

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE

4.00pm 21 JUNE 2023

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Williams (Chair), Councillor Czolak (Deputy Chair), McLeay (Opposition Spokesperson), Baghoth, Fowler, Grimshaw, Meadows, Nann, Sheard and Hewitt (Substitute)

PART ONE

1 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

- a) **Declaration of Substitutes:** Councillor Hewitt substituted for Councillor De Oliveira.
- b) **Declarations of Interest:** Councillor Grimshaw declared they were a council tenant. Councillors Williams, Czolak, Sheard and Grimshaw declared they were members of Acorn.
- c) **Exclusion of Press and Public:** As there were Part Two items on the agenda, it was agreed that the press and public would be excluded from the meeting when any of the agenda items are under consideration.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 2.1 The Minutes of the 15 March 2023 committee meeting were agreed.

3 CHAIRS COMMUNICATIONS

- 3.1 Welcome to the June 2023 Housing and New Homes Committee. Welcome new and seasoned committee members. I am delighted to be chairing and look forward to chairing for the next few years. I am hopeful and enthusiastic that during that time we will see to fruition our manifesto pledges and significantly improve housing conditions for our residents.

To that end we are certainly off to a good start. Our quarterly review reflects that we are doing better in responding to our council tenants and we are making significant progress in tackling the backlog of repairs.

I am really happy to announce that We are investing in our Housing Repairs & Maintenance apprenticeship programme to increase employment opportunities within our communities and city. Funding has been agreed to expand our programme and provide up to 20 apprenticeships this year, with a new Property Maintenance (with plumbing) qualification starting in September, alongside our electrical apprenticeship opportunities.

We would particularly welcome applications from our residents. We will be holding an Apprenticeship Experience Event on Friday 14th July at the Housing Centre to allow for those interested in learning more about being an apprentice to take part in activities as part of our recruitment process and meet some of our repairs & maintenance team.

More information is available via Homing In, the council website and posters in your community'.

The safety of our council tenants is a high priority, and we are embarking on extensive programme to make sure we reach the highest safety standards in our council homes.

We are investing £13 million in building, fire and other health and safety measures in council homes to get ahead of new national regulations expected to come in next spring. This investment is to make sure we continue to provide safe, good quality council homes. Your safety is our key priority. We're carrying out an ongoing review of our building health and safety to check what new measures we need to put in place around fire safety, asbestos management, gas and electrical safety, lifts and water safety.

On top of the extensive programme of fire risk assessments and ongoing door replacement programme, we will be carrying out detailed building surveys on our blocks of flats to make sure we have the most up to date information. We hold data on asbestos across council housing and have a process in place to manage asbestos risk when work is carried out. While the asbestos risk is low in our properties, we need to improve how we store the information so it's in a single system.

We are committed to increasing affordable housing supply in the city. As well as new build schemes the council has an active acquisition programme which includes buying back homes lost through the right to buy and seeking opportunities to increase social housing stock by buying off plan from developers. An opportunity has arisen to acquire Kubic apartments, a block of thirty eight flats in Whitehawk. By purchasing a new build development, we can accelerate the provision of much needed homes.

I have had the pleasure a few days ago to attend the official opening of two major housing developments that have been completed in Portslade this year providing a total of 91 new council homes. Residents have moved into 49 council flats at Quay View Wellington Road. These are the first new homes delivered through the council's Homes for Brighton & Hove partnership, with affordable housing provider, the Hyde Group. The Quay View homes are part of a Homes for Brighton & Hove development of 104 one, 2 and 3-bedroom flats, with the other flats available as shared ownership through Hyde. The partnership is also building 242 low-cost homes in Coldean, which includes a further 127 council-rented homes. The Coldean Lane development is due to be completed this winter.

