

Brighton & Hove City Council

Housing Committee

4.00pm 16 March 2022

Council Chamber

Minutes

Present: Councillor Gibson (Joint Chair), Hugh-Jones (Joint Chair), Williams (Opposition Spokesperson), Barnett, Fowler, Meadows, Osborne, Platts and Phillips

Apologies: Councillors Hills, Mears

Part One

59 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

- (a) **Declaration of Substitutes:** Councillor Phillips substituted for Councillor Hills.
- (b) **Declarations of Interest:** Councillor Williams stated they were a member of ACORN and on the board of Seaside Homes. Councillor Osborne stated they were a member of ACORN. Councillor Phillips stated they were on the board of Seaside Homes.
- (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.

There were no Part Two items for this meeting, therefore the press and public were not excluded.

60 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 60.1 The minutes from the 19 January 2022 were accepted as a true record of the meeting. Councillor Meadows noted that the committee had still not received the minutes of the Homeless Reduction Board.

61 CHAIRS COMMUNICATIONS

- 61.1 Welcome to housing committee. Since last housing committee the restructuring of the Housing dept managers has progressed and I congratulate and welcome the successful candidates appointed to the new structure. I would also like to thank those staff and managers who have worked in temporary positions and arrangements over an extended period of time, often having to deal with new pressures and demands, for their support and dedication. The restructure is intended to increase management capacity and coherence which aims to provide for a better supported staff team and be the basis for improvements to customer service.

Alongside this restructuring, the Homelessness Transformation project has also progressed. The project aims to improve customer focus, working processes, staff support in the homelessness service leading ultimately to greater homeless prevention and swifter move onwards for those whose homelessness has not been prevented. Whilst there is still a long way to go there are some promising green shoots for the future. The number of households being prevented from becoming homeless has improved and the number of people going into emergency homeless accommodation each month has fallen from 160 in July 2021 to 46 in February 2022. An impressive achievement. Associated with this the numbers in emergency homeless accommodation are down from a peak of 817 to 653 by the beginning of this month. I would like to thank officers for their hard work achieving this reduction overall as well as cutting out of city emergency homeless accommodation placements down from a peak of 314 to 142.

The Homeless and rough sleeping update on today's agenda also provides a comprehensive account of all the work being done to seize the opportunity to significantly reduce homelessness following the Everyone In initiative. Whilst we can expect reasonable levels of government support this year it will taper down in future years, so it is vital that we seize this window of opportunity to make a real impact on homelessness in our city. It probably is a once in a generation opportunity. With the end of government support for Everyone In and our inability to offer shelter to those at risk of rough sleeping the reduction in rough sleeping numbers has stalled. However, it is encouraging that our January rough sleeper count was only 9 (the same as the previous year) The homelessness update report is asking committee to propose that council adopts the Emergency Accommodation charter as an aspirational document and a standard against which the Council and its partners judge our policies, practices and outcomes. as requested by a deputation from Justlife and Fulfilling Lives. This feels like a positive step. The charter has already help strengthen the standards the council will expect of future providers of emergency accommodation and should, once adopted assist in future improvements.

Another key report is the update on work to improve the private rented sector. Following the findings of the peer research which are summarised to this committee, we are asking committee to delegate authority to the Executive Director for Housing Neighbourhoods and Communities to proceed with commissioning any further consultancy work needed prior to any recommendation to Committee on undertaking any formal consultation on a selective licensing scheme. The money to do this has been agreed by the cross party budget review group and reflects a shared commitment to progress licensing proposals as swiftly as possible in the belief that under licensing tenants who are too scared to report problems get support from the council. The report also highlights funding identified in this year's council budget to expand the work on ethical lettings beyond the direct lets to a fully-fledged agency. It outlines progress towards an ethical lettings charter. We are still waiting for the government to abolish section 21 no fault evictions and Siroil Hugh Jones and myself have written to landlords encouraging them to avoid using section 21 to evict tenants and instead to contact the council so that homelessness can be prevented. A statement urging landlords not to use section 21 in the meantime is being put on the council website.

The final report monitors progress on the joint Labour-Green Housing and Homelessness work programme and on housing management performance. In terms of housing management, as the report to Housing Committee today highlights, despite

Covid and other pressures in the service, while we have made significant progress it is discouraging to see that the end of month number of empty homes increased in quarter 3 to 293 up to January. Thankfully there is hope that the corner has been turned as since then the month end total had fallen to 266 by the end of February even though more homes are becoming empty. We are prioritising reducing this number and the length of time properties are empty further and faster and hope to be able to make more progress by June committee. As we recover from lock down it is pleasing to see the number of decent homes bounce back up to 96.9% from 92.9 % over quarter 3.

