

# **BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**

## **HOUSING COMMITTEE**

**4.00pm 29 APRIL 2020**

### **SKYPE MEETING**

### **MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillors: Williams (Chair), Gibson (Opposition Spokesperson), Mears (Group Spokesperson), Atkinson, Barnett, Brennan, Fowler, Heley, Hugh-Jones and Osborne.

**Other Members Present:** Councillors Knight (Substitute) and Wares (Substitute).

### **PART ONE**

#### **70 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

##### **a) Declaration of Substitutes:**

1. Councillor Wares substituted for Councillor Barnett
2. Councillor Knight substituted for Councillor Brennan

##### **b) Declarations of Interest:**

1. Councillor Williams stated that they knew the presenter of the Brighton Students Union deputation.
2. Councillor Mears stated that they had previously been involved in the Victoria Road scheme, but they approached the debate with an open mind.

##### **c) Exclusion of Press and Public**

1. The press and public were not excluded from the meeting as there was no Part Two items.

#### **71 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

- 71.1 The minutes of the Housing Committee meeting held on 11 March 2020 were accepted as a record of the meeting.

#### **72 CHAIRS COMMUNICATIONS**

- 72.1 The Chair made the following statement:

##### **Homelessness & Rough Sleeping**

Over the past few weeks, we've secured a number of buildings in the city to provide safe, self-contained accommodation. We have procured 379 units of accommodation to provide for:

- Rough sleepers;
- People who are in supported accommodation who become symptomatic or need to shield, and;
- Those who are becoming homeless where we wouldn't otherwise have an accommodation so as to avoid the need to sleep rough.

We've helped around 190 people who had been sleeping rough move off the streets. We've also provided rooms for new homeless cases and people in shared accommodation.

The level of support we've set up for to keep people sleeping rough safe over the Covid-19 crisis is among the very highest in the country.

We have enough safe accommodation for everyone and there is no need for anyone to be sleeping rough or begging in the city at the moment.

We've worked with health and voluntary sector partners to set up a 'Care & Protect' model which, after assessing a person's medical and support needs, directs the accommodation and support package provided.

We've set up different types of accommodation to make sure we can care for people with symptoms and provide the greatest level of protection for those at the highest risk.

Medical assessments are being carried out by Arch Healthcare, with St Mungo's providing support across the accommodation.

All accommodation is staffed 24 hours a day and supported accommodation staff are working hard to make sure everyone can access the support they need.

We are currently providing food to 270 people a day including people who were rough sleeping, at risk of rough sleeping, accommodated in nightshelters and clients of the Social Impact Brighton, and Navigator teams.

This is three meals a day and is being provided by local businesses and a community kitchen hub.

Volunteers are helping deliver food and toiletries to everyone in the accommodation, as well as delivering donated items helping to keep people entertained in their rooms.

The support has relied on working closely with our partners and it's been inspiring to see so many organisations pull together to get where we are.

It's been a huge effort to get here and is a huge effort to keep going – staff and volunteers across many services are working tirelessly to keep people safe.

I'd like to thank everyone involved in this incredible response - it is making a real difference to people's lives.

In addition to officers in Housing, Adult Social Care Commissioning & Public Health I would like to thank our partners in: SCFT Homeless Nursing Team, Archhealth CIC, St Mungo's and volunteers across Brighton & Hove.

## **Housing Repairs & maintenance**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> April we welcomed 132 new colleagues, as our Repairs and Maintenance service was TUPE transferred from Mears into the council.

Bringing this service in-house marks the end of a long process which has involved many different people from across the organisation.

I would like to thank all of the officers who have worked to make this possible, including our Housing services, our new colleagues in repairs and maintenance, and all of those supporting in our corporate teams.

The service to our residents has been maintained throughout this period, even during the challenging circumstances we find ourselves in with Covid-19.

I am pleased to say that we have been able to provide the transferring staff with the same special leave sick pay arrangements for Covid-19 related absence, and we are looking at a wider harmonisation plan over the coming months and will fully consult with staff and trade unions.

### **Supporting vulnerable households**

We have re-focussed the work of our Housing Teams to enable us to reach out to as many vulnerable households as possible.

We have Co-ordinated our work to enable us to contact vulnerable households in council stock and temporary accommodation. Scheme managers are contacting all residents in seniors housing daily. This is ensure basic needs are being met.

This has highlighted some of the issues residents are facing in regards to social isolation, safeguarding and mental health

To date over 3500 households have been contacted.