In addition, 42 council flats, at Jay Court and Perching Court in Victoria Road, welcomed tenants earlier this year as part of our New Homes for Neighbourhoods building programme. These new homes in both developments were designed by the council's own in-house architects to be highly energy efficient, which will help keep energy bills low for residents. So important given our cost-of-living crisis which is causing much hardship. All of these new homes are built to a very high standard and are an

achievement to be proud of They have been let to people on the council's housing register. A huge thanks you to all those involved in making this happen.

We need more, many more of such developments let's do all we can to make this happen. It is crucial to tackle the housing crisis. We must do everything possible.

4 CALL OVER

4.1 Agenda items 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 were called for discussion.

5 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

a) Petitions:

There are none for this agenda.

b) Written Questions from Members of the Public:

There were three for this agenda.

1. From Daniel Harris:

"I think agenda Item 9 is blooming marvellous, what a steal for the city bringing this in-house. Active listening indeed. The Kubix building and public land asset sale to the developer was an injustice to the community, one which has been put right. Last November the developer tried to rescind on the 40% affordable homes agreement, I spoke against the change at planning committee, these are energy efficient, accessible, and are perfect for in-house temporary accommodation. Well Done Indeed! Temporary Accommodation Spend last year was very high, will we see more plans for more in-house emergency & Temporary accommodation this coming administration?"

Response: Thank you for your question. The Kubic Apartments, in agenda Item 9, are not being 'brought in-house'. It is a proposal to purchase a property from a private developer. This has partly been possible because the council was able to secure a grant from Homes England. That said, I would agree with the Mr Harris that this has been an excellent opportunity the council has acted upon. Once the property has been secured, it would not be used for temporary accommodation, but instead would provide a secure council tenancy, at social housing rents, for 38 households. The council will continue to explore opportunities to purchase properties, where this is initially viable. These may or may not be for the purposes of temporary accommodation, as each property would need to be considered on its own merits.

Supplementary question: The 3.6m over spend is a concern. Money needs to be spent on services, please look at bringing housing into council ownership.

Response: All matters raised are taken into consideration.

2. From: Charles Harrison

Provision of New Build Council Homes - "I am pleased to note, from the Labour Party's Manifesto pledge (Homes for Everyone), that you are committed to continuing the additional council homes provision, building on the approx. 500 additional homes achieved from May 2019 to May 2023 and to build 800 additional council homes. Would you please clarify that the current administration's target is to build 800 additional Council Homes during the period May 2023 to May 2027? If not, what is the target for this period?"

Response: Thank you for your question. The council is committed to creating a supply of new council homes. Since May 2023, 52 new build council homes have been completed at Quay View, Portslade (49) and Manor Hill (3). We have secured a further 6 properties through the Home Purchase Policy 'buy back' scheme. As Mr Harrison can see from today's reports we are also seeking to approve the purchase of another 38 units of accommodation, which will also become new council homes, at social rent. We have a target of achieving 318 additional council homes for 2023/24, which is the highest target set for any one year. A current review of the pipeline is being undertaken to inform the anticipated numbers to be achieved in subsequent years.

Supplementary question: Please speed up home building and make a construction tracker available to the public.

3. From: David Gibson

"In March the council agreed to instigate negotiations to end the current lease arrangements with seaside homes and return 499 properties to direct ownership and management of the council. Tenants will under this arrangement benefit from a rent reduction and given the cost of living pressures that people the sooner this can be finalised the better. Please can you update me on progress and the current anticipated date the council expects (if all goes well) to end the lease and lower people's rents?"

Response: Thank you for your question. The council will be entering negotiations with Seaside Homes and other parties with a shared interest. We expect these negotiations to be complex. We can neither pre-determine the outcome of these negotiations, nor the time it will take should an agreement be reached. As such no date can be given.

Supplementary question: Please prioritise bringing Seaside Homes in house.

(c) **Deputations:** There was one for this meeting.

