

Runnymede Borough CouncilHOUSING COMMITTEE9 June 2021 at 7:30pm

Members of the Committee present	Councillors J Gracey (Chairman), J Hulley (Vice-Chairman), A Balkan, J Broadhead, M Cressey, I Mullens, M Nuti, P Snow and S Whyte  Mrs J Hill (Runnymede Council Residents' Association Representative – co-opted non-voting member)
Members of the Committee absent	Councillor S Mackay
Non Members of the Committee present	Councillor R Bromley

**48 NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

None.

**49 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 10 March 2021 and 6 April 2021 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

**50 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None received.

**51 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None declared.

**52 PROPOSED CHANGES TO HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME**

The Head of Homelessness, Housing Advice & Allocations advised that it was a legal requirement to have an up to date, fit for purpose Allocations scheme. The existing policy was over four years old and did not consider subsequent legislation changes.

Following a period of public consultation, the banding structure had been simplified, and the proposal to make only one offer to all applicants had not been included in the final scheme.

Leading Counsel had provided a number of comments following public consultation, which had been included within the final version of the report.

Members welcomed the thorough consultation, and were grateful that the views of those who fed into the consultation were clearly visible within the policy, which was considered comprehensive yet easy to read.

Members were also pleased that the policy made best use of the Council's existing housing stock, and thanked officers for the work undertaken.

**RESOLVED that –**

**The new Housing Allocations Policy and timeline for implementation was approved.**

53 **REQUEST TO APPROVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HOUSING SERVICES HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY**

The Compliance Manager reported that the Health and Safety Policy linked to the corporate Health & Safety policy but was specifically linked to Housing.

The purpose was to improve the awareness of Health & Safety across the board, with the aim of helping staff to ensure residents' safety.

There would be further policies linked in with the specific areas of the policy, covering items such as asbestos, gas safety, fire safety, water hygiene and electrical safety, many of which had been earmarked to go through the Housing Member Working Parties,

The policy would be reviewed on an annual basis, unless dictated otherwise by incidents or legislation changes.

As part of the kitchen and bathroom replacement system, properties that did not have hard wired smoke alarms would have them fitted. Others were checked regularly.

Some 3,068 individual hard wired smoke alarms were installed in some 1,770 properties across the borough. In response to the chair of the RCRA, it was confirmed it was commonplace that alarms were installed in the kitchen and the hallway rather than the upstairs area.

**Resolved that –**

**Members approved the implementation of the Housing Services Health and Safety policy.**

54 **ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY**

The Housing Services Manager advised that the existing policy was four years old, and a recent TIAA audit had revealed that policy had not been followed in some low impact instances.

The policy had subsequently been streamlined and followed methodical headings suggested by Resolve and the Housing Regulator – prevention, early intervention and support.

A number of revisions had been undertaken, including flexibility around warnings, how hate crime would be dealt with, and many more details about the community trigger. It had also been updated to reflect the positive working relationship with police and other partners.

The consultation had recently closed, and a handout was circulated on the night detailing feedback. Some further minor changes reflecting feedback from Councillors would be made after Committee.

The policy was currently awaiting comments from Counsel, and would be subject to revision depending on their comments.

Members pointed out that it took time to get to the bottom of antisocial behaviour, and it was something that was one of residents' main concerns. Members were keen to ensure that sufficient funding and resources were put in to address the issue.

The Corporate Head of Housing confirmed that much more was being invested in prevention, and it was hoped that bringing the policy to Committee would increase effectiveness and increase awareness amongst Members of antisocial behaviour amongst Council tenants.

It was also recognised that the policy included vulnerable perpetrators, and the importance of supporting people who fall into that category.

**Resolved that –**

**Members approved the Antisocial Behaviour policy and statement of procedures, subject to an approved EIA. Policy to come into effect from 1 July to allow Members to review any additional consultation feedback and the advice of Counsel.**

## 55 **DISABLED ADAPTATIONS POLICY FOR COUNCIL TENANTS**

The Head of Housing and Business Development confirmed that the existing policy was nearly six years old and whilst the revised policy did not represent a change in policy, it sought to bring clarity and ensure that adaptations were not carried out in circumstances that disadvantaged the HRA, whilst not having a negative impact on waiting list times for families.

The policy would be operated in conjunction with the emerging Older Persons' Strategy and Development Strategy which would be brought to Committee in the Autumn. They would seek to create suitable and attractive downsizing options for residents and ensure that the Development Strategy includes the provision of family sized and one bedroom homes that are wheelchair accessible.

It was appreciated that many older residents would prefer to remain in their property and that moving can be difficult and stressful later in life. The ongoing strategy would be to communicate with residents and encourage them to downsize before their mobility becomes impaired

Currently there were 637 properties where it was believed there was under occupation, which was 23% of the Housing stock. 423 of these contain households over 60.

Minor adaptations such as handrails, steps, bannisters, lever taps etc. up to a combined total value of £1000 would be carried out to enable a resident to remain independently living in their home regardless of whether they were under occupying the property. Adaptations in excess of £1000 which constitute alterations to the home would not be carried out if the property was under occupied.

It was acknowledged this was a very sensitive area, and it was imperative that the support arrangements within the policy were accessible for those residents affected. However, the Council had an obligation to make the best use of its housing stock.

**Resolved that –**

**Members approved the new Disabled Adaptations Policy for Council tenants.**

## 56 **RENT SETTING POLICY**

The Head of Housing and Business Development reported that the purpose of the policy was to outline the Council's approach to setting the rent charged for its social rent and affordable rent homes, and was based on government policy.

