

## Runnymede Borough Council

### Housing Committee

**Tuesday, 18 October 2022 at 7.30 pm**

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

Members of the Committee absent: Councillors M Darby and S Whyte.

#### 273 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 21 September 2022 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

#### 274 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor S Whyte.

#### 275 Declarations of Interest

None received.

#### 276 Tenancy Policy/Strategy

The Head of Housing Services & Business Planning reminded Members that approval was given at the June Committee for officers to commence a consultation exercise.

The Council has a legal responsibility to publish a Tenancy Strategy, which was last completed in 2018. It must also publish a Tenancy Policy for use in allocation of its own stock and changes in the Tenancy Strategy should be reflected in the Council's Tenancy Policy, which was last published in 2015.

The Council currently offers two, five and ten year tenancies and secure tenancies for those who held them before 1 April 2012 or anyone moving into IRL. The only significant changes within the new strategy and therefore the policy were as follows:

- Two-year tenancies were no longer recommended for RPs or to be used by RBC as they do not provide adequate security for the tenant.
- Five-year tenancies were previously offered to households moving into a two-bedroom property due to demand for that size, this has been changed to any family size home where all members of the household are over 16 years of age. This would enable a review only when the youngest family member is 21.
- Households with children under 16 would receive a 10-year tenancy.
- Five-year tenancies would be offered to tenants of properties with significant adaptations with more than one bedroom regardless of the age of the children.

Most RPs operating in the borough are large national organisations who had their own overarching Tenancy Policy and did not follow the Tenancy Strategy of each borough. Whilst legislation was complied with and the Council consulted with all RPs with properties in Runnymede, a very limited response was received.

**Resolved that –**

- 1) The Tenancy Policy/Strategy was approved for implementation from 19 October 2022.**

**277 Electrical Safety Policy**

The Head of Housing Technical Services advised that the electrical safety policy set out the department's intentions to ensure that all HRA properties were maintained to a high standard in relation to electrical work and installation.

Electrical safety was one of the failures raised by the Regulator of Social Housing's Notice on the borough in 2019. Since then the certification rate had gone from around 45% to 100%, and it was envisioned that the policy would help the service maintain that rate.

The policy would help the Council to ensure that it meets its obligations as a landlord and seeks to provide assurance that electrical safety was adequately managed, ensuring the safety of tenants, leaseholders, and the general public.

The Committee chair thanked officers for the work in achieving 100% electrical safety compliance, adding that following a government consultation legislation was likely to make full compliance mandatory, and it was positive that the Council was ahead of the curve.

A Member asked about the prospect of installing EV units in homes in future, and the Head of Housing Technical Services advised that priority would be getting the basics right, but new technologies would always be under consideration to make officers and tenants' lives easier.

In response to a further Member question about certification, the Corporate Head of Law & Governance confirmed that since 2021 private landlords were required to have electrical installations inspected by a competent and trained individual every five years, and landlords would have to provide a copy of the electrical safety report to tenants and local authority if need be. Failure to do so could result in a fine of up to £30,000.

**Resolved that –**

**The Electrical Safety Policy was approved for implementation.**

**278 Older Person Strategy**

The Corporate Head of Housing advised Members that the strategy was approved in September 2021 and would be brought back to Committee on an annual basis.

One of the aims of the strategy was to provide first class accommodation at the Council's IRLs, which had been assisted by Committee approval of improvements to the communal areas in the IRLs, whilst work to improve the physical accommodation would commence in spring 2023.

Other actions achieved included putting in place a Local Lettings Plan to restrict access to younger people without a support need, along with consultations on the Moving with Support and Communal Lounge policies. There would be regular engagement and consultation with the residents of IRL accommodation.

**279 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.

## 280 **Planned Maintenance Update**

The Head of Housing Technical Services gave an update on the status of a structural report recently undertaken on an HRA asset within the borough.

The survey had indicated that parts of the asset were at the end of their natural lives, however there were structurally no issues, and any damage was as a result of water ingress.

Officers therefore recommended actively managing the site until such a time where the long-term plans for the wider area became known.

This would involve monthly checks for water ingress, regular cleaning and annual surveys. Should the situation change a report would be brought to Housing Committee as a matter of urgency.

Officers agreed to keep Members updated on the outcome of the surveys undertaken.

### **Resolved that –**

- 1) **Committee noted the details within the report.**
- 2) **Committee agreed with the recommendation that the asset was left in situ and actively managed.**

## 281 **Housing Revenue Account Development**

The Committee considered an item under a Housing Revenue Account development in the borough that would require full Council approval of a £5m supplementary estimate to be spread over the next two years to proceed from Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) stage 1 to 3.