In terms of the wider joint work programme, despite the pandemic, even before the end of our 3rd year of the joint programme, I can report that we are achieving additional council homes at more than double the rate of the previous administration over 105 a year and this is set to increase significantly next year. It is also more than double the rate of all the housing associations working in the city put together as reported in the monitoring. Unlike housing associations who provide more shared ownership than rented we have been providing 100% rented which is a contribution to expanding affordable housing supply in the city which we can be justly proud of. The report monitoring the joint programme is produced to invite scrutiny and challenge from both cllrs and the wider public and I am delighted that a challenging question has been submitted by Charles Harrison as part of today's agenda providing good opportunity for public scrutiny and a further information progress with the programme later in the agenda.

Earlier in the month I was encouraged to visit the lovely council owned temporary accommodation in what was the Oxford St housing office. There are 10 newly fitted flats that look really good and have been worth the wait.

Finally, I am aware that this is Cllr Mary Mears' last housing committee of this council term as she will become Mayor in May. Despite our political differences we share a passionate belief that good secure housing is a vital bedrock upon which people can flourish and I do appreciate the knowledge of Housing Mary has brought to this committee and would like to thank her for all her work in housing (I believe she has only ever missed a single committee). I wish her well as the City's first citizen.

62 CALL OVER

62.1 Agenda items 66, 67 and 68 were called for discussion by the committee.

63 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

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

(a) Petitions: There were none for this meeting.

(b) Written Questions: Three questions had been submitted.

63.2 Evie Martin (Park Life Brighton) submitted the following question:

We are aware that a lot of money is generated from housing within the Whitehawk Area, we are asking housing to add £50,000, to the already existing £40,000 given by City Parks, to the project of a new park installation at the north of Whitehawk.

We already know from years of experience of underfunded parks that £40,000 will not cover the high volume usage from Children and families that desperately need Park accessibility, many living within the high rise blocks surrounding the park so therefore don't have garden access.

Response:

Thank you for your question.

The Budget for the HRA has already been set for 2022/23.

The HRA budget contains the income and expenditure relating to the council's social landlord duties covering all our homes (approximately 11,700 rented properties and 2,900 leasehold properties).

We would need to review any proposal for HRA funding for a new park installation at the north of Whitehawk in the context of the council residents' access to similar resources throughout the city to then establish the basis for any decision on such targeting of resources in one specific area.

In light of this question, we propose to liaise with City Parks colleagues and Park Life to find out more information in order to provide a fully considered response to this funding request.

Supplementary Question: None

63.3 Les Gunbie submitted the following question:

Last year, in response to a Hanover Action question at November Housing Committee on the Warmer Homes initiative it was stated that a detailed timetable of spending for the Warmer Homes budget (£4.8 million) would be made available early in 2022. It is now March 2022 - please can this timetable be provided.

Response:

Thank you for your question.

Housing Committee (November 2021) approved an expansion of the Warm Safe Homes Grant scheme, including allocation of an initial £400,000 of Warm Homes funding. Since November 2021, 16 grants have been completed amounting to £69,095 of works with a further 15 applications in progress to amounting to a further £71,150 of works. These are specifically targeted at low-income households struggling to meet their heating costs. We are working with our contractor framework and network of referring agencies to scale up the delivery of grants and the range of measures and anticipate greater spend in 22/23.

We are in the process of procuring external support to develop the wider Warm Homes scheme. This procurement should be completed imminently, and a wider scheme designed and aiming to launch in the summer. We will keep Committee updated on progress with a report proposed to our June meeting. The timetable for delivery will be based on the recommendations of this advice, taking into account both policy decisions for Council and any required procurement of delivery partners. We are aware there is a large budget to spend this year that not only alleviates the cost of heating homes but contributes to carbon neutral 2030 and we need to give this greater urgency. Whilst we are frustrated, we have not been able to provide a detailed timetable by now, we remain committed to achieving a step change in the support we provide to residents through Warmer Homes grants in this current year.

In addition to the above we have been working with partners over recent months to promote the availability of the Local Authority Delivery (LAD2) element of the national Green Homes Grant scheme, funding is available to eligible private households and tenants <https://www.warmworks.co.uk/greenhomesgrant/>. This funding is available for a short period of time however we hope to be able to provide more information in the coming months for further funding to private households after successful consortium bids for phase 3 of the LAD scheme and Home Upgrade Grants scheme.

Supplementary question: Jane Abbott attended for Les Gunbie and requested that more information be available on progress. The Chair responded and stated that the wider scheme was ongoing and expanding, they shared the speaker's frustration and would try as hard as possible to move forward.

63.4 Charles Harrison submitted the following question:

Under today's Agenda item 67, the latest Housing progress and Performance report includes an impressive level of detail which should be really helpful in identifying issues and shaping new policies and action plans.

However, I note that some indicators may be indicating some significant issues, e.g.:

- Progress in providing more new Council Homes and affordable homes, including Temporary accommodation, 27.5% living wage and social homes
- Shortfall in number of sites allocated for CLT development
- Deferred research on ethical loans
- Deferred advice/support for private renters
- Actual increase in rough sleeping in 2021
- Progress in implementing energy efficiency/sustainability strategies

What actions are proposed by the Council to address these issues?

