

# BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

## HOUSING COMMITTEE

4.00pm 22 SEPTEMBER 2021

### HOVE TOWN HALL - COUNCIL CHAMBER

#### MINUTES

**Present:** Councillor Gibson (Joint Chair), Hugh-Jones (Joint Chair), Hills (Deputy Chair), Williams (Opposition Spokesperson), Mears (Group Spokesperson), Barnett, Fowler, Meadows and Osborne

#### PART ONE

#### 17 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

**(a) Declaration of Substitutes:** None for this meeting.

**(b) Declarations of Interest:** Councillor Mears declared she was on the board of Seaside Homes. Councillor Williams declared she was a member of ACORN and on the board of Seaside Homes. Councillor Osborne declared he was a member of ACORN.

**(c) Exclusion of Press and Public:** To consider whether, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, or the nature of the proceedings, the press and public should be excluded from the meeting when any of the following items are under consideration.

The Press and public were not excluded from the meeting.

#### 18 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

18.1 Councillor Meadows requested that the questions they had asked about items not called for discussion to be added to the minutes. Following agreement that the questions would be added to the minutes of the Housing Committee held on 23 June 2021 they were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

*Item 11: Private Sector Housing Update*

- *Community engagement – landlords and ACORN. Is the implementation by ACORN?*

*Item 12: Leasehold Payment Options & Updates*

- *Equity loans – what happens if the leaseholder doesn't live in the property and dies and leaves to a relative? Is this a loss to HRA? Is there a time limit on equity loans?*
- *64 new rough sleepers – are these listed under COVID 1 or COVID 2? Why are there so many? Are the council robust enough in re-connecting?*

*Item 14: Housing Committee Workplan Progress Update & Housing Performance Report - Quarter 4 & End of Year 2020/21*

- *Performance report (p.207 of agenda) – 1.2: 92 properties from Kings House. Is this correct?*
- *(p.213 of agenda) – 4.1: £4.010m for making the city carbon neutral by 2030. Is this possible, as there seems to be a long way to go. Will the HRA pay for this? Does the council have the EPC for all properties? This would allow calculations to be corrected made and the true spending.*

Once responses have been collated, they would be sent to Councillor Meadows and committee Members.

## 19 CHAIRS COMMUNICATIONS

Please note that 'Captions' is being used in Teams for the web cast. This will enable better accessibility for those with hearing difficulties although it is not a 100% accurate.

I'd like to take a moment, just to remind all members of the decision all councillors voted to introduce on 15<sup>th</sup> July in regard to mask wearing during the meeting. All councillors were asked to exercise their democratic right to decide on the process for council and committee meetings in light of the continued pandemic and the councillors took a decision on how to proceed, taking into account public health advice, not only for members, but also for the best protection of the public and others who also have to attend the meeting in person.

Unfortunately, unlike in other settings – or in our private lives – due to a change in legislation members now have no choice whether they can attend these meetings in person, as the right to attend it virtually has been rescinded by the government. Therefore, we are aware many members and others have no other option to protect themselves once in meetings such as these. Can I ask in line with the protocol agreed and voted for by all political groups at full council on July 15<sup>th</sup> to keep mask wearing in public committee meetings, that you do put a mask on? Thank you very much. We will be taking regular breaks throughout the meeting, more than we usually would, and if you would like to ask for a break at any point, please do so and we can adjourn the meeting.

### **Private rental**

Tenants and campaigners are understandably frustrated by the slow rate of progress. We are looking to pick up on improvements to active Private Sector Housing enforcement and recruitment which was not possible during most of 2020 due to the restrictions owing to the Covid 19 pandemic. On the positive side, new PRS enforcement officers will be in post by November, and we are proposing to turn our highly regarded direct lets scheme into an embryonic council-run lettings agency with enhanced landlord standards.

Selective licensing is moving more slowly than we would like (although, of course, we already license over 4000 HMOs). As is clear from the first report on the agenda, officers indicate we do not have the evidence to apply for a scheme yet. We believe there is a need for a scheme, but we have to be straight with campaigners and highlight

the fact, even if we had the evidence now, it would still remain impossible to bring in a scheme by the end of the year. What we are doing is finding resources to research where licensing schemes have been successfully brought in since the Secretary of State withdrew consent to the last one proposed for Brighton and Hove. We shall also look at what councils who have been unable to set up licensing schemes have done instead.

We have offered to meet campaigners and look with them at the standard of evidence needed to justify a scheme. We are also proposing a joint amendment, with Labour, to the officer report to make clear our shared commitment to achieve licensing. Finally, we are working hard to develop more support packages for tenants in arrears to prevent them losing their homes and becoming homeless. This is vital if we are to avoid a surge in homelessness as the eviction ban lifts. Where there are problems, we urge landlords to contact us and see how we can work with them to avoid evictions.

### **Leasehold Payment and Options**

This has been the subject of some in-depth consultation with leaseholders and Area Panels, and we are grateful to them for their engagement and their numerous suggestions. Unfortunately, given that our last meeting to discuss these with leaseholders was in August, it has not been possible to obtain definitive legal and financial advice on the proposals ahead of today's Committee, so this will need to come back to November Committee for a decision.

### **Next Steps**

Another important report highlights the progress with the "Everyone In" programme which we hope will leave a lasting legacy of reduced rough sleeping in the city post pandemic. The report makes clear that, in line with the aspirations in the recently adopted Homeless Bill of Rights, the Council will continue to seek to offer accommodation to all verified rough sleepers where this is permissible within its powers in order to consolidate the reductions in rough sleeper numbers, which so far have been greater than most other councils across the country. To continue to succeed and make progress towards ending the need for rough sleeping we need to expand further longer-term move-on accommodation. Partly in recognition of our record of delivering an additional 30 properties for Housing First under the Next Steps Accommodation Programme, the government have awarded us funding towards 60 further units for rapid rehousing and Housing-Led support accommodation for clients. This is a big step towards a lasting solution and is contingent upon the ability to prevent new homeless people becoming entrenched through our expanded "No second night out" service.