This work runs alongside and feeds into that of the Community Hub. A place any resident can self-refer. Types of support available regardless of which route they come in include:

- Finding help with shopping and collecting prescriptions
- Emergency foodbank referrals and finding sustainable solutions
- Support to keep active and well and to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness

Further to this, rough sleepers, recently accommodated and those still sleeping out are receiving three meals a day, this is being provided by local businesses and a community kitchen hub.

## **73 CALL OVER**

73.1 All agenda items were called for discussion by the Committee.

## **74 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

**(a) Petitions** - None

**(b) Written Questions** – None

**(c) Deputations** – One deputation was received from Brighton Students Union:

74.1 Dear Council

We hope you and your loved ones are doing well during these worrying times. We write to you regarding an urgent matter detailed in the open letter below. On the second page you will find the letter we sent to MPs and Councillors and on the third page we have provided an update on the campaign.

**Dear Non-University Purpose-Built Student Accommodation Providers and Houses of Multiple Occupancy**

As lead representatives of Brighton Students' Union, we believe, as always, it is our duty to protect the over 20,000 students we serve during this unsettling time in relation to the developing COVID-19 situation and its impact on accommodation rent payments. Up and down the country, students have been returning home in increasing numbers due to guidance issued by the Government and their University. In doing so they have rightly prioritised their personal safety and protected the national interest, yet they now find themselves facing great uncertainty with their rent payments. It is wholly unjust for them to be financially penalised for carrying out their civic duty and therefore save lives. The relationship we have with the wider community is one we take very seriously, and we value these ties. You undoubtedly play a critical role in the area's residential ecosystem and we ask you to join us in supporting our students by showing flexibility in residential contracts for those in privately run Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) and Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs). We firmly believe students should not harbour the financial burden as the responsibility to do so rests with yourselves. Unite and Liberty Living's recent announcement makes it clear it is within your power as providers, owing to your complex mitigation plans, and we sincerely hope you would undertake these measures voluntarily for the sake of our students. For landlords who experience a financial impact as a result of this, you have access to a three-month mortgage holiday. We join the National Union of Students in lobbying Government to further support you in doing the right thing by students. Officers from both Unions have come together to propose 8 measures we strongly urge you to undertake:

1. Offer students a no-penalty release from their tenancy contracts, both for the current and upcoming academic year.
2. Refund those students who have paid rent and a deposit for the upcoming period.
3. Effectively reduce, subsidize or waive rent for tenants who have experienced a detrimental financial impact as a result of the Coronavirus.
4. Operate a holistic ban on evictions for all renters during this pandemic.
5. Stop all rent increases planned for the current and upcoming academic year.
6. Allow students with health conditions that increase their risk to the Coronavirus and thus wish to relocate to a more isolated part of their PBSA to do so at no extra cost.
7. In line with Liberty Living's stance, offer free of charge support beyond their current tenancy to those needing to extend their stay. This is crucial for international students who are unable to leave due to travel restrictions and for students who do not wish to return home to avoid placing a vulnerable member of their household at increased risk.

8. Implement and offer student tenants access to best practice public health advice, in addition to providing them with material and pastoral support.

The values you enact going forward in addressing the measures outlined above will shape our student community and society as a whole for years to come. There is no doubt this is the right thing to do. The business model, which is the very foundation of student accommodation, is singlehandedly dependent on the physical occurrence of university and the fact it has now moved to a virtual environment means the risk should be absorbed by providers and not by students. They are counting on your support and we hope you will provide it.

Yours Sincerely  
Ramy Badrie  
Brighton Students' Union

In summary, following the closure of the Universities of Brighton and Sussex due to COVID-19, the vast majority of students decided to return to their family home for various reasons, including needing to support relatives, taking up caring responsibilities, wanting to self-isolate with their family and no longer being able to access critical campus services. They have embraced their civic duty and have remained home during this period, adhering to Government Guidance, and in turn helped save lives. Yet, they are being financially penalised by the private accommodation sector. Students who have vacated their properties are still being forced to pay rent. While the University of Brighton has released students from their third term fees for those who reside in its accommodation, the vast majority of private providers and landlords are refusing to do so. Our students rely on part-time and vocational jobs alongside their maintenance loans to pay rent. Many of these jobs are zero-hour contracts that now cease to exist. Without the means to pay rent and the property having been vacated, it seems only fair and just to release them from their housing contracts early. Whilst students will still receive their student loans for the final term of the academic year, for the majority this amount will not be enough to pay their rent, bills and food. Many do not have parents or family that can afford to help them financially, some have dependants and others many not even have access to loans, relying solely on zero hours contract that no longer exists. Many students will be forced to find alternative funding such as further debt and credit borrowing to support their families as well as themselves during this time. In addition, many students have opted to volunteer for the NHS, some even working on the front line to fight this pandemic. The University of Brighton has announced that students will not be coming back to campus to study for the final term this year.