Response:

Thank you for your question which provides us with exactly the kind of challenge that is needed on monitoring reports. I shall respond to each of your points as fully as possible in turn.

As reported to Housing Committee in January 2022. The pandemic has disrupted progress in delivering the Housing Committee Workplan timetable approved in September 2019 and this needs to be updated to reflect the current position and resources. Rescheduling the timetable in a revised workplan presents an opportunity to review priorities and consider additions or subtractions to the plan for future years. Housing Committee approved the report recommendation that a revised workplan is presented for consideration at Housing Committee in June 2022.

As the report to Housing Committee today highlights, while we have made significant progress in delivery of many priorities, there are some areas where our performance or achievements have not been at the level we anticipated they would be when the work plan was originally put together and the targets were set in 2018, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some targets have not been achieved because of direct impacts such as staffing resources being redirected to other priority work areas – particularly our resident focussed services, and because of some associated reduction in the number of staff available due to illness or other impacts of Covid-19 at various stages through the pandemic.

Progress in providing more new Council Homes and affordable homes, including Temporary accommodation, 27.5% living wage and social homes.

In terms of providing truly affordable additional council houses is a priority for our joint programme. Thankfully the figures in the report up to the end of quarter 3 and since then we have achieved 8 more social rented homes as part of our hidden homes programme on council estates. As a result, we will achieve the biggest annual number of social and living rented additional council homes this year. In addition, the budget passed in January boosted the funds to achieve more social and Living rent homes in the next financial year

In terms of our ambitious target of 800 additional council homes, we have now achieved over 100 additional council homes this year bringing our total since 2019 to over 320 in under 3 years. Though we will not reach our goal of 800 over the 4 years we have already achieved a 50% increase on the previous administration which took 4 years and we have over 200 more homes currently under construction with a further 95 to be bought next year through our expanded home purchase budget

Whilst it is disappointing not to achieve our target so far, we have made as big as possible contribution to housing supply in the city in the last 3 years achieving over 320 additional council homes compared to the 158 additional housing association homes from all the housing associations working in the city reported in today's papers

- Shortfall in number of sites allocated for CLT development

It is disappointing that 10 sites have not been located and also that neither of the 2 sites in Coldean that were offered to the CLT have yet been progressed to a planning proposal since these sites were offered several years ago. Work continues to be undertaken to identify suitable sites We are exploring an on lending proposal with the CLT which could help speed up financing and assist the provision of homes at lower rents and this in part covers the concern about ethical loans

- Deferred research on ethical loans – This work is stalled due to capacity and additional covid recovery priorities. It will be reconsidered as a priority when we review the joint work programme in June.
- Deferred advice/support for private renters

Expanding advice and support for private renters was in our programme but we have prioritised focussed supporting private renters by investing in enforcement and research to advance development of a licensing scheme. Sadly we have not been able to progress everything in the joint programme, partly because the programme is over ambitious and partly because of the pandemic. One impact of the pandemic has been to contribute to repairs and empty property backlogs, it has also disrupted face to face homeless prevention and caused long backlogs in mutual exchanges. We have had to prioritise staff resources on pressing tasks like homeless prevention and bringing down the number of desperately needed empty council properties. Failure to do this causes the housing and homelessness services to lose valuable resources as well as increasing homelessness so is a high priority. We are now reviewing the joint programme and there will be a report to housing committee in the summer to schedule activities and priorities for future years.

- Actual increase in rough sleeping in 2021

Offers of accommodation to all verified rough sleepers where we have the power to do so in line with the homeless bill of rights continues.

Rough sleeping does have seasonal variations and there are differences between when a full count is carried out compared to when we carry out a smaller estimated count which incorporates information from the outreach services team.

Evaluating the progress reducing rough sleeping is hard to establish clearly because there are monthly variations throughout the year and the method of counting varies at official counts.

In November 2019, prior to the pandemic there were 88 people counted as rough sleeping on a particular night, By November 2020 which was a smaller estimated count due to restrictions under the pandemic, estimated 27 people. November 2021 was a full count and there were 37 people, which is still well below figures pre pandemic. In January 2022 our latest estimate identified 9 people rough sleeping in the city.

My reading of the data is that with the end of housing people at risk of rough sleeping there was a small increase over 2021, but numbers are still very significantly lower than 2020. So, despite the end of the gov'ts everyone in policy we are keeping numbers down and based on the most recent count in January suggest numbers have levelled off at a low level. We currently have a record number of rough sleepers who have been accommodated following expansion of provision to 124 units commissioned for rough sleepers and single homeless people to enable them to move off the street during the winter under Protect and Vaccinate no second night out, our off street offer and Severe Weather Emergency Provision. We are working hard to secure the resources we need through the rough sleeper initiative funds to support move on to more long term accommodation or reconnection over the next year. We will not have this funding

indefinitely, so we are seeking to transform provision to focus on prevention where possible, and for swiftly moving people on whilst we have the expanded capacity

- Progress in implementing energy efficiency/sustainability strategies

There is an ambitious target set for the energy efficiency rating improvements of 76.8 out of 100. Over the previous 3 years the council improved by 1.4. Given the climate crisis an extremely challenging interim target of increasing the rating by 8.8 has been set. It is now clear that this will not be achieved by the end of this year, but we shall continue to press hard and can report that.