Officers have worked hard in difficult circumstances to move the many people housed under Everyone In and deserve our thanks. However, despite these efforts, the move on will not be completed as planned by the end of this month and we need some of the council's emergency funds to manage the additional cost of this and of the high numbers of households to whom we owe a duty under homelessness legislation placed in our remaining emergency accommodation. Finally, during the pandemic the Homeless Reduction Board has been meeting frequently and after its first year in operation we intend to review its effectiveness in achieving its aims. This will be reported to a future Housing Committee.

## Workplan Progress

We continue to perform particularly well on key areas of service delivery including rent collected; repairs appointments kept; tenant satisfaction with repairs; gas safety compliance; and waiting time for housing adaptations.

Though the pandemic is still very much with us we are attempting to provide an improved service with more face to face access. To this end, Barts house is now operating a face to face appointment-based customer service offer for those who need to be placed into emergency accommodation.

We have also maintained delivery of our supply of additional council homes, including through our successful Home Purchase Policy, and provided our first new council owned short term and emergency accommodation, as well as letting council new-build schemes at Hawkridge Court and Buckley Close.

In terms of some other key indicators where we are seeking to improve performance and are currently below target post pandemic, we are now emerging into a recovery period and some areas of backlog may take time to clear.

As part of our recovery measures our performance on average relet time is improving post pandemic and was 88 days in the first quarter of this year – still far too high but moving in the right direction.

The service has made considerable efforts to increase resources to reduce the backlog of empty homes through approved procurement routes, including through maximising use of our existing sub-contractor framework and accessing two new procurement frameworks to increase our contractor capacity.

The reported data for days to complete routine repairs does not take into consideration our work to tackle the backlog of repairs that have built up over the Covid period. The Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service is prioritising repairs firstly by urgency and secondly by age and therefore this backlog does consist of many older jobs. As the backlog of older jobs is addressed and works completed, the average days to complete figure reported will increase temporarily.

We have put in place additional senior management capacity and commenced recruitment to new permanent staff vacancies in the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service which, over time, will increase our in-house capacity for direct delivery of works.

As part of our recovery work, we are committed to reducing empty temporary accommodation, with some turnaround times impacted by the speed at which we can complete repairs. We are intent on reducing this figure month by month over the next quarter.

I should say it was my pleasure to visit the Housing Centre a couple of weeks ago, to meet members of the team and get their views on the electric vehicles and e-bikes that are gradually being added to the fleet. I was very impressed by the supervisor who says he gets to vastly more sites on his e-bike than he would in a van.

**Homemove:** Following issues arising with the implementation of our new ICT system we have been working to resolve matters raised that have had a negative impact on customers. We have increased our staffing levels, with additional officers appointed to resolve customer enquiries as soon as possible and improve our service delivery. We have also been working closely with the system provider to review system functionality, up-grade and staff training.

I would like to thank the Housing team for all their continued hard work in very challenging circumstances.

## **Evictions**

The annual evictions report makes for grim reading. While it is a very atypical year and, with more emergency housing provision, there are bound to be more evictions, the reported increase is nevertheless concerning and requires a deep dive into the details - in particular, the variations in performance, with the worst private provider evicting 400% more than the best one. There is clearly variation between providers who accommodate families as opposed to single vulnerable clients, which is most clearly demonstrated by provider D who provides mostly 1-4 bed family size properties.

There was a reduction in cancellations from 132 to 109 by our longer term contracted accommodation providers (A, B, C & D) between 2019/20 and 2020/21. The largest rise in cancellations in 2020/21 was by hotel and short term 'spot purchase' providers of accommodation provided as part of the 'Everyone In' initiative. It is worth noting that no-one has been evicted from the new council-run emergency accommodation.

The next emergency accommodation contract will both include higher standards aligned to the emergency accommodation charter and will for the first time be awarded 50% on quality and 50% on cost. To allow this to happen, the 2021/21 budget includes £0.230m extra investment to enhance the level of service in the re-procurement of emergency accommodation. We hope this will lead to improvement in both conditions and practice.

In the pandemic the reviews of deaths in emergency accommodation stalled. It is imperative we learn from any deaths that occur in our emergency accommodation. Now the pandemic is easing, and we are moving back to our more usual services, officers are reviewing the re-commencement of homeless mortality reviews with Health & Adult Social Care colleagues in order to ensure there is a detailed inquiry into each situation. The outcome of that review should be reported to this Committee in due course.

To finish, I should briefly mention the Citywide Housing Conference which I attended on Saturday and which took as its theme "sustainability and the carbon neutral city". Unfortunately, this needed to be held on Zoom which I have no doubt had an impact on the numbers of residents attending. I am grateful to the many officers who gave up their Saturday to attend and present at that event.

## **20 CALL OVER**

20.1 All agenda items were called for discussion by the committee.

## **21 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

21.1 To consider the following matters raised by members of the public:

**(a) Petitions:** None

**(b) Written Questions:** One written question was received:

David Spafford: Question to Housing Committee

*Would you give an update on the progress which has been made over the summer with the Review of Arrears Policy, part of Alleviating Poverty in the work plan, and reported to be slightly off track in the first Quarter report 2021/22?*

Response: Thank you for your question regarding the review of the arrears policy.

For Quarter 1 2021/22 our rent collected from council tenants remains 'green' above our target of 95.68% at 96.38% (£51.3m of £53.2m). We have not evicted any tenants due to rent arrears.

The work programme was established prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and a formal review of Arrears Policy has not been completed at this time.

However, we have informally reviewed our working practices to make sure we have been in line with government Covid guidance. For example, in line with pandemic guidance no arrears cases have gone to court to formalise a repayment agreement. The work we have undertaken over the summer to take action at the earliest stage and to support tenants include:

- Making telephone or other contact with all tenants in arrears to fully understand their situation and offer support, and to make sure they know what to do if for example their income has been reduced or they have lost their job
- Ensuring money advice is available to residents who need it
- Striving to prevent arrears from increasing and causing anxiety to residents
- Applying to the Department for Work & Pensions for 'alternative payment arrangements' meaning rent is paid directly to the council where applicable and the tenant is on Universal Credit
- Ensuring our colleagues are supported well and are equipped with the resources to provide a good service to residents

The way of working resulting from Covid-19 has helped strengthen relationships between ourselves and our residents and has emphasised our willingness to help reduce the burden of debt.