From Adrian Hart:

A Crisis of Affordability. (A deputation to the Housing and New Homes Committee 21/06/23)

Much of the focus on the city's housing crisis understandably centres on the plight of people experiencing housing insecurity or indeed the lack of any home at all. I want to commend local campaigners on their efforts but also draw this committee's attention to a crucial set of issues highlighted at Octobers *Action on Homes* one day-conference organised by Brighton & Hove Housing Coalition (Cllr Williams - I think I saw you in attendance). (1) Nationally, the crisis of housing supply has been approached by central

government as something remedied by a top-down house building drive enforced by targets. However, the 'build more homes' mantra sidesteps the issue of affordability. In reality, Britain needs to build council homes by the 100s of thousands. In Brighton & Hove, as the birth-rate drops, as half the population is swapped out by those who can afford to come and live here, as school leavers realise, they'll have to leave the city to have a home of their own ... it feels to many of us that successive council administrations have failed to grasp – or certainly to act on – the key obstacles to resolving the crisis of affordability.

I lived in Lambeth in the 1980s – I learnt that a radical council does not cower to government decree. It unites with other like-minded councils to demand change. In this case that means demanding that central government abolish the 1961 Land Compensation Act (2). It means seeking, as London has done, that government regulate Airbnb and other forms of short-term letting in our city (3). It means demanding that government enable local action on empty homes (4). This new administration should recognise, as the public does, that housing is the political issue of our times. On behalf of citizens forced out of Brighton by this crisis, I hope the new administration will be a campaigning council issuing relentless demands on government to engage in a large scale nationwide council house building programme. Of course, this means challenging the oligopoly of the big house builders. Until the issue of land ownership is tackled, the crisis of affordability will continue. Big business buys up pre-planning permission land and the iniquitous 1961 Act ensures the owners reap the financial gain from permissions granted (in other countries 50 percent of the land gain goes to the community). Buying up land, hoovering up permissions and sometimes sitting on the land for years while values rise results in the big developers putting the small house builders out of business.

One morsel of good news is that the government has asked the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to conduct an inquiry into the house building sector (5). Could this be a challenge to the big house-builder oligopoly? So long as this virtual cartel continues to dominate the sector, rents and house prices will stay high ensuring the housing crisis will rumble on.

It is my hope that the Housing and New Homes Committee will celebrate the government rebels who recently forced an end to the imposition of targets. For years B&H hasn't been able to demonstrate the required 5 year housing land supply and that, as you know, came at a cost (6). However, criticism that the end of targets has created a "nimby's charter" is unwarranted. Yes, permissions are down but most of these simply lead to more unaffordable homes. As my colleague at the Brighton Society Jeremy Mustoe has written:

"House building targets kill off local planning control and community involvement. The emphasis on pure numbers leads to the wrong type of housing and it ignores other important planning considerations such as heritage and landscape concerns. It effectively transfers power over planning matters into the hands of big powerful developers".

I hope this committee concurs with this assessment. We must transform BHCC into a radical, campaigning council that demands current and future governments break the oligopoly and build council houses on a massive scale countrywide. As a first step I trust

the council will press the government to legislate to deal with the Airbnb mega hosts and the glut of empty homes which make renting impossible for most people (7).

Thank you.

Signed by six local residents.

Notes:

- (1) The conference inspired this essay: <https://www.brighton-society.org.uk/housing-held-hostage-a-2023-update/>
- (2) 1961 Land Compensation Act:
It is land ownership that stands in the way. Big business buys up pre-planning permission land and the iniquitous 1961 Land Compensation Act ensures the owners reap the financial gain from permissions granted (in other countries 50 percent of the land gain goes to the community). Buying up land, hoovering up permissions and sometimes sitting on the land for years while values rise results in the big developers putting the small house builders out of business. In short, the big house builders act like a cartel. That governments (both Labour and Tory) have so far refused to take on such a powerful vested interest speaks for itself. The push will have to come in the form of a people's campaign. MPs should tell voters where they stand on this question.
- (3) Airbnb: In Brighton & Hove, there are over 2,000 houses and flats are 'entire home/apartment' Airbnb rentals. The UK government has legislated in London so that Airbnb properties cannot be let for more than 90 days a year (this restriction applies to both 90 days in a row or 90 days throughout the year). Government must do this for Brighton and Hove too. There are some promising signs that the 'levelling up and housing secretary' wants to take specific action on Airbnb 'mega hosts'.
- (4) Empty Homes: In Brighton & Hove around 4,500 homes are empty (1,350 long-term, plus 850 exempt) with around 2,000 more declared as second homes. There are 237,000 long term empty homes in England. Another 231,000 are short-term empty and 185,000 are empty but exempt from council tax. This adds up to 653,000 homes no one lives in. On top of this figure there are a further 253,000 'furnished empties' (though it's impossible to know how many of these are Airbnb lets or other kinds of holiday or second homes). The already existing 'empty dwelling management order' legislation needs to be allowed to perform its intended social duty rather than be frustrated by government red tape designed to impede it.
- (5) See: <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/competition-watchdog-to-launch-review-of-housebuilding-market-79899>
- (6) Because the targets were mandatory, failing to deliver on them came at a cost. The powerful developers challenged refusals via the courts and, if they could show a failure to meet the housing target, permissions for large, badly designed blocks of unaffordable flats were invariably awarded.
- (7) Some hopeful signs: <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/gove-proposes-new-planning-powers-to-curb-airbnb-style-home-conversions>

Campaigner Daniel Harris writes on the 'mega-host' problem here:
<https://housingcoalition.co.uk/airbnb-mega-hosts-worsen-housing-crisis-for-key-workers-and-council-tenants-in-brighton-as-investment-properties-leave-them-in-dire-need-of-temporary-and-affordable-accommodation-with-emphasis-on/>

Response: The second homes report was discussed at the 16 June 2022 Committee meeting. Planning permissions include s106 agreements requiring registered providers to be included in the development. The council is reviewing the situation to help residents. The short term lets report is looking at working within national standards. The council encourage empty homes to be occupied, and after two years the council tax can be doubled.

The committee agreed to note the deputation.

6 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

a) Petitions:

None for this agenda

b) Written Questions:

None for this agenda.

c) Members Letters:

None for this agenda.

d) Notices of Motion:

None for this agenda.

7 CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

7.1 The Democratic Services officer introduced the report to the committee.

7.2 Following questions the committee Members were informed: the administration were looking forward to working with other groups.

Vote

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

RESOLVED:

2.1 That the committee's terms of reference, as set out in Appendix A to this report, be noted; and

2.2 That the establishment of an Urgency Sub-Committee consisting of the Chair of the Committee and two other Members (nominated in accordance with the scheme for the allocation of seats for committees) to exercise its powers in relation to matters of urgency on which it is necessary to make a decision before the next ordinary meeting of the Committee, be approved.

8 HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4 - 2022/23

- 8.1 The Assistant Director Housing Management introduced the report to the committee.
- 8.2 Following questions the Committee Members were informed that: the higher volume of complaints helps to make improvements and any upheld complaints are being looked at; works can take 3 months if they are complex; rent collection delays due to universal credit are being resolved; changes to rents for Seaside Homes are being implemented; gas safety checks are a priority and forced access will be used if absolutely necessary; there has been a large migration over to universal credit and this has resulted in rents being paid in arrears, and the council are working with residents to resolve this; money advice services are available and it is noted that the eviction target is zero; the council are working with landlords before serving eviction notices, and process is protocol driven; landlords compliance is preferred; boilers are being monitored and there is a pilot on heat pumps; energy plans are being looked along with voltaic panels; solar panels are installed when right for the building; new homes in Portslade and Charles Kingston Gardens are not included in the report; timescales on buying properties vary greatly.

Vote

- 8.3 A vote was taken, and the committee agreed the recommendations unanimously.

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Housing & New Homes Committee notes the report.