We have now contacted 97 different, landlords, letting agents and purpose-built student accommodation providers about the issue. And we have had several positive responses, yet many have refused to do right by students or have not at all replied:

- IQ Student Accommodation agreed that students could break their contracts and be refunded for term 3 rents.
- Abodus Student Living who run Hollingbury House has also agreed to allow students to break their contracts fee-free and will refund their term 3 rents.
- Co-Apt have said they are willing to discuss individual requests with their tenants and work with students and landlords to come to an arrangement.

- Deborah Webb in Brighton has arranged with her tenants to pay 50% for the remaining period.
- G4 lets have responded saying that they will discuss individual cases with tenants and landlords and can arrange for payment deferrals where students cannot afford the fees but any deferred payments must be paid up to date by the end of the tenancy.
- Q Estate Agents have replied saying they are happy to negotiate with tenants and landlords individually to help find a solution where students are in financial hardship. They have already made arrangements for some students and are working with landlords to insert a clause allowing students out of upcoming tenancies.
- Ann and Ralph Thompson from Eastbourne have reduced rents for April, May and June by 50% and are waiving rents for July and August.

In addition, MPs Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton Kemptown, who has written on our behalf), Caroline Lucas (Brighton Pavilion) and Peter Kyle (Hove) are all supporting our campaign and calls for action and have signed a letter to the Minister for Housing asking them to enable students to break their contracts without a fee. Paul Blomfield has written to the Minister of State for Universities regarding this matter. We are immensely grateful to Councillor Gill Williams for the support she has offered as well. It has been incredibly valuable, and it deeply appreciated by the thousands of students we represent. Students, who are the very heart of this campaign, have also been directly lobbying providers and landlord through resources we have developed for them to use. Our petition to the Minister for Housing and Minister for Universities has nearly 1,500 signatures. As you can see from the engagement with our social media updates on the campaign, this is an urgent priority for our students. They are counting on your support.

- 74.2 The Chair, Councillor Williams thanked the presenter - Rami Badrie for the deputation from Brighton Students Union and noted that local landlords have been written to requesting they support student residents. The Councillor applauded those landlords who have already shown helped students. It was noted that the Shadow Minister for Education and the Shadow Minister for Housing have been written to on this matter.
- 74.3 Councillor Osborne thanked the speaker and felt that more needed to be done for students and the Green Group were supporting the campaign for student housing. It was noted that some landlords were supportive, and others were not and this lead to worry for the students. Councillor Osborne supported the deputation.

## 75 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

a) **Petitions** – None

b) **Written Questions** – One written question was received from Councillor Osborne:

Dear Geoff Raw

I am submitting the following letter on the subject of AirBnB and short-term lets during COVID-19 under Council Procedure Rule 23.3 to be included on the agenda for Housing Committee.

During the Coronavirus pandemic 'business as usual' has shut down - and like all others, the short-term holiday lets market has been one of the sectors affected, with an estimated drop in occupancy rates of between 70-90%. Many of these providers will be able to get through the shutdown by claiming through one of the government schemes; depending on their situation, they may be able to get small business grants and business rates relief, and others may be able to get a mortgage holiday, for example.

However, as we have previously discussed in this committee, the lack of a centralised database or official registration scheme detailing the existence and location of short-term holiday lets in the city means we are unable to clarify who all of the providers are, and what their specific situations might be. This lack of knowledge – and of regulation – of the short-term holiday lets market limits the help that the council can both receive and provide to the sector. Indeed, some weeks ago we heard media reports that some providers were seeking to advertise properties as 'retreats,' during lockdown – while in some cases this may have been an attempt to maintain business, this is a measure widely criticised as profiteering and that has since thankfully been prevented.

We have however become aware that several short-term holiday lets companies and landlords have responded to the global pandemic in more positive and proactive ways, by offering properties free of charge to NHS workers who need to self-isolate. In a city with a high number of houses in multiple occupation, NHS and care staff, and soaring rents, we recognise there will be many residents who require a safe self-isolation facility such as can be provided by short-term let accommodation providers, particularly when their normal place of residence is shared with others or if they are concerned for loved ones.

The Short-Term Accommodation Association (STAA) have launched a scheme titled 'NHS Homes', where providers offer their homes for use by NHS staff free of charge (a £10 fee service charge needs to be paid per day but no rental charge for the actual property is levied). We have also learned that AirBnB has its own similar scheme called Frontline Stays.