Supplementary question: Is the same service offered to temporary accommodation tenants?

Response: Not exactly the same service, but support is offered.

**(c) Deputations:** One deputation was received:

Title: Council fails to keep tenants free from harassment & anti-social behaviour.

Spokespersons: *Tony Graham and Martin Gray*

*Introduction: I've been Chair of the Nettleton Court & Dudeney Lodge Residents' Association since Nov 2019. From 2002 till 2013, I worked in B & H Neighbourhood Housing Offices. The Council fails to keep tenants free from harassment & anti-social behaviour. It's a system failure.*

*So-called 'Noise Nuisance' for too many tenants is a life-disrupting nightmare. One couple in Nettleton Court have kept over 4 years of Diary entries: two Officers at different times have suggested that **they** move from their home of 18 years.*

*Environmental Health & the ASB Team are Court-focused. Lacking serious support, perpetrators with mental health problems often 'fail to engage': the victims are left to suffer the consequences.*

*Main text: Part 1 - Personal account, an eye-witness statement.*

*My name is (redacted), and I am (redacted) years old. Last year I had open heart Surgery and have spent most of this, and the last year, shielding from covid-19.*

*I became unintentionally homeless after my long-term relationship broke down in Aug.2019. After being assessed, I was found to be in housing need. I was sent to Kendal Court, Railway Road, Newhaven that was/is part of B&H emergency Housing allocations. I was accommodated in a single room, without bedding, cooking equipment, or electricity. (I bought an electric card from the caretaker later) The mattress was urine and blood stained from the previous tenant who, from reading a summons, delivered to me by mistake, from the Brighton Magistrates court, (redacted).*

*The caretaker refused to change the mattress until the following day as he said his shift was over, and therefore, I slept on the floor for the first night. Within the first week, the other tenants in my block were fighting, screaming and shouting at each other over drugs and alcohol. It is no surprise to me that there were five unnatural deaths in the building, shortly before my arrival. I was scared to leave my room and kept the door locked at all times. The police were called many times in the time that I was there, due to constant disturbances.*

*Finally, I was moved to Dudeney Lodge, Upper Hollingdean Road, Brighton. In a flat that was let by Sea-side homes. The tenant below me suffered from mental health problems and the slightest noise made him react irrationally. I was chopping a carrot for a soup that I was making in the daytime, when he came up to my flat, shouting abuse, and because I did not open the door to him, he kicked the letterbox off my door. His bullying behaviour, constantly banging on his ceiling, carried on for months and despite constant phone calls to housing, nothing effectively happened.*

*I was then moved to my present flat which is a permanent tenancy in the same building. I thought that I had escaped from the unstable neighbour below me, only to find another one above me. This person used his flat as a workshop, drilling, electric planing, hammering, etc. sometimes until midnight. Again, after many complaints to housing, nothing happened, and he continued to make unbearable noise until he left the flat, without my being told, after one year.*

*This is my short living experience in social housing, I simply ask, what changes do we need to make in order to improve our housing service? I have some ideas to put forward to this committee today, I hope you will consider them.*

*Part 2. A way forward. The 'Housing first programme' currently includes levels of support for the vulnerable that are significant and sustained. Where is the comparable support for those in temporary accommodation currently housed by Seaside Homes in council properties like ours? There will be risks (and some failures) in assessment and allocation, still, effective monitoring and support must be delivered. The damage up to now, sometimes prolonged and extreme, is borne by neighbours, whose tenancy rights are abused without effective redress.*

*As you know, High-rise blocks are echo chambers and amplify noise many times over. A simple way to reduce this excessive noise pollution, would be to install, in every uncarpeted flat within High-rise buildings, a 20-25mm foam underlay with hardwearing fitted carpets. There are many elderly and vulnerable residents in our senior High-rise blocks who cannot afford, or do this upgrade by themselves, yet they unknowingly, cause a great deal of noise disturbance to other tenants. The cost of this carpeting to me was around £800 in total.*

*I believe that you are beginning to do this in sheltered accommodation, so I ask you to extend this important upgrade to all the other senior housing stock. Leaseholders who sublet their flats in High-rise blocks, especially to families with children, should be made to do this under the conditions of their leasehold, and it should be followed through by B&H housing officers until the work is done. Indeed, it should be a condition of the "Right to buy scheme".*

*Also, there must be a better flow of information from each department within the housing system. First, in the assessment process, and then in the support that is given to long-term tenants. I also believe that Tenant Resident Associations should be encouraged to play an active role in this undertaking.*

*We must continue to develop new integrated pathways from homelessness, through to secure accommodation, with housings' higher management, monitoring the support and guidance that is given to new tenants in both emergency accommodation and in their first secure tenancy's probationary year. (Kendal Court should never happen again).*

*Finally, there must be a better recording system, with inbuilt accountability for the way placement and decisions are made. Decisions that can ultimately affect our tenant's physical health, mental health, and emotional wellbeing.*

*(On behalf of the Nettleton Court and Dudeney Lodge Residents' Association)*

Response: Thank you for your deputation.

We take issues of harassment & anti-social behaviour and the impact of such behaviour on our residents very seriously.

I am aware, from having met Tony previously, of the impact antisocial behaviour is having on some of the residents at Nettleton Court and Dudeney Lodge and that you have been in contact with the area Housing Manager for your area and met with him recently.

I am sorry to hear of the experience outlined in the deputation of our emergency accommodation at Kendal Court from when you were placed there in August 2019. We have undertaken a range of measures to review and improve our emergency accommodation standards both at Kendal Court and elsewhere. This includes increasing our Welfare Officer provision. In addition, our forthcoming emergency accommodation re-procurement of contracts seeks to further enhance tenancy support and sustainment of emergency accommodation. The 2021/21 budget includes £0.230m extra investment to enhance the level of service in the re-procurement of emergency accommodation.