- Victoria Rd - The council has serious ambitions to reduce the carbon emissions of its new-build schemes to net zero and this development is a key milestone. The Victoria Road Housing Scheme is the first new council housing project in the city with a ground source heat pump system to provide heating and hot water for residents. The one, two and three bedroom homes will also benefit from other sustainability features including the light gauge steel frame, solar panels and high levels of insulation. The steel frame which has been prefabricated in Leeds, represents a 20% reduction in embodied carbon when compared with a traditional concrete frame construction.

- Zero carbon standard – as you know, we adopted a Zero Carbon New Homes strategy in January 2021. This is currently under review but, in brief, every council development seeks to be more ambitious than the previous one. The update has been to the Housing Supply Board and will be going to the Working Group for review. The final policy will then go to Housing Committee for sign off.

- Joint venture high standards on developments – will adopt BHCC standards for BHCC developments, or the Hyde standard if higher.

- We have put funds aside for retrofitting to improve energy efficiency. We are currently waiting for the outcome from the Greater Brighton retrofit taskforce which is due to report at the end of March. They are looking at 8-10 archetypes and the interventions for each of them. Taskforce recommendations are due in July, these findings alongside our own ongoing analysis of our own housing stock will put us in a stronger position to put together a detailed programme. We have successfully been trialling the installation of Air Source Heat Pumps and have a plan to install 100-150 more in the financial year 2022-23 in suitable properties. The next financial year will see the beginning of our solar PV programme with an aim to install systems on 1000 homes over the next 3 years.

We have considerably boosted the capacity of the Housing Sustainability and Energy team to support the work above and further projects we will be recruiting to these posts in the next two months.

Supplementary question:

The speaker thanked the Chair for the very comprehensive response and noted that the challenges were getting more intense and asked that the reviews be more frequent. Also, more meetings with the Housing Coalition and Community Land Trust to help achieve goals. The Chair responded and stated that they could not commit officers but would be happy to attend meetings personally.

(c) Deputations: There were none for this meeting.

64 ITEMS REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

64.1 To consider the following items referred from the Council meeting held on the 3 February 2022.

a) Petition: None for this meeting

b) Deputation: None for this meeting

c) Notice of Motion: One Notice of Motion was referred from Council:

64.2 Subject: Stop people being priced out of our city. Ban the sale of new homes as second homes.

Notice of Motion referred from Council on the 3 February 2022

Date of meeting: 16 March 2022

Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

1.1 To receive the following Notice of Motion which was debated at and referred from the full Council meeting held on the 3 February 2022.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That the Committee responds to the motion concerning the sale of new homes as second homes either by noting it or where it is considered more appropriate, calling for an officer report on the matter as requested, which may give consideration to a range of options.

3. CONTEXT / BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The following resolution from the full council meeting held on the 3 February 2022 for the committee to consider is detailed below:

In order to stem the rise of second home ownership which is having a severely detrimental effect on housing supply and affordability, this Council:

1. Supports the implementation of a principal residency policy whereby new open-market housing planning permission will only be granted where there is a condition restricting occupancy as a Principal Residence – the purpose being to reduce the levels of second homes and enable increased primary residence and year-round community benefits;

2. Requests the Housing and Tourism, Equalities, Communities & Culture committees to call for a report to be submitted to meetings of each of the committees within the next six months to outline all possible policy steps that could be considered in order to implement this policy and model the impact of such an approach on both affordability and availability in the next five years;

3. Requests that this report will highlight:

- The planning policy changes required;
- Examples of Planning Authorities where such outcomes have been successfully achieved; 23
- Any evidence gaps or reports required to meet standards of evidence;
- A timetable for implementation for this Authority and potential mitigations required – such as a balancing policy for the development of holiday lettings.

Supporting Information:

Principal residences are defined as those occupied as the residents' sole or main residence, where the resident spends the majority of their time when not working away from home or living abroad.

<https://www.ft.com/content/2128f460-67b0-445b-a684-bf87560a081d>

<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/19378734.families-priced-brighton-hove>

<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/19042360.rising-rent-costs-outpacing-wages-brighton-hove/>

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2022-0001/>

<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/19211154.one-every-37-homes-brighton-hove-empty-figures-show/>

<https://www.airdna.co/vacation-rental-data/app/gb/south-east/brighton-and-hove/overview>

64.3 The Committee noted the Notice of Motion.

65 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

(a) Petitions: There were none for this meeting.

(b) Written Questions: There were none for this meeting.