With NHS workers potentially having vulnerable family members or housemates, and a wider shortage of housing in the city, we recognise that such schemes have potential to offer a comfortable place to stay as well as reassurance for workers concerned about spreading the virus to family and friends. Given that in some cases, student doctors are also being sent to work early, we also note that there are many that will be on placement in a new location and unable to secure housing elsewhere in the private rented sector. We are also aware through resident correspondence that some NHS workers are struggling to find accommodation at this time, due to concerns about new people entering an existing household.

STAA have informed me that over 2500 providers have already signed up to the NHS Homes scheme and 14 properties in Brighton signed up on 15th April alone. There are likely to be additional providers and landlords in Brighton who may have vacant homes. While the council cannot advise on the best course of action for the sector, we call on committee to consider the accommodation needs of essential workers during this crisis. We would ask that housing respond to these suggestions of urgent action in the current crisis, and consider:

- What measures can be taken to engage with landlords and companies managing short-term holiday lets in the city, such as AirBnB, to ask how their properties can be rendered helpful during the crisis; and to inform them of the existence of registration and support bodies with NHS Homes schemes (such as STAA and others);
- to continue to lobby government for powers to enable us to better control and manage the short-term lets sector, to enable all stakeholders to respond quickly in times of need, such as the current crisis; in light of the city's housing shortage, that we also continue to lobby for more regulatory powers and caps on such properties in general;
- to use means available to reach existing landlords and short-term lets providers in the city, in order to ensure that offers of support with accommodation for workers looking to self-isolate can be found and promoted; and to liaise with relevant bodies in the NHS and CCG to promote available offers of accommodation support for NHS and other essential staff;
- to share with other committee chairs and council officers where relevant who can help to follow up on any of the above actions should they feel able to.

There are concerns that in a time of national crisis, many homes are lying vacant. Our city is also embroiled in a housing crisis more generally – and the rise of the short-term holiday lets market has in many cases resulted in the loss of permanent family homes. Given these factors, we welcome the potential to utilise any vacant homes or properties to support the needs of essential staff and our public health efforts and ask that committee consider how it can facilitate such actions.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Martin Osborne

### **Response from the Chair**

Dear Councillor Osborne

Thank you for your letter.

We support the current efforts to house NHS, Care and other essential staff during this emergency and have been in liaison with Health and other colleagues to signpost essential workers to accommodation that may be of use in the City.

As Chair of Housing, I have also been in direct contact with AirBnB seeking their compliance with Government guidance on advertising short term accommodation during the Covid-19 crisis and their support concerning the beneficial use of short term lets advertised via their platform that may otherwise be empty at this time for NHS and other essential workers.

In terms of further action:



Many of the major companies may have links to a specific local authority through the scheme known as primary authority. This allows one local authority to advise those companies of their rights and obligations under specific legislation.

Officers propose to contact these primary authorities where they exist to request that the companies are made aware of the schemes mentioned in Cllr Osborne's letter.

Where those primary authority relationships do not exist, officers propose to contact the companies direct to advise them of the schemes.

Following both Tourism Economy & Culture Committee and Housing Committees in March the Chief Executive did as requested by members, write to the Secretary of State to request additional powers to deal with short term holiday lets.

We will also follow up with existing landlords and short-term lets providers in the city in order to ensure that offers of support with accommodation for the NHS and other essential staff looking to self-isolate can be found and promoted and share information with other committee chairs and council officers who may be able to assist with and / or promote this work.

Please let me know if any further information may be of use at this time.

**c) Notices of Motion** – One Notice of Motion was received from the Green Group:

## HOMELESSNESS AND THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Subject to available funding that Committee:

- declares its intention to consider how to provide appropriate move-on accommodation and support for all rough sleepers currently housed and supported in hotels/other accommodation in time to avoid them returning to rough-sleeping once current Covid 19 restrictions are lifted
- requests a report to its June meeting setting out needs assessments and an action plan, costings + timetable to provide suitable move-on accommodation and support that would avoid a return to the streets; such report also to consider how the current unconditional offer of accommodation to rough sleepers can continue once the hotel/other accommodation provided during the coronavirus outbreak is no longer available
- declares its commitment to explore ways of continuing the unconditional offer of shelter currently being offered to rough sleepers during the crisis. Committee requests that the Chief Executive write to Robert Jenrick (MHCLG) urging the Government to provide the additional resources needed to ensure that the needs of those currently temporarily housed in hotels/other accommodation can be adequately met (once their needs for accommodation and support have been established) following the removal of the current restrictions associated with the pandemic.