In addressing anti-social behaviour, the council currently adopts a twin track approach, this is in line with Equality Act duties. Where the perpetrator is identified we are obliged to try to bring about a change in their behaviour by introducing enhanced support. The success of this is reliant upon an individual's commitment to engage. Our approach to anti-social behaviour is to take any reports at face value. However, in order to take enforcement action, we do need evidence to take to court. In noise cases, this can be very difficult in the absence of professional witness testimony or a victim witness statement.

When undertaking enforcement action, the council is required to determine what is reasonable and proportionate, and at what stage to escalate the matter. Escalation can include issuing formal warnings, serving an abatement notice and/or seeking an injunction or, in more extreme cases, seeking possession of a person's home.

All cases of anti-social behaviour that have not been resolved at Nettleton and Dudeney have been referred to Housing's Complex Case team to review and explore remedial options available. Once this review is complete, we will let residents know the types of remedial action we have taken, without identifying individual residents.

We are also very keen to improve how we respond proactively to reports of anti-social behaviour.

In light of this, we are reviewing our antisocial behaviour policy and will be involving residents in this review, I understand that a number of residents have already been invited to participate.

I am unable to make reference to any specific household in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned. However, I can confirm that if we have failed to prevent anti-social behaviour and do not have enforcement options open to us, if a tenant wants help to move, we will generally help facilitate this.

We are also reviewing our provision of support to our most vulnerable tenants. This includes reviewing how we better support residents who are moving from temporary accommodation into settled accommodation. We wish to ensure that perpetrators of anti-social behaviour receive the support they need to sustain their tenancy without their behaviour impacting on others. In addition, as you outline, we have also significantly increased our provision of Housing First and Housing Led support accommodation for clients with multiple and complex needs moving from rough sleeping into more permanent homes.

In relation to the point made about carpets, we agree that simple remedial measures such as provision of carpeting with good underlay can help prevent such issues escalating. We no longer routinely remove carpets from empty properties if they are in good condition unless we need to remove them to carry out other work. We also have a small budget for carpets for use in general needs housing. The Housing Estates Service run a furniture recycling service for residents, and we will consider whether we are able to expand this to include underlay when it is in good condition.

I hope this information is useful and the residents can continue to work with officers to respond to the issues arising and to participate in our antisocial behaviour policy review.

Following the response:

Martin Gray stated that all residents are equal and that they trust councillors. However, support has broken down and this was indicative of the poor responses. Those who complain are told to fill in a form and go away. The councillors are asked to create an oversight committee with an eight member task force to articulate on behalf of residents. Residents have low expectations. The committee needs to make real decisions.

The Chair noted the further comments and stated that setting up committee would be looked at.

Councillor Fowler considered the issue upsetting and had contacted officers on this matter before relating to Nettleton residents. A report on anti-social behaviour would be welcomed.

Councillor Platts thanked the speakers and stated they had experienced the same in their ward and also called for a report.

Councillor Williams thanked the speakers for the deputation and noted they knew of residents who had waited fourteen months for a carpet.

Councillor Barnett considered that some residents were not getting the care they needed. The councillor noted that the Brighton Fund can help residents, however some residents were being ignored. The councillor stated they had photographic evidence of drug dealing at some properties.

Councillor Mears thanked the speakers for the deputation and stated they were aware of these serious issues and the need for 24/7 support. This was a matter of urgency and the timescales are important as drug dealing was ongoing.

Councillor Gibson considered the matter an important issue and endorsed support for residents. The council need to work hard and be clear about housing. The level of frustration is understood and how anti-social behaviour can destroy lives.

## 22 ITEMS REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

22.1 There were no items referred from full council.

## 23 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

23.1 To consider the following matters raised by councillors:

**(a) Petitions:** There were none for this committee.

**(b) Written Questions:** The following questions were received from Councillors:

***From Councillor Meadows:*** *When senior officers or managers of services for vulnerable people asked to from home during Covid; were their positions considered for example, managing the services for our rough sleepers? And how could they manage local services if working from home, especially if 'home' is say in Scotland?*

Response: Thank you for your question about services to vulnerable people during the Covid lockdowns.

The Housing service continued to provide a high level of service to our most vulnerable residents throughout the pandemic, both in person and virtually, in line with Government and Public Health instruction and guidance.

During the Covid-19 pandemic the Council worked within strict Government and Public Health parameters, including for people to work from home unless involved in delivering essential services. In addition to provision of essential services, the Council also had a responsibility to protect the health and safety of our residents, staff and contractors.

Assessments were made of which services were essential as well as an assessment of which staff members were vulnerable themselves (for example owing to underlying health conditions, age or pregnancy) and needed to be shielded or lived with a vulnerable person that required shielding.

Subject to risk assessment, we identified how best to use available resources to maintain critical face-to-face service provision including:

- Providing essential emergency and urgent repairs services.
- Accommodating rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping under Everyone In. Including in person assessment and support and food for these vulnerable clients.
- Maintaining our Estates Service throughout the pandemic, including additional cleaning of common areas.

Where residents were particularly at risk, we quickly developed alternative service delivery models where appropriate, including supporting thousands of vulnerable tenants and residents in their homes through phone and other virtual contact.

Some managers and senior staff directing delivery of essential services worked from offices following a thorough risk assessment. In line with Government guidance, most council staff worked from home, with the council moving quickly to make use of technology to support home working which includes effective management of services.

In this respect, the location of managers' homes or the reasons why they may have been working from home, has not adversely impacted the responsive and important work we were able to successfully provide to rough sleepers and other vulnerable residents.

Supplementary question:

Councillor Meadows considered that managers should have checked where 'home' was when sending senior officers to work from 'home' and considered what would be a reasonable commuting distance to work. The councillor stated they understood the issues surrounding working from 'home' but considered that frontline services had no reason to work at 'home' and should be within a reasonable commute.