(c) Letters:

65.1 One letter was submitted by Councillor Platts:

Subject: Housing Policy & Drug Dealing

Date of meeting: 16 March 2022

Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

Councillor Nancy Platts
East Brighton Ward 3rd March 2022

Housing policy and drug dealing

Dear Cllr Hugh-Jones and Cllr Gibson

I would like to ask for your support for a review of housing policy to be conducted as a matter of urgency. This review needs to look at housing policy around 'sensitive lets' and the goal of zero evictions in relation to the placement of people with a history of drug use and drug dealing onto housing estates that have previously and recently experienced a similar problem.

As you may be aware, the residents of Craven Vale have been put through a disturbing, frightening and thoroughly miserable experience due to drug taking, dealing and cuckooing on their estate.

The residents of Craven Vale take a pride in their estate. This is reflected by the neat and tidy garden areas and there are always new projects in the pipeline to improve the environment.

There is an active residents' association that organise lively and fun events, socials, a food bank, café and regular meetings to keep people involved. People take an interest in their neighbours and care for one another.

It was a very happy and peaceful community. But in recent years' that peace has been disrupted by the scourge of drugs.

Residents have experienced disturbed nights, violence, broken windows and doors and even a person collapsing outside a block allegedly after taking drugs secured from a dealer who was living there.

We have organised multi-agency meetings to try and get organisations to work with one another to understand the impact on residents and do something about the problem. After a slightly bumpy start, we succeeded in establishing a way of working where residents' reporting delivered sufficient evidence that resulted in court action and evictions.

To get this far required a lot of courage and I am proud of the residents for coming together to tackle this problem and for making statements to the police that could be used in court. I also made a statement to the police for use in court about the impact on residents.

We were able to take this action because we built an environment of trust and support at those multi-agency meetings and believed it would return to residents the peaceful life they had previously enjoyed and that they are entitled to.

In addition, because we are not naive in believing the problem will go away, you'll recall that I put forward a budget amendment in 2021 for a Drug Impact Coordinator and summit. We wanted the learning from that awful experience to act as a template for how agencies, residents and Councillors work together in the future to stamp out drug dealing on our estates. That amendment was agreed across all political parties.

The idea of the role was to raise the voice of residents and understand the impact on them, because they feel the Council focuses too much on the vulnerability of those engaged in dealing.

That role is now in place, and we await the summit. Meanwhile, the success we had on Craven Vale has quickly unravelled due to our Housing Policy.

Following the evictions of those involved in drug dealing, it was agreed that certain flats would be subject to 'sensitive lets' so as to give residents some respite. However, whilst this covered the specific flats from which people were previously evicted, we were told that it couldn't cover the whole estate.

As a result, in a matter of weeks, we have found ourselves back at square one. There are active dealers back on the estate, living in Council properties. In addition, people with a history of dealing, have been housed close to people who are recovering from drug abuse, undermining those individuals' efforts and the officers supporting them. We need a more joined-up approach to these problems.

Light bulbs have been broken so that the dealers can operate under cover of darkness. I asked for all of these to be repaired in January and for all lights to be proactively tested, as a matter of urgency, and gave the reasons why. Those repairs have still not been completed.

Residents are at their wits end. Trust and confidence in the Council and other agencies are being rapidly lost. Residents believe the current situation is a 'dereliction of duty' by the Council and the duty of care they owe to the residents who are not involved in drug dealing but are seriously impacted by it. The Council's goal of zero evictions appears to actively work against the interests of residents who are having their day-to-day lives destroyed by drug dealing.

In short, the relationship between the Council and residents on this estate is in a downward spiral.

I am going to read you some of the comments that have been sent to me – and these are anonymised because whilst trying to get some change for residents, I also have a responsibility to protect them:

- *'...the after-effects of Hadlow Close which took years to address are still felt today'.*

- *'Images and sounds etched in residents' minds, voices filled with pain, holding back tears, as they're coming forward to share their experiences to help in trying to resolve the current situation...'*
- *'For a few months we, on the Craven Vale Estate, felt what it was like to be in a safe environment - as is promised by the Council to tenants. That time is now over, for we see the council has housed two people (in separate tenancies) who are immediately blatantly dealing.'*
- *'We have still not recovered mentally, physically or financially from the havoc of last years' situation.'*
- *'...there's been nothing but trouble, drugs people in and out all day and night banging. It wakes us up at least four nights a week. The problems haven't stopped.'*
- *'We will not cope, as a neighbourhood...if yet another dealer (or vulnerable individual, who WILL be instantly cuckooed) is moved into this premises. We have seen how it takes years to resolve. We are now incredibly familiar with the pattern that follows. We see what is going on daily - a drug gang has stamped on this estate and is just waiting for a vulnerable tenant to move in - and then they swoop in.'*
- *'The residents are just really angry that the council are supporting people that are working illegally and causing trouble and when they have a problem takes years to get them out'*
- *'...people are absolutely livid at the moment ...you'll get one out and then they put two more in.'*

In conclusion, it is my view, we now need to take a tougher line and I ask for your support for the following actions:

1. Where there have been drugs problems on an estate, we need a period of time when our residents can have respite from this problem. We need to review Council housing policy - both permanent and temporary - on sensitive lets and ensure that we don't resolve the problem one day, only to bring it back the next.
2. Whilst the original goal of zero evictions may have been arrived at with the best of intentions, it is now having the unintended consequence of preventing law-abiding residents from feeling safe in their own homes and this needs to be reviewed.
3. We need to speed up progress towards a plan of action to stop drug taking, cuckooing and drug dealing on our estates.
4. When residents or Councillors ask for urgent action, such as lights to be repaired, to make life more difficult for dealers to operate, we need it to happen.
5. When residents are asked to report incidents, we need that process to be clear and reassurance given that the information will be treated seriously, logged and maintained, not for residents to be ticked off for reporting the wrong things, to the wrong people or for sending too many emails.
6. We need to get better at understanding the impact and vulnerability of our residents who are doing the right thing and to improve our response.
7. We need to get better at co-ordinating across Directorates and within Directorates and across other agencies. We should not expect residents to have to negotiate a route

through a maze of bureaucracy, whilst losing weeks when we could be working together to solve the problem instead.

On behalf of the residents of Craven Vale, please seriously consider our requests and review Council policy on sensitive lets, evictions and housing people with a known history of drug dealing on our estates.

I would be grateful for a written response that I can share with residents that fully addresses the points set out in my letter.

- 65.2 The Chair responded stating that a written response was being worked on and would be sent to the councillor. It was noted that it was not just a Craven Vale issue.
- 65.3 Councillor Barnett considered the comments in the letter needed saying. The councillor asked that drug dealers be evicted, and the reason publicised.
- 65.4 Councillor Platts supported Councillor Barnett and expressed their disappointment at no response at the committee meeting.
- 65.5 The Chair sympathised with the councillor and stated that if the response was not with them within one week, they should contact the chair.
- 65.6 The Executive Director for Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities stated that the lead officer was on annual leave, but they would try to meet the one week deadline.
- 65.7 The Committee agreed to note the letter.

(d) Notice of Motion: Subject: Rent Controls

- 65.8 Date of meeting: 16 March 2022

Proposer: Councillor Osborne
 Seconder: Councillor Gibson

Ward(s) affected: All

This council notes:

That there is growing support for rent controls and that both the recent cooperation agreement in Scotland, between SNP and the Scottish Greens, and in Wales, between Labour and Plaid Cymru, had rent controls at the centre of the joint policy platform. Furthermore, there was a central pledge from Sadiq Khan in his 2021 mayoral election campaign to explore rent controls in London. A YouGov poll conducted at the height of the pandemic revealed that 74% of the public support putting caps on landlords can charge, with only 8% against.

This Council resolves:

- Write to the Secretary of State to ask that powers to implement rents controls are given to the city of Brighton and Hove, or to allow us to pilot the idea and test its impact
- Support campaigns that are asking for rent controls nationally
- Support organisations that are willing to bring in voluntary rent controls and work on this further as part of an ethical lettings charter and good landlords codes in the city
- To engage in dialogue with groups and renters in the city and work with them on a wider campaign to promote the need for rent controls and 'living rents' in the city and calculate a 'living rent' for Brighton and Hove, based on 30% of median income, and publish this figure on the council website
- To include updates on the progress of the above back to future housing committees

Supporting Information:

The Private Rented Sector (PRS) is a large proportionate of the housing stock in Brighton and Hove, with latest estimates from ONS from 2019 stating that there are nearly 40,000 PRS properties in the city, which equates to over 1/3 of properties in the city.

Brighton has been ranked as one of the most unaffordable cities to rent in the UK, being especially difficult for single renters, and rents are now rising at a 5 year high, according to latest research from ONS.

- 65.9 Councillor Osborne proposed the Notice of Motion and stated that this was the time to bring in rent controls. The housing crisis was getting worse with buy-to-let's etc. There has been some tinkering from the government, however, control is needed. It was noted that Scotland and Wales have already introduced rent controls. The system is broken, and people are leaving the city due to costs. Lower rents will allow more spending in the local economy. The government talk of levelling-up, and this motion is asking the Michael Gove to implement rent controls now.
- 65.10 Councillor Gibson seconded the Notice of Motion.
- 65.11 Councillor Williams considered that housing rights in the UK were being eroded and noted that the right to housing is not in UK law. The market needs restraining, with a rapid expansion of rentals as in London. The government won't heed calls, but the Labour group will. Housing is human right.
- 65.12 Councillor Meadows considered that all want lower rents in the city. The councillor remembered previous rent controls and did not consider this would expand the number of rental properties but rather contract it, with landlords finding ways around the controls. The councillor considered that the Labour and Green groups were being hypocritical, with Members charging high rents themselves. The councillor considered that rents will remain high, and landlords will not work with the council.
- 65.13 Councillor Gibson stated that they owned one and a half homes and charged below market rents. The councillor noted that other countries have rent controls with a mix of

policies and high rents do not necessarily equal high quality homes. The policy mix in the UK means high rents for many people and rent control would be the best way forward. The councillor stated they passionately supported rent controls. The councillor also stated that they had been informed when door knocking residents that a living wage was no good if there was no living rent. The joint venture housing project has been developing lowest council rents for some time, and the council should pilot rent controls for the benefit of residents. The councillor requested that the committee support the Notice of Motion.