Committee notes that the unprecedented measures taken to alleviate hardship and avoid overwhelming the NHS with coronavirus patients demonstrate what can be achieved when there is a will to do so. Rough sleepers have been housed, there is a temporary halt to evictions and local housing allowance has been increased.

We commend the work of officers and the administration in providing accommodation for over 170 rough sleepers. We have an opportunity to advance the pledge\* to “end the need for rough sleeping” and now need to apply the same degree of urgency to ensuring that ex rough-sleepers are given suitable move-on accommodation and are not forced back onto the streets when the immediate crisis ends.

Proposed by: Councillor Gibson. Seconded by: Councillor Heley

\* See joint Housing and homelessness programme 2019-2023

- 75(d).1 Councillor Gibson presented the Notice of Motion to the Committee stating that now is the time to end rough sleeping in the city. Non conditional entrance to shelters should continue after the crisis. The Green Group and Labour Party are committed to ending rough sleeping and an opportunity has arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the country support is needed on many levels and the National Government can do this. Home is the best place to give support with the costs being covered by rent support. It is noted that Housing First has been a great success. Rough sleeping is costly. The costs of 30 people per year could be as high as £60,000. If they were housed it would be half that cost.

An all-party commitment is needed to continue the work undertaken during COVID-19 after the crisis. Access should always be open for all. Returning to the ‘normal’ situation for rough sleepers is not acceptable.

Please support the motion to build on the success achieved during the crisis. A report for the 17 June 2020 Committee is requested to cover future accommodation after COVID-19 and to include costings to support a letter to the National Government. There is a limited window of opportunity, please support this community minded motion.

- 75(d).2 Councillor Heley seconded the motion and stated that the support for rough sleepers is greatly needed. Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) has shown the National Government during the current COVID-19 crisis that moving rough sleepers off the streets can be achieved. The motion is to reaffirm the movement forward. Housing is needed to end rough sleeping.
- 75(d).3 Councillor Atkinson thanked officers and staff and stated that they supported the motion and noted that 10 years ago homelessness was almost eradicated across the UK and the Country needs to return to that situation.
- 75(d).4 Councillor Fowler thanked all involved and stated that they supported the motion and felt that funding would be difficult.
- 75(d).5 Councillor Hugh-Jones stated they agreed with others and that people affected by domestic abuse and refugees are also a housing issues. The community supportive attitude of the lockdown needs to be remembered when restrictions are lifted.
- 75(d).6 Councillor Williams stated that those affected by domestic abuse will be supported with accommodation if they step forward and make themselves known.

- 75(d).7 Councillor Mears stated that they supported the motion. They went onto note that bring a detailed report to the 17 June 2020 Committee may be difficult. If the report were possible it would be welcomed and should include detailed costings break down, how accommodation was appropriated and how the 5 year local connection policy will continue. It would not be right if those on the Housing waiting list were discriminated against in anyway. It was also noted that many local services could offer support.
- 75(d).8 Councillor Knight stated that they were proud of The Homeless Bill of Rights and the aspiration to live up to the commitment. The current situation is a unique opportunity to work through issues. It was noted that Housing First has been proven to work and a great deal has been achieved already. Thank you to all who are working so hard.
- 75(d).9 Councillor Gibson welcomed the debate and support from the Conservative Members and agreed that the costings needed to be understood and the report to the 17 June 2020 Committee should contain as much information as possible. Once the COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted the council will need to move fast. The key point was that it was more cost effective to offer a home as opposed to rough sleeping.
- 75(d).10 The Assistant Director of Housing informed the committee that a report on rough sleeping would be possible for the 17 June 2020 meeting including information on costings and how to move forward.
- 75(d).11 Vote: The Chair invited the Committee to vote. The motion was agreed by a unanimous vote.

## **76 NEW HOMES FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS VICTORIA ROAD SCHEME UPDATE**

- 76.1 The Committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director for Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities concerning the increase in costs for the construction of the Sports Pavilion and Housing Schemes above the original budget approved by Housing Committee on 14 November 2018 and by Policy, Resources & Growth Committee on 6 December 2018.
- 76.2 The report was introduced by the Project Manager.
- 76.3 Councillor Atkinson hoped that the committee would see this as a 'win-win' situation with energy efficient heat pumps giving the scheme high sustainability. Although costly at the construction stage, savings would be made later. Councillor Atkinson asked the committee to support the recommendations.
- 76.4 Councillor Hugh-Jones felt that savings would be made with the steel frame and construction time reductions. The project was considered inspiring. The Councillor has been assured that a clerk of works will be appointed to oversee the project with the BHCC architect. The Lead City Regeneration Programme Manager noted that the PV energy producing figures were not available but were likely to be similar to other comparable schemes.

