

Runnymede Borough Council

Housing Committee

Wednesday, 21 September 2022 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors J Gracey (Chairman), J Hulley (Vice-Chairman), D Coen, M Cressey, M Darby, P Snow, S Whyte and R King (Substitute, in place of A King).

Members of the Committee absent: Councillors S Dennett and S Williams.

205 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 June 2022 and the Special Committee on 3 August 2022 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

206 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor S. Dennett and Councillor S. Williams.

207 Declarations of Interest

None received.

208 Domestic CCTV Policy

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning advised that the proposed policy set out the Council's approach to the use of CCV on its housing estates and applied to all Council tenants.

This would cover any cameras installed by tenants including Ring doorbells, which when placed on a door in a communal area or looking onto a public area and making audio and visual recordings of activity in that area are in breach of legislation.

This policy would require tenants to request permission to install any form of CCTV and the procedure for this would ensure that permissions are only granted where the installation would not be in contravention of legislation.

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning concluded that should inappropriate CCTV be installed the tenant would be requested to remove it. In the unlikely event this request was not complied with, enforcement action would be taken for breach of tenancy conditions.

The policy was seeking an eight-week consultation with residents ahead of a further report being reported back to a later Committee. In response to a Member's question about the consultation, the Head of Housing Services and Business Planning confirmed that the consultation pages on the Council website would be updated, the Housing Service's Engagement Inclusion Officer would liaise with residents, whilst direct communications would be sent to those residents in blocks.

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning confirmed that the policy would be referenced in the tenants' handbook going forward.

Resolved that –

- 1) Housing Committee approved the draft CCTV policy for an 8-week period of consultation with stakeholders.**

209 Asset Management Plan Update

As part of its annual update to Housing Committee, the Corporate Head of Housing reminded Members of actions within the Housing Service's Asset Management Plan:

- To achieve a Decent Homes standard
- To achieve a C in energy efficient rating
- To deliver a new build programme
- To invest in older persons accommodation
- To ensure assets were being effectively maintained

Key achievements over the past twelve months had included developing a Runnymede Investment Standard, implementing a new Asset Management IT System and developing a Garage Strategy.

A number of actions remain outstanding or had recently been added to the plan, including developing a carbon neutral heating plan for the Council's stock, a tree stock survey and capturing information on the condition of the estate paths.

The Corporate Head of Housing confirmed to the Committee Vice Chair that the Housing Service were aware of upcoming carbon monoxide regulations, and it was widely believed that the Council already adhered to those regulations, but this would be confirmed.

A further action on the plan was around consideration of the removal of playgrounds once they reached the end of their lives. However, a consultation with residents would take place in the first instance to establish how regularly they were being used.

Resolved that –

- 1) Housing Committee supported the aspirations set out within the plan and the investment identified to support their delivery.**
- 2) Housing Committee identified the progress made against the actions contained within the plan and considered the additional actions required for effective long-term delivery of the plan.**

210 IRL Communal Lounge Policy

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning advised that communal lounges were in operation in the Council's five independent retirement living schemes, which were used for social events, meetings or somewhere for residents to socialise.

Historically there has been no official policy for use of lounges and the draft policy formalised the common practice in schemes and ensured that the communal areas were accessible to all residents whilst ensuring there is a process for arranging events and hosting external agencies or companies.

An eight-week consultation period was being sought to gather residents' views on the policy, with coffee mornings taking place at all locations to discuss the policy and capture feedback.

It was hoped that this policy will assist us to provide a safe and accessible communal lounge at all Independent Retirement Living sites.

In response to a Member's question, it was confirmed that the option to create a coffee shop that was open to non-residents had been discounted on security grounds.

Resolved that –

- 1) Housing Committee approved a consultation on the draft IRL Communal Lounge policy to be focused primarily on current residents of IRL Schemes.**

211 Rehousing Plan for Ukrainian Households (Homes For Ukraine Scheme)

The Corporate Head of Housing advised that the report sets out how RBC is assisting Ukraine nationals accessing housing when their initial placement ends. Whilst initial placements had originally been earmarked for 6-12 months, it was expected that the vast majority of those would last the full 12 months.

Government guidelines suggested placements with a new host family are preferable if existing arrangements breakdown after 6 months. A campaign will be launched to try and identify potential new hosts within the borough. Should this not yield enough responses, placements would be sought in the private rented sector, or as a last resort through Housing Associations.

Funding for the support comes from central government, which was being administered through the Council's Customer Services team, so whilst cost-neutral there were potential resource implications if a large amount of private rented accommodation was being sought to house Ukrainian families there would be the possible knock-on effect on other housing groups. This would be closely monitored.

The Corporate Head of Housing confirmed that support workers had spoken to all households supported in Runnymede and they would be aware of the help and support available to them.

Resolved that –

- 1) Housing Committee supported the approach set out for dealing with requests for support from Ukrainian households who approach the local authority for support with their housing.**

212 Compensation Policy

Following approval of a consultation exercise on the draft Compensation Policy at June's Housing Committee, the Head of Housing Services and Business Planning confirmed the consultation took place between 9 June and 4 August 2022.