65.14 Councillor Osborne noted that this was no panacea, and a raft of policies was needed, as were more homes. The rent controls would be monitored and if they were found to be a bad idea then they would be reviewed. The councillor was happy to receive any negative feedback. The councillor considered this would be good for the city.

Vote

65.15 The committee were invited to vote and by 7 to 2 abstentions the committee agreed to accept the Notice of Motion.

66 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE

66.1 The Head of Temporary & Supported Accommodation introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

66.2 Councillor Gibson was informed that there was evidence for selective licensing of Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) and the evidence threshold was high.

66.3 Councillor Williams considered evidence gathering was good, but they were concerned at the process and ask that the committee Members had oversight.

66.4 Councillor Osborne was informed that there had been significant extra investment in enforcement and the council wants to reach out to partners and the private sector. It was noted that stakeholders need to know who to contact with regards to enforcement.

66.5 Councillor Meadows considered that a one year licence for an HMO would allow the Planning team time to catch-up and this could be revoked after one year. The councillor was informed that the 2020 stock condition survey included the private sector. It was noted that the one year licences are being issued before Planning have made any investigations or decisions. It was also noted that £15,000 was agreed in September 2021 and this would form part of recommendation 2.3 as the £15,000 plus the £50,000 totalled £65,000. The Executive Director for Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities noted that budgets were in the last private sector update and the spending was broadly within that.

66.6 Councillor Platts was informed that HMOs pay domestic, not business rates and the Ethical Landlords Charter was still being worked on.

66.7 Councillor Meadows was informed that the Secretary of State's approval was not required for selective licensing schemes affecting less than 20% of the council's area or less than 20% of privately rented homes in the area. The previous unsuccessful scheme was City wide.

Vote

66.8 A vote was taken, and by a unanimous vote the recommendations were agreed.

66.9 **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 note the review (Appendix 1) of the current national position with regard to selective licensing designations to better understand the current context within which any approvals are being given.

2.3 Housing Committee delegate authority to the Executive Director for Housing Neighbourhoods and Communities to proceed with commissioning any further consultancy work needed prior to any recommendation to Committee on undertaking any formal consultation on a selective licensing scheme.

67 HOUSING COMMITTEE WORKPLAN PROGRESS UPDATE AND HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 3 2021/22

67.1 The Head of Strategy & Supply introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

67.2 Councillor Platts was informed that the team do everything they can to get the right size accommodation for residents but sometimes smaller is given as it is the quickest way to house vulnerable persons. It was noted there is a shortage of two bed accommodation. There is no 'zero evictions' policy but evictions are a last resort. The committee were informed there were two evictions in quarter 3. It was considered that the increase in anti-social behaviour cases was COVID related, and this has been noted across the UK. It was noted that re-lets would increase rather than decrease as the team are catching up on a back log from COVID restrictions. The report states that 103 properties were re-let in the last quarter. Major works are being delayed by the availability of materials; however, the works are being addressed. The councillor will receive a written response relating to solar panel repairs and maintenance.

67.3 Councillor Meadows was informed that the residents are able to contribute to works when and where possible. Communications are ongoing via the Community Engagement Team. Some loss to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) has been due to voids and rent arrears. The council are working with residents who are not claiming benefits and supporting others. Articles on how to claim have been published in the 'Homing In' magazine. The ban on court actions during COVID has been lifted and the council will start to look at serving notices. Further support will be offered once a notice is served.

- 67.4 Councillor Gibson expressed concerns at the downturn in re-lets.
- 67.5 Councillor Barnett was informed that the 60 comments were compliments not complaints. The reasons for the length of time taken for re-lets was referred to at the previous committee and the figures are rounded up into days not hours, and therefore not exact, however, times are coming down. It was noted that the concept of residents moving into properties whilst the works were still being actioned was a good idea in some circumstances.
- 67.6 Councillor Williams was informed that they will receive a written response regarding the replacement window programme. The most urgent issues are looked into first at this time. The councillor was requested to let the officers know of any particular cases. It was noted that Craven Dale window replacements start in the next financial year.

Vote

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

67.8 **RESOLVED:**

- 2.1 That Housing Committee notes the report.