The Chair clarified the difference between social rent and affordable rent, and hoped that the minimum levels of social rent would be maintained, including replenishing and increasing lost stock through right to buy sales.

Furthermore, whilst the policy says affordable rent should be "up to 80%" or market rent, that in no way meant a blanket 80% across the board on future developments and each case would be judged on its own merits and brought to Committee.

**Resolved that –**

**Members approved the new Rent Setting Policy.**

#### 57 **OLDER PEOPLE STRATEGY CONSULTATION**

The Corporate Head of Housing advised Members that an older people strategy would set out how older people who live in the Council's stock would be supported. He went on to highlight the emerging themes.

Permission was sought to undertake consultation with partners, stakeholders, residents and other interested parties, ahead of bringing the policy to Committee later this year.

Members were encouraged to promote the consultation as widely as they could.

**Resolved that –**

**i. Members approved the request for the service to consult with its tenants and leaseholders on the draft vision for the older peoples housing service;and**

**ii. Members agreed to receive the results of the consultation alongside a final strategy in September 2021.**

#### 58 **REPAIRS POLICY CONSULTATION**

The Head of Housing Technical Services sought permission to begin a consultation involving key events with residents and partners on the current and proposed policy.

There were currently two repair times within the draft policy. Whilst more options were desired, an IT integrated solution would need to be in place before this was possible. The policy would be revised and adapted once a solution was in place.

It was hoped that the process for ordering repairs would be simplified and digital, but officers were keen to ensure it was user-friendly for residents.

One of the many things of interest as part of the policy was around trees; Runnymede was a very green borough and issues with trees was a common occurrence, particularly around right to light.

As many views as possible were sought to help shape the policy, and every possible avenue would be utilised to ensure views were heard. It was hoped this would be the dawn of a new era of tenant involvement, reaching out to as many tenants as possible.

**Resolved that –**

**i. Members approved the request for the service to consult with its tenants and leaseholders on the draft Repairs Policy; and**

**ii. Members agreed to receive the results of the consultation alongside a final policy in September 2021.**

#### 59 **HOUSING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM UPGRADE**

The Corporate Head of Housing advised that officers would like to accelerate the implementation of the upgrade of the Housing integrated IT system. This would require a

significant additional spend, which was sought in principle pending the detail around what the money would be spent on.

The IT system was complex and required many additional modules, but would see a step change in efficiency and as well as the information available to Members. Whilst most other Councils invested in their IT annually, there had been considerable under-investment in Runnymede's IT system for around twenty years. It was anticipated that requests for a modest additional investment would be made annually.

It was felt this upgrade would greatly enhance the experience of residents reporting issues. The Corporate Head of Housing went on to say that the amount being sought was £200k rather than the £100k in the report. Members were being requested to approve this in principle, and any decisions ahead of the next Committee would be in conjunction with the chair and vice chair of Committee. This would allow the work to be progressed in the interim.

It was hoped that full functionality would be in place within 18 months, although many of the modules would be available sooner than that.

A Member agreed that this would bring the Housing team up to date, but was keen to ensure that the policies and features overlap, and any gaps were addressed to ensure that 100% of the policy was covered within the features of what was being implemented.

There was a lot of anxiety from some Members around the lack of detail and breakdown within the report, whilst it was currently unclear what the benefits would be.

The Chairman acknowledged the lack of detail in the report, but added that whilst the final decision would be for Corporate Management Committee, she believed it was important for any decision on Housing related matters to be put to Housing Committee in the first instance.

A meeting would be taking place with Northgate on 17 June where they would set out what would be required for implementation. This would enable officers to submit a far more detailed report to Corporate Management Committee on 22 July.

As well as consulting with the chair and vice chair, officers would circulate the details to the rest of Housing Committee prior to CMC.

#### **Resolved that –**

**Members agreed to recommend to Corporate Management Committee an additional HRA Capital estimate for up to £200,000 in principle to be used to bring forward the delivery of the Northgate Housing upgrade. This would be subject to sufficient scrutinisation by the Chair and Vice Chair as more details emerge.**

#### **60 UPDATE ON COMMUNICATION WITH THE REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING**

The Head of Housing Technical Services provided an update on electrical certification and fire safety actions. The Regulator was also being kept informed of the planned fire works at Surrey Towers.

Officers raised the issue of ending the notice period during a recent meeting with the Regulator, and were aiming for this to be done in September 2021. This would be dependent on the implementation of the Health & Safety policy and all fire risk actions being completed.

#### **61 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, Q4 AND YEAR END 2020/21**

The Head of Housing and Business Development admitted that the void performance remained at an unacceptable level and impacts on other Housing services. A recent review of the

process had resulted in a voids project group being set up with officers from across the department to look at the failing areas.

Notice had been served on one of the contractors and whilst improvements were expected there was likely to be an initial period where the remaining contractor picks up their 50% of the Borough and would need to increase their own workforce and resources.

Improvement of Void timescales was a key management priority and was being appropriately resourced.

There were just six properties with an expired gas certificate (0.23% of the stock), four of which were unoccupied properties.

Electrical certification had risen to 92.3% and out of hours and doorstep contact continued with those tenants that had failed to respond to communication about this.

The Chairman added that the Council did not previously have the tools to address the outgoing, under-performing contractor, however this would be remedied when going out to tender to find its replacement.

A Member asked for an update on the works at Surrey Towers at future meetings, along with updates on the recent purchase of land.

(The meeting ended at 10:06pm)

Chairman