (AI 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

6. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

Councillor Corkery declared a personal interest as he is a Portsmouth City Council (PCC) tenant.

7. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 March 2022 (AI 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

8. Review into "Procedures and performance of the council and housing associations in relation to response repairs and maintenance" (AI 4)

Councillor Corkery welcomed those present and invited comments on the review. Members thought the review gave a very fair reflection of the meetings and conversations that had taken place. They were keen that a watching brief should be kept on issues raised so that they were not forgotten. A follow-up report could be made formally or informally and the relevant ward councillors involved.

Members considered the recommendations.

Recommendation 1 - Councillor Corkery thanked officers involved in the review for their work. Democratic Services will draft a letter so that the Leader and Chief Executive can formally thank officers.

Recommendations 2 and 3 - Officers mentioned the Major Cities initiative that Portsmouth City Council (PCC) used to participate in. PCC met the housing departments of other local authorities of a similar size though they faced different issues due to geographical factors. Paul Fielding (Assistant Director, Housing) and Kevin Beagley (Housing Enabling Officers) meet housing associations regularly; future discussions will cover Repairs & Maintenance and include pay and green building technology issues. Although organisations face similar challenges they may adopt solutions tailored to their needs.

PCC is a leader in green technology and has its own in-house expertise with the Energy Team. Officers are meeting Highbury College today to develop

practical educational courses for young people to train to install, for example, solar panels and ground source heat pumps. The training will kickstart work around Passivhaus technology and zero carbon emissions. Green technology and carbon reduction are built into the annual cycle of contractors' plans and are part of asset management for the Housing Revenue Account. Housing invest in green technology and lead the way. Their work dovetails with that of the private sector. PCC has frameworks of contractors and funding to help private householders pay for measures such as insulation of external render.

The Green Deal initiative had not been very successful as there were a lack of contractors and householders could not see the benefits as they had to pay back money they had saved on fuel bills. The government is investing money through the LAD (Local Authority Delivery) scheme to improve the energy efficiency of low-income households; this is making a big impact. £40m has been awarded to Portsmouth and its partnership of local authorities. PCC has helped 1,400 households across the consortium, half of which were in Portsmouth. The LAD covers a vast range of work. PCC vets supply chains to ensure they do what they are supposed to. The Chancellor's spring statement of 23 March gave another £2m through the removal of VAT on energy efficiency works. PCC has a key part to play in the local economy and uses local contractors to deliver the work. Councillor Corkery noted green technology will become more and more important.

Recommendation 4 - Officers mentioned the guidance leaflet on DIY and asbestos advice recently produced by Housing for tenants. Housing is mindful of the need for tenants to know how to use appliances in their property such as stopcocks and heating when they start tenancies. Improving instructions means residents can be more self-sufficient and do not need to call out Housing staff or contractors, thereby reducing demand down the line.

Recommendation 5 - The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper (published in 2020) places a duty on councils to demonstrate how they engage with residents. The Head of Local Authority Housing is working on resident engagement. As noted in the review, residents often prefer giving feedback via a phone call rather than in the presence of contractors.

Recommendation 6 - Members agreed to change the recommendation from "To resume the residents' meetings for council tenants that used to be held before Covid" to "To continue to provide residents with opportunities to give feedback and engage with housing services" because the earlier version is now out of date. There are focus groups for resident, for example, for repairs or technical issues. However, officers said residents increasingly prefer different ways of engaging as they do not always want to attend meetings, which tend to attract the same people each time. Some residents are happy engaging by email or phone. Housing is now more flexible in how it engages with residents. Officers agreed they need to try to engage with a wider demographic as some residents do not have a voice. Minority groups may be less likely to come forward if there are issues. Members said widening engagement could be a joint effort between them and officers. Officers

requested members to let them know if they are aware of residents who are not being heard and will try to engage with them.

Recommendation 7 - members agreed with the recommendation.

Although the panel may have a different membership in the next municipal year, members suggested possible topics for the next review as a basis for future discussion. The panel's remit covers social care as well as housing so members suggested a social care topic as recent reviews have been housing related. Suggestions were:

- Examining the effectiveness of social care in the pandemic and the ability to deliver social care.
- Developments like Patey Court, Highgrove Lodge or Temple Court where residents live independently but near each other, thereby preventing isolation or carers having to drive long distances, and also providing economies of scale for carers and a sense of community for residents.
- Co-housing - community housing schemes led by groups rather than local authorities or housing associations; the housing is self-contained with some shared spaces and facilities.

Councillor Corkery thanked those present for their involvement in the review.

The meeting concluded at 10.35 am.

Councillor Cal Corkery
Chair