68 **HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING - UPDATE**

- 68.1 The Head of Temporary & Supported Accommodation introduced the report to the committee and gave two presentations.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

- 68.2 Councillor Hugh-Jones was informed that a number of other authorities are responding to re-connections and there does not appear to be a pattern as different authorities are involved at different times. It was noted that the level of special needs accommodation had increased over the last two years.
- 68.3 Councillor Platts was informed that when the Severe Weather Emergency Protocols (SWEP) is triggered the Street Services team go out and let rough sleepers know SWEP is open. It was noted that during COVID sleepers could just turn up, however, this has reverted to being referred by services. The standards of emergency accommodation were a challenge during COVID restrictions. The standards are set into contracts and the number of bedspaces has expanded significantly. The re-procurement of emergency accommodation will be started by the council soon. It was noted that the Street Services team generally know where rough sleepers are in the city.
- 68.4 Councillor Williams was informed that the emergency accommodation standards are set in all new contracts and the accommodation is inspected. It was noted that some persons have no recourse to public funds, and there is no homogenous group. The council has different powers available to support these persons in this complex area. The councillor will receive a written response on this matter.

- 68.5 Councillor Gibson noted that the Emergency Accommodation Charter was not adopted, but the council are trying to align with the charter.
- 68.6 Councillor Meadows was informed that the Homeless Reduction Board (HRB) oversees the homeless strategy and reports to the Housing committee. The councillor noted that no minutes from HRB had been seen by the committee who are the decision makers.
- 68.7 Councillor Gibson noted the HRB elements in the report which reflects the work done by the HRB. It was agreed the HRB minutes would come to the committee.
- 68.8 Councillor Williams noted that the HRB were not a decision making body and were only advisory and they would welcome the minutes at committee.
- 68.9 Councillor Meadows was informed by the Principal Accountant that the report was for noting and therefore required no financial implications information, which is all within budget. It was noted that all grants were given before the last Housing committee. The Head of Temporary & Supported Accommodation informed the councillor that the two hotels used for emergency accommodation were within the city. It was noted that allocations of social housing were not given straight from the street, as rough sleepers were given temporary accommodation first.
- 68.10 Councillor Platts was informed by Councillor Gibson that placements in the emergency accommodation in Kendal Court, Newhaven, had been frozen and the review was ongoing. The Head of Temporary & Supported Accommodation informed the councillor that it was possible that a person could lose the right to council housing if they turned down offers of accommodation. However, people are offered private rented accommodation, which some prefer. Customers bid on properties and only those at the end of bidding cycle who have not given good reasons for turning down properties are given the option of the private rented sector.
- 68.11 Councillor Osborne was informed that the SWEP was open at all times during COVID restrictions and operating under triggers now. The SWEP is located in one place. Once the winter provision has ended the council are looking to prevent 'second night out'. It was noted that many are re-connected, and the emergency accommodation protocol is currently in place. It was noted that those evicted under Section 21 would not always go direct to private sector. Three months support is given by the council to landlords and tenants.
- 68.12 Councillor Gibson noted that the council wanted to reduce evictions and that the in-house team were not evicting residents.
- 68.13 Councillor Meadows was informed that the Emergency Accommodation Charter was an aspirational document. The councillor stated they would not support the recommendations.
- 68.14 Councillor Williams noted the Emergency Accommodation Charter was presented to the committee some time ago and then COVID arrived. The councillor supported the charter.

68.15 Councillor Meadows expressed concerns that the policy of not entering street tents, where attacks or drug overdoses could not be seen, was not good for people's health. The councillor considered an aspirational document still needs to be measured.

68.16 Councillor Gibson considered that not all documents could be measured, and the charter was a positive document.

68.17 Councillor Osborne noted that the Council has a welfare first approach to the street community and the Homeless Bill of Rights does not encourage issues.

Vote

68.18 A vote was taken, and by 7 to 2, the committee agreed the recommendations.

68.19 **RESOLVED:**

Housing Committee:

2.1 Note the update on Rough Sleeper & Single Homeless Services.

2.2 Note the update on the Homelessness Transformation Programme.

2.3 Note the contents of the Homes England Compliance Audit Report on the Next Steps Accommodation Programme

2.4 Note the update requested following the Notice of Motion agreed at January Housing Committee on the action proposed to ensure homeless people and rough sleepers placed in emergency accommodation by Brighton & Hove City Council have proper support to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

2.5 Agree the Emergency Accommodation Charter as an aspirational document and a standard against which the Council and its partners judge our policies and practices and outcomes.

2.6 Note that the measurable and feasible aspects of the Charter have been embedded in our revised Emergency Accommodation specification.

2.7 Agree that the charter be subject to review periodically and upon renewal of the associated contracts. Where the Charter is not embedded in the contract, this will also be kept under review with JustLife and Fulfilling lives.

That Housing Committee recommends to Full Council:

2.8 To adopt the Emergency Accommodation Charter as outlined in paragraph 3.12 and included in Appendix 4, as an aspirational document and a standard against which the Council and its partners judge our policies, practices and outcomes.

69 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL

69.1 There were no items referred to Full Council.

70 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

70.1 There were no Part Two items on the agenda for this meeting.

The meeting concluded at 7.42pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