Despite efforts to communicate with individuals and more widely through the website and tenants' newsletter, no responses were received to the consultation.

Whilst compensation was discretionary, the proposed policy was in line with guidance issued by the Local Government Ombudsman, which states the importance of offering compensation where there has been an identified service failure.

Compensation rates would be subject to management authorisation levels and would be payable in a flexible way dependent on the recipient's circumstances and preferences.

The Committee Chair asked that a process was implemented whereby any CPI increase over 5% automatically triggered the policy returning to Committee, and this

practice should be considered across the Council, whilst the Head of Housing Services and Business Planning agreed to report annually on the amount of compensation paid out.

Resolved that –

- 1) Housing Committee approved the Compensation Policy.**

213 Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Application

The Corporate Head of Housing advised that officers had previously estimated that achieving an energy efficiency C rating across the Council's stock would cost in the region of £8.79m, although it was now thought the final figure may be higher.

Officers intended putting in a request to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, which was a government scheme aimed at assisting social landlords achieve an energy C rating. The application to the fund would be in the region of £3.5m and would cover 331 of the 757 homes currently below a C rating. It was anticipated that the remaining 426 homes would achieve the C rating through the Decent Homes programme.

The application would be made to a second wave of funding. Officers advised that the first wave contributed to 69 projects across the country at a cost of £170m. However, the Corporate Head of Housing felt it unlikely that all 331 homes would achieve the C rating, and a later application to a third wave was already under consideration, whilst all options remained under consideration for those properties.

It was hoped that going down this route would give the Housing Service a chance of being carbon neutral across its stock by 2030, with a significant amount of the work done by 2026. Feasibility studies on the stock would be carried out and options would be considered based on the outcomes of these studies.

Given the high demand of the fund a Member asked how confident the Council should be on the decarbonisation fund application being successful, and the Corporate Head of Housing advised that the Council had been working closely with a consultancy supporting organisations making bids, along with the Council's bid writer and Climate Change team.

The Corporate Head of Housing emphasised the Council's 'Fabric First' approach, to invest in the fabric of a property and explore technology options once the fabric was in the best possible condition.

A Member highlighted the extreme difficulty in achieving an A rating for energy efficiency, and whilst a property may be at a B rating, the presence of solar panels or ground source heat pumps could see the property carbon neutral or carbon negative.

The Corporate Head of Housing confirmed that dialogue was ongoing with other Housing providers about achieving carbon zero, however joint consortia bids with other providers had been ruled out as those providers were generally national and submitted their own bids to cover their entire stock.

Resolved that –

- 1) Housing Committee approved a bid to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund wave 2.1.**
- 2) Housing Committee gave delegated authority to the Corporate Head of Housing in conjunction with the Chair and Vice Chair to approve the final bid – including clarified finance figures.**

- 3) Housing Committee noted that should this bid be successful the service was on track to hopefully deliver a C energy efficiency rating as a minimum for its social housing by March 2026.**

214 **Mobility Scooter Policy**

Due to the increased use of motorised mobility equipment throughout the population, the Head of Housing Services and Business Planning advised that a policy was required to ensure that the Council manages the use of such items within its buildings to ensure the safety of all residents.

The aim of the policy was to ensure that residents had permission to store a scooter and that the scooter was well maintained and insured.

An 8-week consultation period had recently concluded that focussed on residents who were most likely to be affected by the policy.

As part of this consultation a pamphlet was created aimed at those who reside in the Council's Independent Retirement schemes, coffee mornings were held, a dedicated webpage was set up and an article on the policy was published in the Council's online tenants' newsletter.

When prompted with options, 100% of respondents selected 'I think the arrangements are fair and I am happy with them'

The Runnymede Council Residents' Association rep had received feedback from residents about the lack of mobility scooter storage. It was confirmed by officers that this would be taken into consideration as part of the overall IRL refurbishment, details of which would be communicated widely once known.

Resolved that –

Housing Committee approved the Mobility Scooter Policy

215 **Housing IT Enhancement Update**

The Corporate Head of Housing advised that the IT enhancement project was nearing a conclusion, with the majority of the modules identified now implemented, including asset management, planned maintenance, task manager and energy assessor modules.

The Housing Allocation module was not yet live but would be by the end of the calendar year, whilst some issues still had to be overcome with the communications module. Despite this, the overall project remained on track to be delivered on time and on budget.

The Corporate Head of Housing added that the benefits of the IT upgrade were already bearing fruit, with better data already coming through on assets and energy performance.

Members of the Committee would be invited to a demonstration of the IT package once fully operational.

Resolved that –

- 1) Housing Committee recognised the progress being made to implement Phase**

2 of the Housing IT system enhancement.

216 Support with Moving Policy

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning Social reminded committee that Housing landlords had historically paid incentive sums to tenants to move to smaller properties as housing need has increased, and Runnymede was no different, providing financial assistance and practical support with moving to those residents downsizing.

However, up until now this had only been requested at the point that the tenant could no longer cope in the larger home and was downsizing out of necessity.