- 76.5 Councillor Mears expressed concerns having noted that in the past other schemes had incurred extra costs later on following fault finding in under floor heating, lifts etc. The Councillor expressed concerns that the report on the Pankhurst Road fire has not been seen before committing to more community housing. The Assistant Housing Director stated that the report will be brought to the next meeting in June 2020. Councillor Mears noted that the light gauge steel frame superstructure will leading to possible savings however the amount of reduction in total scheme costs cannot be quantified and the committee should not be asked for more money if this is not known.
- 76.6 Councillor Wares was informed by the Estate Regeneration Project Manager that the Executive Urgency powers were used by the previous Executive Director to acquire the sports pavilion in November 2019.

Debate

- 76.7 Councillor Gibson commented that the scheme was fantastic and as building costs are on the rise it needs to be got on with. Councillor Gibson supported the scheme of 42 much needed housing units.
- 76.8 Councillor Wares applauded the approach to providing more homes but did not agree with the costings as the cost increases have not been quantified. The Councillor did not feel the committee should make decisions on unknowns. It was noted that 4 terrace homes will be lost to the scheme and they calculated that the costs of building were 50% more expensive than buying properties in Portslade. Councillor Wares felt the scheme was too expensive and did not support the item.
- 76.9 Councillor Hugh-Jones commented that retrospective fitting is in general more expensive than making homes more energy efficient when they are built.
- 76.10 Councillor Gibson noted that the costs of property were very important. Buying was cheaper to start with but building ensured properties were available for housing needs.
- 76.11 Councillor Wares declared he was a Chartered Building Surveyor and understood all the issues and noted that business cases can change along the way but did not approve of throwing more money at the scheme.
- 76.12 Councillor Gibson stated their support for the scheme and noted the Housing Members Supply Board support for the council homes and community buildings.
- 76.13 Councillor Hugh-Jones felt the landscaping would benefit residents and possibly reduce costs to health services in the future.

**Resolved:**

- 2.1 That the latest Order of Costs for the Housing and Sports Pavilion scheme is noted; and
- 2.2 That the additional budget of £2.600m is approved in principle (subject to confirmation from Policy & Resources Committee) to ensure the construction of the Sports Pavilion and Housing Scheme goes ahead as soon as practically possible.

**77 FUTURE REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE TO COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK.**

- 77.1 The Committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director for Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities updating the committee on the commencement of the council in-house Repairs and Maintenance service following the TUPE (Transfer of Undertaking Protection of Employment) transfer of Mears staff into the council, which took place on the 01 April 2020.
- 77.2 The report was introduced by the Senior Programme Manager.
- 77.3 Councillor Hugh-Jones was informed by the Senior Programme Manager that the repairs call centre staff were working from home at this time. Once the COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted or altered the re-organisation of the call centre will be look into. Emergency calls only are being dealt with, resulting in a reduction in the number of calls over all. The percentage of routine jobs delayed by COVID-19 restrictions is currently unknown. The Assistant Director of Housing stated that the Quarter 4 figures would be presented to the Committee at the next meeting in June 2020. It was noted that the Task and Finish Group were looking into how to hold virtual meetings in the light that some tenants did not have the appropriate technology.
- 77.4 Councillor Mears was informed by the Senior Programme Manager that out of the 167 staff identified only 132 transferred to the authority on 01 April. Some staff had already transferred whilst others had left. It was noted that the staff were fluid. The Councillor was also informed that a report will be presented to the June committee meeting regarding the affects of the COVID-19 restrictions.
- 77.5 Councillor Gibson was informed by the Senior Programme Manager that a detailed report will be submitted in June including the number of jobs this year against a 'normal' year.
- 77.6 Councillor Osborne was informed by the Senior Programme Manger that some repair staff were not working and were on Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) special leave with full pay. The return date for routine repairs was not known.
- 77.7 The Assistant Housing Director assured the committee that emergency repairs were being carried out and the Council were working closely with regulators such as Gas Safe to ensure the safety of tenants.
- 77.8 Councillor Fowler thanked the officers for the smooth transition on 01 April welcomed the staff from Mears to the council. Councillor Fowler also thanked all key workers across the city for there work during the COVID-19 restrictions.

**Resolved:**

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the progress with the programme which is outlined in the body of this report.