9 PURCHASE OF KUBIC APARTMENTS, WHITEHAWK WAY, BRIGHTON

- 9.1 The Head of Strategy & Supply introduced the report to the committee.
- 9.2 Following questions the Committee Members were informed of that: the project seems ideal for those wishing to downsize; the council are looking at the long life of homes and are carrying out surveys to inform on the state of properties; there no tenants in the property at this time; S106 agreements give 40% affordable housing on new builds when delivered on site, and this development is ideal for downsizing to a well-built development.
- 9.3 The Committee Voted to enter into Part Two. The private and confidential elements of the report were discussed.

Vote

- 9.4 A vote was taken, and by 9 to 1 abstention the committee agreed the recommendations.

RESOVLED:

That Housing & New Homes Committee:

- 2.1 recommends to the Strategy, Finance & Regeneration Committee that it agrees the purchase of Kubic Apartments Whitehawk Way, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 5FH and

grants delegated authority to the Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities to negotiate the sale price up to the maximum set out in the Part 2 report.

- 2.2 recommends to the Strategy, Finance & Regeneration Committee that funding is switched and part of the budget from the Home Purchase Policy 2023/24 is used to purchase Kubic Apartments as outlined in paragraphs 3.3. and 3.4 of the Part 2 report.

That Strategy, Finance & City Regeneration Committee:

- 2.3 agrees the purchase of Kubic Apartments Whitehawk Way, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 5FH and grants delegated authority to the Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities to negotiate the sale price up to the maximum set out in the Part 2 report.
- 2.4 agrees that funding is switched and part of the budget from the Home Purchase Policy 2023/24 is used to purchase Kubic Apartments as outlined in paragraphs 3.3. and 3.4 of the Part 2 report.

10 HOUSING, HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATE

- 10.1 The Assistant Director Housing Management introduced the report to the committee.
- 10.2 Following questions the Committee Members were informed that: vulnerable residents were prioritised for home gas checks; Members can contact officers if they know of resident issues, as the council wants to engage with residents; it was noted that access can be an issue; recruitment is ongoing and some technical posts have been difficult to fill; one IT platform is preferred to the legacy database systems; all residents will be consulted on decent homes review; all budgets have been reviewed with reserves covering current pressures and ongoing issues; investments in better homes means less repairs in future; fines will be issued if landlords do not comply; the council reaches out to community groups; the IT platform will be recommissioned soon; disrepair claims are rigorously rejected.

Vote

- 10.3 A vote was taken, and the committee agreed the recommendations unanimously.

RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Housing & New Homes Committee note the key outcomes, actions and resourcing plan arising from the Housing health & safety review to date and that a final report and an Action Plan will be brought back for consideration at September Housing & New Homes Committee following engagement with tenants at Housing Area Panels.
- 2.2 That Housing & New Homes Committee agree that this Committee report is shared with the Regulator of Social Housing.

11 ROUGH SLEEPING AND SINGLE HOMELESS SERVICES RE COMMISSIONING

- 11.1 The Head of Temporary & Supported Accommodation introduced the report to the committee.
- 11.2 Following questions the committee Members were informed that: the reconnection policy was national legislation and reconnections were carried out whenever possible; the council engages with registered providers to find solutions to reconnections; for evictions due process needs to be carried out; the importance of language is a priority when referring to the community, and this will be explored at Member workshops; users' options are important and sustainable housing is a priority.

Vote

- 11.3 A vote was taken, and by 9 to 1 abstention, the committee agreed the recommendations.

RESOLVED:

That Housing & New Homes Committee agree to:

- 2.1 Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities to take all steps necessary to procure and award contracts for the rough sleeping and single homeless services listed in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 A Housing Committee Member workshop will take place prior to the stage 2 tender exercise. This will provide detail of the needs analysis, how contracts will be specified in order to drive better performance, and actions available to the local authority to improve performance (if necessary).

12 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL

- 12.1 None from this meeting.

13 PART TWO

14 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

- 14.1 The Committee voted to discuss item 9 appendices in Part Two. The committee discussed the confidential appendix attached to the report.

The meeting concluded at 6.55pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of