***From Councillor Barnett:*** *I would like to know why it is taking so long to relet houses. I have 7 at least in my ward that have been empty for months and at least 1 has been empty for 2 years (that is what I know about) with the great deal of residents that are waiting for a home it is not acceptable.*

Response: Thank you for your question about the time taken to let empty council homes.

As previously reported to Housing Committee, one of the most significant negative impacts of the pandemic has been upon our turnaround time for empty homes, meaning we have an unacceptably high number of void properties at this time.

As advised, this was caused by pandemic restrictions on what works the Council, and our contractors were able to undertake on our empty properties to meet the standard for re-letting, which has led to a backlog of empty council homes. As part of our Covid recovery plan we are committed to improving our empty homes re-let time.

As outlined in the 'Housing Committee workplan progress update and Housing performance report - Quarter 1 2021/22' being considered at Housing Committee on 22 September, as part of our recovery measures our performance on average relet time is now improving post pandemic.

Our recovery measures to continue to address this issue include:

- Provision of additional senior management capacity in the Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service.

- Approval of additional procurement options to increase our contractor base and the empty homes work contractors can carry out on our behalf.
- Commencement of significant recruitment campaign for additional permanently employed skilled trades staff within the Housing Repairs Maintenance Service. Over time this will increase our in-house capacity for direct delivery of works.

I am advised that you have had responses to earlier queries about specific empty homes in your ward. If you could provide details to officers of the empty homes referred to in your question, they can check whether there are any responses outstanding or update you on those properties.

Supplementary question:

Councillor Barnett wondered why properties were still empty, with approximately 7/9 properties in their ward. The councillor thanked the Assistant Director of Housing for their assistance.

***From Councillor Mears:*** *Following the changes made by the Administration to Brighton and Hove City Councils Allocation Policy, which placed homeless people at the top of the priority list for council housing, we have seen many vulnerable clients being moved into Sheltered Housing in the city.*

*There have been some very serious issues that are now being experienced by residents and staff in our sheltered schemes. Many homeless residents placed in sheltered housing under the administration's priority policy have Drug, alcohol, and Mental health issues affecting their lives but are being allocated in to our sheltered blocks without 24 hour support.*

*This is having a very serious effect on other elderly and vulnerable residents living in sheltered blocks and our staff trying to deal with the problems.*

1. *What steps are the administration taking to address these serious issues and protect all residents of sheltered blocks.*

Response: Thank you for your question about the Council's Allocation Policy and people who have recently moved into the Council's Seniors Housing schemes.

Since April 2020 there have been 85 lets to Seniors Housing schemes, of which 13 had a background of homelessness. Anecdotally there have been limited nuisance reports from residents. However, if there are known concerns at particular schemes, we take this very seriously and will investigate thoroughly. More information would be helpful in this respect.

In general terms, the Covid-19 emergency has had a profound impact on housing needs of the city, and the Council is looking at an appropriate response to meet these

challenges. In line with statutory duties, the Council is housing those in greatest need and has prioritised allocations for those facing homelessness over the pandemic period.

While some housing applicants will present with complex needs, not everyone who faces homelessness will have drug, alcohol or mental health issues, or indeed have those issues and then go on to cause a nuisance or annoyance to others. However, we do know that with an ageing population, and because of the pandemic, older people's needs are increasing across the board.

The Seniors Housing service has always worked closely with those residents with more challenging needs, often in partnership with health and social care colleagues, and / or more specialist organisations.

The Seniors Housing service is working closely with the Healthy Living Team to ensure that staff and residents have access to specialist advice and support. During the pandemic the team has provided a range of information to all residents on keeping well, either directly or through the post. This has also included information on accessing mental health support given the impact of the pandemic.

The Housing Service also has a Tenancy Support Team which helps those who are struggling to maintain their tenancy, including those living in seniors housing schemes. If there are problems in communities, we encourage residents to raise this directly with the scheme manager or the service as soon as possible.

The Housing service is careful to ensure that whatever action we take, we are sensitive to the needs of everyone, including those being complained against. We wish to avoid stigmatising those who have faced homelessness or have mental health or other health, care and support issues as this would be a serious failing in our equalities duties.

Supplementary question:

Councillor Mears noted that this was a serious issue and those in sheltered housing needed 24 hour support.

*2. What is the current waiting list for housing repairs at council properties in Brighton and Hove?*

Response: As of Friday 10<sup>th</sup> September, the number of outstanding housing repairs was 6960.

As outlined in the 'Housing Committee workplan progress update and Housing performance report - Quarter 1 2021/22' also being considered at Housing Committee on 22 September, as part of our recovery measures, our performance on completion of routine repairs is improving post pandemic.

The Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service is prioritising repairs firstly by urgency and secondly by age and therefore this backlog does consist of many older jobs. So, a percentage of the overall figure will be lower priority jobs that are responded to in 20 days and the remaining will be jobs of a lower priority which are effectively forming the

backlog. As the backlog of older jobs is addressed and works completed the average days to complete figure reported will increase temporarily.

As with our recovery plan to improve empty property turnaround times we are seeking to maximise use of our approved list of contractors for the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Service to provide access to key resources. The Service has also commenced a large-scale recruitment process that will begin to address the backlog and ultimately reduce the time taken to complete routine repairs.

Supplementary question:

Councillor Mears considered that the issues around bring repairs in house were well known and residents were frustrated as the systems were not working at this time.

*3. What is the current number of vacant council housing properties in Brighton and Hove, awaiting being let out to those on the housing list?*

Response: As of Friday 10 September, the number of vacant general needs and Seniors Housing council homes is 277.

As outlined in our response to the question from Cllr Barnett, as part of our recovery measures our performance on average relet time for empty homes is now improving post pandemic.

Supplementary question:

There was no further question on this point.