**78 MOULSECOOMB NEIGHBOURHOOD HUB & HOUSING SCHEMES**

- 78.1 The Committee considered a joint report of the Executive Director for Economy, Environment & Culture and the Interim Executive Director for Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities concerning the release of land for development in Moulsecoomb and Bevendean. The intention being to enable the delivery of approximately 232 new council homes.
- 78.2 The report was introduced by the Lead City Regeneration Programme Manager.
- 78.3 Councillor Gibson raised concerns regarding the need for more office space as it appears that there are empty offices across the city and was informed that the need for offices will need to be accessed when COVID-19 restrictions are amended. The need may increase if social distancing remains in the work place. The whole portfolio for the city will need to be reviewed.
- 78.4 Councillor Mears raised concerns relating to costs of the project. The housing elements of the scheme were supported. The spending of Housing Rent Account (HRA) was a concern and it was felt that the report lacked detail. Concerns were also raised as to what the community will actually get at the end of the project. The project was supported, but as a critical friend.
- 78.5 It was noted by the Lead City Regeneration Programme Manager that strong feedback had been received that the community services were needed.
- 78.6 Councillor Gibson commented that although things felt uncertain at the moment, this would not be long-term. Home working may increase and relieve the need for more office space perhaps. Clarity would be needed in the future as to office need. Concerns were expressed regarding the conversion of Portslade 6<sup>th</sup> Form College into council offices and the need for this.
- 78.7 Councillor Hugh-Jones commented that community engagement was good and noted the lack of retail space in the area.
- 78.8 Councillor Knight noted the consultation with the community was good and that supporting services such as shops and a supermarket were in already existing in Portslade. It was also noted that the Secretary of State needed to agree the scheme.
- 78.9 Councillor Wares expressed concerns if the committee agreed to the recommendations and the houses were not built. Councillor Wares was informed that the by Councillor Williams that the Administration promised to build at least 800 homes. It was noted by the Property Programme & Business Manager, that office requirements throughout the city would be kept under review and that 6<sup>th</sup> Form College at Portslade had a significant amount of time built in to access need. Councillor Wares noted that he calculated that ¼ billion pounds would be borrowed eventually. This was refuted by Councillor Gibson.
- 78.10 It was noted by Lead City Regeneration Programme Manager that the external validation was being sought with regard to depreciation of land and how this would affect the scheme costs. It was also noted that each housing scheme in the item would be brought to the Housing Committee allowing all factors of the costs to be reviewed.

78.11 The Chair then put the recommendations to the vote which were agreed unanimously.

78.12 The Chair noted that Councillors Mears, Wares and Hugh-Jones stated they had reservations but supported the recommendations.

**Resolved:**

2.1 That the appropriation of the following sites from existing purposes to Housing Act purposes:

- Hillview Contact Centre, Hodshrove Lane
- Moulsecoomb Hub North, Hodshrove Lane
- Moulsecoomb Hub South, Hodshrove Lane
- 67 Centre Youth Centre, Hodshrove Lane
- Multi Use Games Areas, Hodshrove Lane

2.2 That the General Fund should receive the value of £7.32m in consideration for land appropriated as defined at recommendation (1) above from the Housing Revenue Account, subject to validation of this amount from an external valuation;

2.3 That authorisation of the retention of the net capital receipt to be used for reinvestment to support the development of a new Neighbourhood Hub and Sports Facilities on land adjacent to Moulsecoomb Community Leisure Centre, as well as the refurbishment of the Former Portslade Sixth Form site be agreed;

2.4 That the development of a new Neighbourhood Hub and Sports Facilities on land adjacent to Moulsecoomb Community Leisure Centre, subject to planning permission be agreed;

2.5 That the refurbishment of the former Portslade Sixth Form site into council offices, subject to planning permission and Secretary of State consent for change of use be agreed;

2.6 That it be agreed in principle to the development of housing on the appropriated sites listed in recommendation (1) above, subject to planning permission and notes that the Housing Committee will be asked to approve schemes and give authority to procure capital works contracts at a later date;

2.7 That the appropriation of the Hillview Youth Centre and Multi Use Games Areas referred to at (1) above be approved and that it be noted the appropriation will take place when the Committee makes the decision to appropriate (assuming that the Committee approves the recommendation) and that the funds referred to at (2) above, will be transferred following that decision;

2.8 That the Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities and the Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture be granted delegated authority to appropriate the Moulsecoomb Hub North and Moulsecoomb Hub South sites referred to at (1) above following the refurbishment of the Former Portslade Sixth Form site and transfer a proportion of the funds referred to at (2) above;

- 2.9 That the Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods & Communities and Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture be granted delegated authority to appropriate the 67 Youth Centre site referred to at (1) above following the completion of the new Neighbourhood Hub and transfer a proportion of the funds referred to at (2) above;
- 2.10 That a budget for borrowing within the HRA Capital Investment Programme to finance the cost of the appropriation of the sites listed in recommendation (1) above be approved;
- 2.11 That the Executive Director of Environment, Economy & Culture be granted delegated authority to procure the required capital works and enter into contracts in respect of the new Neighbourhood Hub and Sports Facilities and the refurbishment of the former Portslade Sixth Form College site;
- 2.12 That a budget for inclusion into the Council's Capital Investment Programme for the Moulsecoomb Neighbourhood Hub works as detailed in paragraph 3.4.8 of the report be approved.