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning added that a large proportion of the Council housing stock was under-occupied by older tenants, many of whom lived alone. Furthermore there was an increasing need for larger family properties, specifically those with two downstairs rooms that could be adapted to provide level access facilities.

A more proactive approach was therefore now being sought, and in order to incentivise downsizing whilst supporting residents who did not have the funds to move, the Support with Moving policy proposed to offer payments to tenants giving up a larger home, and additional practical and financial support could be accessed dependent on the tenants' circumstances. A consultation period on the policy was proposed ahead of returning to a future Committee with a firm policy based on residents' feedback.

The Committee Vice Chair asked if the incentives on offer would be enough to tempt residents into downsizing their property, and the Head of Housing and Business Planning felt that it would not be desirable to have a large number of residents downsizing at once as this would impact the void turnaround. It was hoped that the policy would tempt around a dozen households a year into downsizing.

Resolved that –

Housing Committee approved a consultation with Stakeholders on the draft Support with Moving Policy.

217 Performance Report

The Corporate Head of Housing reported that following the ISO audit in July 2022 confirmation had been received of accreditation, subject to annual validation, which was considered a very positive result.

Re-let remained higher than desired but continued to decrease, with the average currently 43 days – around half of the figure from 12 months ago.

The Corporate Head of Housing briefed Members that the government would be introducing twelve tenant satisfaction measures from April 2023, which would be used to capture performance and compare against other social landlords.

The government were also in the process of consulting on rent increase for the next financial year, with 3%, 5% and 7% the likely options. An increase on the higher end of the scale would likely create pressures on the Housing Unit Business Plan. Some modelling would be done on each option and presented to the November Housing Committee.

The Committee Chair thanked the Corporate Head of Housing for the hard work undertaken to achieve ISO9001 status. The Corporate Head of Housing thanked colleagues in the Housing Service.

218 Exclusion of press and public

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the remainder of the meeting during the consideration of the remaining matters under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

219 Appointment of Repairs, Maintenance, and Voids Contractor

The Head of Housing Technical Services briefed Committee on the process that begun in summer 2021 to appoint a new Repairs, Maintenance and Voids contractor.

This would be a key appointment given that it was one of the drivers of tenant satisfaction, and the Head of Technical Services and his team had put a considerable amount of time into the process to study lessons learnt from previous procurement activities and ensure the most thorough and professional procurement exercise possible.

The decision to award a longer contract provided greater value for money for the Council and the contractor, and the security would allow the contractor to invest in digital enhancements that would bring about carbon reductions and benefits to the local economy.

A number of workshops were held with prospective contractors, with a significant emphasis on the need to deliver the service in a modern and dynamic way, which would be simple to access for tenants and provided real time data to allow accurate contract reporting and management, as well as real time data to residents giving them updates on repairs and arrival times.

As part of the procurement there was also the requirement to detail how contractors had collaborated with clients to continuously improve existing services to tenants through innovation and performance measures.

Officers were also keen for prospective contractors to commit to a pure electric fleet over the term of the contract, and it was anticipated when their next fleet renewal came about strong consideration would be given to moving the fleet electric.

The Head of Housing Technical Services confirmed that a mobilisation period would soon begin with the new contractor to ease them into the contract and avoid beginning the contract in 2023 with an abundance of repairs to deal with.

The Head of Housing Technical Services and the Committee Chair thanked the existing contractor for the work undertaken throughout their time with Runnymede, adding that performance had not tailed off despite the contract drawing to a close.

Responding to a Member question about how KPIs would be measured in the event of fewer callouts, the Head of Housing Technical Services advised that his team would switch from being reactive to proactive and spend considerably more amount of time on the post-quality side of the work, whilst minute-by-minute data would be captured on a dynamic scheduling system.

The Committee thanked the Head of Housing Technical Services for the hard work and detail put into tendering process, feeling the bar had been set for future procurement exercises across the entire Council.

Resolved that –

- 1) **Housing Committee approved the appointment of the contractor listed in the report under a JCT contract for the time period listed in the report based upon delivery of performance measures.**
- 2) **Housing Committee gave further approval to that obtained in September 2021 to the increased cost of the procurement due to inflation (further to CSO 2.5 (b)(iii)).**
- 3) **Award letters to the winning contractor and unsuccessful bidders should not go out until Committee approval received in September 2022.**

220 **Procurement Activities**

The Head of Housing Technical Services reminded Committee that a similar report was tabled in September 2021 summing up procurement activity, and the purpose of the report was to provide details around key procurements activities that will bring the Council's housing stock to a condition that as a minimum met the Decent Homes Standard and addressed housing health and safety rating system failures.

The activities linked closely to the Asset Management Plan, and the Head of Housing Technical Services gave the Committee a brief run-down on planned procurement activities on the horizon, adding that individual reports on new procurement exercises over the remainder of the financial year would be presented to Committee.

Resolved that –

- 1) **Members noted the procurement activities for the new and already procured contracts listed within the report.**

(The meeting ended at 10.32 pm.)

Chairman