*4. Through the Homeless Reduction Board, I have asked for a financial breakdown of money the Council has received from the Government for Homelessness and rough sleepers. This information is still outstanding despite having been requested multiple times.*

*a) Please can the above information be provided.*

Response: Thank you for your question regarding the financial breakdown of funding which the Council has received for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping. I apologise that you have not received a reply to your previous requests.

a) The funding is as follows:

- Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) funding received from Government has been regularly reported to Housing Committee. The Council were awarded NSAP shorter-term/interim accommodation and immediate support revenue funding of £3,428,766 to 31 March 2021. This was the highest sum awarded to any individual local authority in the country. In addition, the council were awarded a capital sum of £1.752m with revenue support of £669,600 (over four years) to deliver 30 Home Purchase Policy, Housing First homes for move on by 31 March 2021, and £609,939 to deliver 20 units of high support accommodation for 3.5 years

thorough partners St Mungo's and Clarion.

- Rough Sleeper Initiative 4 grant awarded for single homeless including rough sleepers for 2021/22 was £3,302,305. This covers supported accommodation for single people as well as floating support.
- The council was awarded £6,240,090 in 2021/22 for Homelessness Prevention Grant. This is a combination of the previously called Flexible Homeless Support Grant and Homelessness Burdens Funding. These grants are awarded by Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) based on previous figures of homelessness and temporary accommodation. It is primarily to fund the management element of temporary accommodation that was removed from the housing benefit several years ago. It is also for the prevention of homelessness.
- Grant to provide private sector accommodation to ex-offenders who may become or are homeless and to whom we do not have statutory accommodation duties towards was £64,000. This is a one-off award.
- Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme (RSAP). Under the RSAP round 1 funding, the MHCLG awarded £0.700m towards a £2.800m scheme to enable the purchase of 12 new homes to be used for Housing Led Support for rough sleepers with complex needs. The council has also been awarded £511,800 to pay for the revenue support costs for these tenants up to the end of 2023/24. The RSAP round 1 funding also awarded £1.163m towards purchasing a further 30 properties under 10-year leases for Rapid Rehousing scheme aimed at lower need rough sleepers.
- More details are in the table below:

	Capital grant award 21/22 & 22/23	Grant for revenue support costs 21/22	Grant for revenue support costs 22/23	Grant for revenue support costs 23/24
Home purchase expansion to 30 properties to deliver Housing Led Support*	700,000	65,500	214,200	232,100
30x 10 year leased properties to deliver Rapid Rehousing Scheme	1,163,000	99,076	178,500	178,500
Totals	1,863,000	164,576	392,700	410,600

Supplementary question:

Councillor Mears requested that the answers and the above table be sent to the committee Members, as well as to those councillors who submitted questions.

*b) Can the Council confirm if the programme to provide accommodation to all homeless people in the city as has operated during the pandemic still stands or has now finished?*

Response: The service provision to homeless people and rough sleepers in the city during the pandemic has been subject to regular reporting to Housing Committee, including detailed reports in March and June 2021. There is a further report to Housing Committee on 22 September 2021. Key information includes that:

- The council continues to discharge its statutory accommodation duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act.
- The council will continue to seek to offer accommodation to all verified rough sleepers where this is permissible within the Council's powers.
- In line with proposed easing and ending of national Covid-19 restrictions and opening up of the council's usual homeless prevention and housing options services, Housing Committee in March 2021 agreed that by 21st June 2021, the accommodation offer to those at risk of rough sleeping, (the Covid- 2 cohort), made for the duration of the pandemic is ended where no accommodation duty is owed by the council.

Supplementary question:

Councillor Mears requested that the Housing committee pre meets include all the reports in the agenda. The Chair stated although it was difficult to get all reports ready in time for the pre meeting, it is the endeavour to do better for the next committee.

**(c) Letters:** There were none for this committee.

**(d) Notices of Motion:** There were none for this committee.

## **24 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE**

24.1 The Head of Housing Needs introduced the report to the committee.

Questions

24.2 Councillor Williams was informed that the council were looking at the Local Government association advice programme.

24.3 Councillor Meadows was informed that the council are looking at resources to achieve the legal advice required for an ethical lettings agency by a review group. It was noted that the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) is not relevant when engaging with groups as no personal information is shared. The report has been produced to make people aware of what the housing team can do. Resources will be needed to set

up a review group. The councillor was further informed that the council are engaging with landlord groups to help with energy certificates. It is not considered that the council would be unfair competition to the rest of the market, however, competition issues will be checked. It was stated that the £100,000 needed will need to be identified after the review. This information will be brought back to committee.

- 24.4 Councillor Mears expressed concerns regarding the council will be reviewing of houses of multiple occupancy (HMO), and the running of a business by the council. HMO figures should be seen by councillors. The proposed recommendation amendment is not required, and the housing stock does not meet criteria, nothing has changed. The councillor did not support the report or the proposed amendment.
- 24.5 Councillor Gibson was informed that the information supplied by the voluntary sector was of some assistance (it identified approximately 80 complaints across the city around disrepair), but the legal advice is that it would be subject to challenge as further detail is required to ensure it is robust if used to support consent for a selective licensing scheme and so has limited weight. The councillor was also informed that the evidence base is complex, and the evidence needs to be robust.
- 24.6 Councillor Williams proposed the amendment to the recommendations and stated that the council needs to commit to introducing selective licensing. The Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) can help the council with information and resources have been found, the landlords of the city will benefit.
- 24.7 Councillor Osborne seconded the amendment and stated that the amendment would make clear the way for selective licensing, bring groups together and work jointly.
- 24.8 Councillor Meadows expressed concerns regarding the finances and was informed by Councillor Gibson that the funds would be reviewed by the budget review group.
- 24.9 Councillor Mears expressed concerns stating that selective licensing has been around for a long time and it is a sensitive issue. It considered that officers will need resources to got to landlords who aren't behaving, and the timing is off, making the issues very difficult. The conservatives are aware of issues in the city and note the work not yet done.
- 24.10 The Chair stated that the amendment was to make clear what can and cannot be done.
- 24.11 Councillor Gibson stated that the review equals an improvement in conditions.
- Vote
- 24.12 A vote was taken on the amendment and by a vote of 7, with 3 abstentions, the amendment was agreed.
- 24.13 A vote was taken, and by a vote of 7, with 3 abstentions, the recommendations as amended were agreed.