## **79 ADULT & COMMUNITY LEARNING**

- 79.1 The Committee considered a report of the Interim Executive Director for Families, Children & Learning, concerning the proposals for the future delivery model of the council's Adult & Community Learning offer funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).
- 79.2 The report was introduced by the Assistant Director, Education & Skills.
- 79.3 Councillor Knight was informed by Assistant Director, Education & Skills that the National Government funding would be lost if the recommendations were not approved, along with the 'Good' Ofsted rating. The Councillor was informed that the staff within the authority have the skills and expertise to run the project inhouse with a good track record if high standards. It was noted that the staff from the Friends Centre will be utilised. The sum stated in the recommendations would be manageable within in The HRA it was noted.
- 79.4 Councillor Hugh-Jones was informed by Assistant Director, Education & Skills that the authority became aware of the lease on the Friends Centre becoming available at the beginning of 2020. It was noted that ESFA have recently consulted on the introduction of a cap on the percentage of the funding to procure services from third parties. If the recommendations are implemented the council would need to provide the service in house or return the grant. The possible costs of redundancy were not known at this time. It was noted that this matter would be looked into later. It was confirmed that the Friends Centre were entitled to agree a one year lease to the authority.
- 79.5 Councillor Atkinson noted that the Hangleton and Whitehawk consultations were good and was informed that the percentage of tenants consulted was not known, however this would be recorded in future.
- 79.6 Councillor Gibson noted that the money would be requested from the General Fund by



the Policy & Resources Committee if the Housing Committee did not agree the recommendation to use the HRA.

- 79.7 Councillor Mears expressed concerns that the Children, Young People & Skills Committee had not discussed the item. It was also a concern that if the HRA was used, tenants would be paying twice, having already paid Council Tax.
- 79.8 Councillor Knight felt that the HRA funds should be put to good use and this would support the most disadvantaged in the community. Councillor Knight supported the scheme and the Green Group amendment.
- 79.9 Councillor Wares expressed concerns at dipping into the HRA but did not want to lose the service. The General Fund would be a better way of finding the money it was felt as the HRA was over used. Councillor Wares noted that tenants wanted repairs done to their homes and the HRA should be used for this. It was felt that the Housing Committee should refuse the recommendation and let the Policy & Resources Committee choose the option of using the General Fund. Councillor Wares did not support the recommendation to the Housing Committee.
- 79.10 Councillor Mears felt the HRA should not be used in this case and that tenant's views supported this. Councillor Mears did not support the recommendation to the Housing Committee.
- 79.11 The Green Group amendment was proposed Councillor Gibson who stated that the services were highly valued. Councillor Gibson was concerned that the initial funding would be based on inadequate information, however it was noted that the General Fund was very tightly squeezed at this time. The amendment would make it clear that the HRA could only be used for one year. The amendment was a compromise based on limited tenant consultation.
- 79.12 The Green Group amendment was seconded by Councillor Hugh-Jones who commented that they were disappointed by the level of consultation. It was noted that East Brighton were supportive and that it was vital to show the benefits to tenants.
- 79.13 Councillor Wares reiterated the concerns that there had been inadequate consultation and the HRA should not be raided now or in the future as this would push costs onto tenants. Policy & Resources should grant funds from the General Fund.
- 79.14 The Chair then put the Green Group amendment to the vote, which was carried by 8 votes to 2.
- 79.15 The Chair then put the recommendation as amended to the vote, which was carried by 8 votes to 2.

**Resolved:**

- 2.1 That a contribution of £40,000 from the HRA be set aside in the 2020/21 financial year only to support the funding requirements detailed in Option 1 in the report and subject to recommendation 2.3 (i) below for the Policy & Resources Committee being approved, and that any future HRA contributions be conditional on tenants support evidenced by

consultation and that should this consultation be favourable, the HRA contribution be proportionate to the established benefits derived by tenants from these services, as also described in 3.41.

**80 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL**

80.1 There were none.

**81 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS**

81.1 There were no Part Two items.

The meeting concluded at 7.15pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of