It was also seeking full Council approval to delegate to Housing Committee to proceed with RIBA Stage 1, noting that the project can be halted by Housing Committee if the project is not proven to be viable at the end of RIBA Stage 1.

The Housing Service's HRA Business Plan and the Housing Development Strategy had committed the Council to creating an additional 125 social housing units, and officers had been exploring the possibility of regenerating the Parkside area of New Haw as part of that target.

The units on the estate are poorly performing in terms of energy efficiency, are not mortgageable, they are of a prefabricated design and not been designed to last for so long.

It was therefore proposed to deliver 450+ new units on the site, utilising private sales to cross-subsidise the delivery of affordable housing.

The site boundary had been identified and constraints and a delivery brief established.

Subject to Housing Committee and full Council approval, communication to residents would begin almost immediately, with letters to residents planned for 21 October 2022, and public events earmarked for 31 October and 1 November. Regular newsletters would follow to

those impacted by the development, and there would be a webpage dedicated to the development.

Residents had been informed in 2019 that some initial feasibility testing was in the pipeline.

The Corporate Head of Housing added that doing nothing on the site was not an option, as it would result in the units being re-built at a significant cost to the HRA and one that is likely to exceed the cost to the HRA of the proposed redevelopment.

The Committee Chair added that further Special Housing Committees were likely to be required to cover off key milestones, however this would be judged on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, the properties were on large plots of land, and part of the regeneration would see an increase on the density of housing.

Whilst acknowledging it would be long-term, the timescales of the project were currently unknown, and much would depend on the feasibility and viability studies.

The Corporate Head of Housing advised that Planning officers had been involved in the initial stages of the project, however advice was being sought about their continued involvement to prevent any pre-determination. The Corporate Head of Law and Governance added that guidance would suggest an external Planning Consultant would be required who was extremely familiar with the policies of the Council.

A Member asked about flood alleviation, and was advised that a number of technical solutions would be available to mitigate the impact. The feasibility study would establish the most appropriate method. However any form of flooding in the area was extremely rare, and it was acknowledged that the nearby waterway was a canal rather than river.

Queries were expected from freehold property owners about Compulsory Purchase Orders. The Committee Chair confirmed that they would be fairly recompensed and supported in any way possible, including the consideration of the option of moving into one of the new properties.

The Committee Chair advised that the Council did not intend to make a profit from the development, with the primary aim to deliver an affordable development. Furthermore, a number of options would be delivered to Committee in terms of mixture of social and affordable rent.

The Corporate Head of Housing added that the spending profile would have to be closely monitored. Avoiding carrying significant borrowing would mean that the option would remain to carry out simultaneous developments across the borough.

The Corporate Head of Housing advised the Runnymede Council Residents' Association rep that the Council would be unable to block any right-to-buy requests on the development unless there was evidence that a property would be demolished within 24 months. However, the likely risks would be made very clear in the event that any requests were made.

#### **Recommended to full Council on 20 October that –**

- 1) Committee approved the recommendation to full Council of a supplementary revenue estimate to be spread over the next two years to proceed from RIBA Stage 1 to 3.**
- 2) Committee approved the recommendation to full Council to delegate authority to Housing Committee to proceed with RIBA Stage 1 following the resolution of recommendation (2) by full Council, noting that the**

**project can be halted by Housing Committee if the project is not proven to be viable at the end of RIBA Stage 1.**

## 282 **Fire Door Procurement**

The Head of Technical Services advised that during 2021/22 the Housing Department undertook a range of passive fire prevention works at one of its HRA locations in the borough it had come to light that the original installation of fire doors and surrounds had been completed to an unacceptable level.

The Housing Technical Services Team had drawn together a set of specifications and designs to replace all door sets within the building in order that they all met the required 30 to 60 minutes as recommended within the fire strategy document and The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

The proposed contractor had been through the Council's procurement processes, and along with installing the fire doors they also manufacture their own products, reducing the risk of supplier delay.

The expected timeline would be 12-16 weeks.

### **Resolved that –**

- 1) Committee approved the procurement of replacement fire doors in order that they all meet the required 30 to 60 minutes as recommended within the fire strategy document and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005**
- 2) Committee agreed to the appointment of the specified contractor via the LHC framework to undertake works to an agreed sum.**

(The meeting ended at 9.03 pm.)

Chairman