**RESOLVED:**

- 2.1 Housing Committee note the updates on progress against key elements of the Housing Committee Work Plan objectives to improve the quality and management of homes in the private rented sector as set out in this report.
- 2.2 Housing Committee restates its commitment in the joint housing and homelessness programme to work towards introducing selective licensing in the City of Brighton and Hove as soon as possible and to seek resources to support this.
- 2.3 Housing Committee note the expansion of the existing Private Sector Housing enforcement team, as outlined in paragraph 3.1, and that the service will assess the impact of the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy and new legislation in this area. 2.4 Housing Committee note that, as outlined in paragraph 5.1, officers will seek to support renters to understand what legal remedies are available to them under the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Strategy, including any provided by new legislation in this area.
- 2.5 Housing Committee request a review of the current national position with regard to selective licensing designations to better understand the current context within which any approvals are being given. Identifying the resources that are required to undertake this work to be considered.
- 2.6 That Housing Committee agrees the re-purposing and expansion of the Direct Lets scheme as an ethical letting agency incorporating Good Landlord standards. Any additional costs arising as a result of these changes will be brought back to committee for approval.
- 2.7 That Housing Committee notes the funding required to explore and scope the feasibility of a broader based ethical letting agency proposal. This will require an estimated budget of £0.100m.
- 2.8 That officers urgently develop options for sustaining tenancies where a tenant with arrears faces eviction and could become homeless.

## **25 LEASEHOLD PAYMENT OPTIONS AND UPDATES**

- 25.1 The Assistant Director of Housing introduced the report to the committee.

### Questions

- 25.2 Councillor Mears was informed that the council did engage with residents and plans for further engagement are going ahead. The councillor expressed concerns regarding the Mears contract and was informed by the Chair that an independent review of the contract had been carried out.
- 25.3 Councillor Meadows was informed that the information relating to those who die with an equity release loan will be looked into and shared with the committee. It was noted that no appeals have been heard regarding the discretionary reduction of service charges. The results of the satisfaction survey will be shared with the councillors and it was also noted that the work of Resident Inspectors compliments but does not replace the work

undertaken by our professional qualified council staff. It was confirmed that 100% of works are checked.

- 25.4 Councillor Williams was informed that the residents and leaseholders were engaged before COVID-19, however this was not possible during the pandemic. Resident inspectors are continuing to give feedback.

Vote

- 25.5 A vote was taken, and the committee agreed by a unanimous vote to accept the recommendations.

**RESOLVED:**

- 2.1 That committee notes the outcome of the consultation with tenants and leaseholders on proposals to make changes to the leaseholder payment options.
- 2.2 That committee note that the full financial, legal and other implications of the points arising from the consultation will need to be considered and recommendations arising from consultation on changes to the leaseholder payment options will be brought to the next meeting of Housing Committee to enable an informed decision.
- 2.3 That committee notes the progress in other areas of leasehold management as detailed in section 5 of this report.

**26 HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT IT SYSTEM REPLACEMENT**

- 26.1 The Head of Income Involvement & Improvement introduced the report to the committee.

Questions

- 26.2 Councillor Williams was informed that the process of procurement does not allow those applying to specify whether companies are local. It was noted that the system required would be specialised and local businesses are offered help and support to make a bid.
- 26.3 Councillor Mears was informed that the current contract cost was £66,000 and £69,000 and the new contract would be around £10,000 more. It was noted that the older systems need upgrading. The new systems will work within the IT programme with higher levels of accessibility and ability to 'talk' to each other.
- 26.4 Councillor Meadows was informed that the new system would not necessarily need to be geographically located at Moulsecoomb as it would be a system on IT only.
- 26.5 Councillor Osborne was informed that a great deal of testing has been done and a lot learnt from other councils. There would be on guarantee of no glitches and this would be a leap of faith to some extent. Romanwood will be able to bid for the work as the council must go to market when using public money. Standing orders state that procurement over £500,000 should come to committee for decisions.

## Vote

26.6 A vote was taken, and by 8 to 2 the committee agreed the recommendations.

**RESOLVED:**

- 2.1 Housing Committee agree and then recommend to Policy & Resources Committee:
- 2.2 That the Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities is granted delegated authority to:
- i) Procure a new asset management IT system for the councils' housing service.
  - ii) Award a contract with the preferred supplier for a period of five years, with an option to extend by two years subject to satisfactory supplier performance.
- 2.3 Approval of a £0.515m budget to be added to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital programme for the project's procurement and implementation activity.

**27 NEXT STEPS - ROUGH SLEEPING AND ACCOMMODATION DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC AND RECOVERY**

27.1 The Head of Housing Needs introduced the report to the committee.

## Questions

- 27.2 Councillor Mears considered the finances should be totalled at the end of the report and was informed that the hotel acquisition was for 6 months only and cost £138,000. The 81 rooms referred to in the report were spread between hotels and hostels in the city. The funding comes from successfully grant funding bids. It was noted that the authority has a statutory need to help those in temporary accommodation. It was confirmed that the Contain Management Outbreak Fund (COMF) has funds remaining and costs would be neutral to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- 27.3 Councillor Barnett was informed that the 45% of social housing lets were too homeless, 57 to transfers and 69 to home seekers.
- 27.4 Councillor Gibson was informed that written answers given to the committee regarding the questions relating to the calculations of move-on rates, out of the two groups in the report, what was the percentage of homes achieved for those moved-on, number of those suitable for re-connections and what assumptions are there about rent recovery.
- 27.5 Councillor Williams noted the 42% of social housing lets to homeless people and noted the government should stop the right-to-buy scheme.
- 27.6 Councillor Mears considered that the finances needed to be clear in the report. The councillor was informed that the written responses would be given regarding the funding from The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) which covers all of Sussex and Brighton and Hove. The Executive Director - Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities stated that there isn't a separate pot for Brighton and

Hove and work would be needed before details can be given. The councillor welcomed a complex briefing on the matter.

- 27.7 Councillor Meadows was informed that the council have a statutory requirement to support to support homeless and those on the housing register. It was noted that many homeless have many and varied issues, which includes housing.

#### Debate

- 27.8 Councillor Gibson considered the table in the report regarding the social housing lets to be very useful, however the out-of-city placements were a concern where people would be isolated from services and support. It was considered good that the government want to end homelessness and wish that the right-to-buy scheme would be reduced. The government were also asked to repeal the £20 less in universal credit following the easing of pandemic regulations. It was considered that the report sets out many positives and highlights the huge challenges such as the lifting of the evictions ban and furloughing. It was noted that numbers of homeless have been reduced and are second only to London. No Second night out scheme was considered successful, and it was also considered good to prevent the revolving-door scenario for the homeless. The councillor commended the report and asked that the re-connections be monitored and for the committee to support the recommendations.
- 27.9 The Assistant Director of Housing that there has been a 40% fall in out-of-area placements. Currently 122 have been placed in Eastbourne compared to 75 before the pandemic.

#### Vote

- 27.10 A vote was taken, and by 7 to 3 the recommendations were agreed. (Councillor Meadows noted recommendation 2.1)

### **RESOLVED:**

#### **That Housing Committee:**

- 2.1 That Housing Committee note the low number of verified rough sleepers and that the Council will continue to seek to offer accommodation to all verified rough sleepers where this is permissible within the Council's powers to consolidate this achievement.

#### **That Housing Committee recommends to Policy and Resources Committee:**

- 2.2 To approve a capital budget of £2.800m to be included in the HRA Capital Investment Programme 2021/22 financed by HRA Borrowing of £2.100m funded by the rental stream and an MHCLG contribution of £0.700m. This is for the purchase of 12 new homes to deliver a Housing Led Support scheme for higher need rough sleepers.
- 2.3 To approve a capital budget of £3.240m be included in the General fund Capital Investment Programme 2021/22 for the acquisition of 30 properties on 10-year leases to deliver Rapid Re-housing for lower need rough sleepers. This will be funded by a

contribution from MHCLG of £1.163m and will require borrowing of £2.080m, funded by the rental stream.

- 2.4 To approve the extension of emergency short term hotels from October until March 2022 in light of continuing pressures of those to whom the council owes a statutory accommodation duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act in emergency accommodation.
- 2.5 To agree to use the remaining 2021/22 Contain Management Outbreak Fund (COMF) grant (estimated at £1.615m) to support the continuing pressures caused by the pandemic of those in emergency accommodation to whom the council owes a Housing duty.
- 2.6 To agree to the acquisition of a hotel to deliver in the region of 15 - 20 rooms to enable provision for the SWEP between October 2021 and March 2022.

## **28 HOUSING COMMITTEE WORKPLAN PROGRESS UPDATE AND HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 1 2021/22**

- 28.1 The Head of Income Involvement & Improvement introduced the report to the committee.

### Questions

- 28.2 Councillor Meadows was informed that the total number of complaints was 83, 81% had been responded to within 10 days and the re-let timescales are being improved.
- 28.3 Councillor Mears was informed that the apprenticeship scheme had been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and new scheme would start soon. Residents with rent arrears are given support, but not a lax approach. When needed the council will go to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) for full payments.
- 28.4 Councillor Gibson was informed that the air and ground source heat pumps are being installed, as well as solar panels, retrospectively.
- 28.5 Councillor Williams was informed that tenants in arrears are helped with discretionary house payments and given support by other council directorates, and back dated benefits can help. The council look at the whole picture, in the round and help residents to consolidate debts. The ability to move-on when in arrears depends on the situation, there is no general way forward to assist tenants move-on.
- 28.6 Councillor Osborne was informed that the number of days to resolve cases was to be improved, however it was noted that gathering evidence takes time.
- 28.7 Councillor Meadows was informed that the electric certificates were not needed legally for council stock, however, it is good practice.

### Vote

28.8 A vote was taken, and the committee agreed unanimously to accept the recommendation.

**RESOLVED:**

2.1 That Housing Committee notes the report.

**29 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION EVICTIONS ANNUAL REPORT**

29.1 The Head of Housing Needs introduced the report to the committee.

Questions

29.2 Councillor Mears was informed that the after the options after the pandemic would include looking at reconnection options, private rental and possible move-on. Social housing would be allocated on a case-by-case basis.

29.3 Councillor Platts was informed that abandoned meant that the current occupier leaves accommodation provided by private or council with no notification. It was noted that not suitable was a different matter which is covered in the next steps report. Councillor Platts stated that a resident had been given an unsuitable property. It was noted that particular cases could not be discussed at the committee meeting, however, the matter would be looked into as soon as possible.

29.4 Councillor Meadows was informed that the majority of those evicted not receiving support found accommodation themselves.

29.5 Councillor Gibson was informed that the information relating to data comparisons with previous years, a tables update to include previous years, information on performance of providers and the council emergency account would be provided in an additional report to cover all the relevant information requested.

29.6 The Chair noted that no evictions from council accommodation have taken place as of the date of the meeting.

Vote

29.7 A vote was taken, and the committee agreed by a unanimous vote to accept the recommendations.

**RESOLVED:**

2.1 That Housing Committee notes the performance and end of placements by Emergency Accommodation providers reported.

2.2 That Housing Committee note that 2020/21 was an exceptional year in terms of both client placements and the complexity of client need.

- 2.3 That Housing Committee acknowledges the continuing efforts of staff within the service, our commissioned services and contractors to maintain tenancies throughout the Covid 19 period.
- 2.4 That Housing Committee notes that the forthcoming emergency accommodation re-procurement of contracts (unavoidably delayed due to Covid 19), seeks to enhance tenancy support and sustainment of emergency accommodation.

**30 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL**

- 30.1 There were none.

**31 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS**

- 31.1 There were no Part Two proceedings.

The meeting concluded at 8.30pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of