

Brighton & Hove City Council

Housing Committee

4.00pm 22 June 2022

Council Chamber Hove Town Hall

Minutes

Present: Councillor Gibson (Joint Chair), Williams (Opposition Spokesperson), Fowler, Meadows, Osborne, Phillips, Barnett (Substitute), Clare (Substitute), Evans (Substitute) and Lloyd (Substitute)

Apologies: Councillors McIntosh, Mears, Hugh-Jones and Powell

Substitutes: Councillor Barnett for Councillor Mears, Councillor Clare for Councillor Hugh-Jones, Councillor Lloyd for Councillor Powell, and Councillor Evans for Councillor McIntosh.

Part One

1 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

- (a) **Declaration of Substitutes:** Councillor Evans substituted for Councillor McIntosh, Councillor Barnett substituted for Councillor Mears, Councillor Clare substituted for Councillor Hugh-Jones and Councillor Lloyd substituted for Councillor Powell.
- (b) **Declarations of Interest:** Councillors Williams, Evans and Osborne declared they were members of ACORN.
- (c) **Exclusion of Press and Public:** To consider whether, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, or the nature of the proceedings, the press and public should be excluded from the meeting when any of the following items are under consideration: Item 13: Homes for Brighton and Hove – Business Plan Review.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 2.1 The minutes of the 16 March 2022 Housing committee were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

3 CHAIRS COMMUNICATIONS

3.1 Second Homes

Last week's TECC Committee received a report recommending that 2021 Census data be used to assess whether the number of second homes in the city had reached the 20% level at which it was likely to make communities socially unviable. The officer report suggested that a citywide Principal Residence Policy was unlikely to be justified but members amended the report to keep this option open. All options will remain under investigation subject to the results of the 2021 Census and further analysis of up-to-date statistics.

No fault evictions

Members no doubt welcome confirmation that the government will finally be bringing in legislation to ban section 21 'no-fault' evictions, though it is regrettable that renters have been kept waiting for over 3 years since this was promised. The government's white paper goes some way to addressing the power imbalance that exists between landlords and renters but does not go far enough on security of tenure and it makes no mention of rent controls.

Also, on the subject of the private rented sector, Martin Osborne and I are due to meet officers over the next month to finalise the monitoring of the private rented sector enforcement team which will be added to the next quarterly housing monitoring report at September's Housing Committee. Once we have assessed the available data on this, we will be able to consider how best to update our enforcement strategy and be able to review the strategy in the light of the new commitments in the government's white paper.

Homelessness

It is good to see that over the last year the number of homeless households has fallen by 10% - possibly helped by the achievement of 108 additional council homes last year (66 more than lost under the Right to Buy). We continue to offer accommodation to all verified rough sleepers (where the Council has the powers to do so) in line with our commitment in the Homeless Bill of Rights. That said, according to the spotlight count in May, the number of people found sleeping rough has increased compared to a year ago. This is concerning and makes it doubly important to ensure these offers to verified rough sleepers are resulting in accommodation and getting people off the streets.

Voids

We are down to about 94 awaiting repairs. 960 void repairs were completed last year. Turnover now looks quite good. New contractors – two have started doing early voids for us. A third is meeting officers this week. The hope is that we will be back to normal by the autumn. In the meantime, a monthly tracker has been developed which currently shows that in 2021/22 the Council completed 515 lets, of which 233 were standard voids and 239 major works voids according to the Housemark definition. That is above the (largely) pre-pandemic figure of 481 for 2019/2020.

The pilot programme of **estate walkabouts** on Wednesday afternoons has been going for a month now. The walkabouts allows officers and councillors to speak to residents. Significantly, they have highlighted the need to operate as "One Council" as many of the items being picked up are matters for Highways/CityClean. As well as identifying

maintenance issues, this is also an opportunity to identify general improvements that could be made such as planters, play equipment and fencing.

And talking of planters, these are some of the many items produced by the Woodstore which Cllr Hugh-Jones, Martin Reid and I recently visited at **Oakley House**. For those who don't know, the Wood Store collects and reuses waste timber from the construction industry. Their workshop is fitted with extremely effective soundproofing, and they have developed a very good relationship with the residents of the flats above Oakley House who are pleased that the presence of the Wood Store has deterred drug dealing and anti-social behaviour in the immediate area. Previous concerns have therefore been allayed. They also offer tremendous social value. Over the last year alone they have worked with 115 volunteers, many of whom are living with one or more forms of disadvantage or health issues. I am sure that the Wood Store would be only too happy to host any other members wishing to visit.

Another example of social value is the **Victoria Road development** which Cllr Hugh-Jones and I visited last Friday and where 62% of workers on site that week had a Brighton postcode and 80% live within a 10-mile radius. The Morgan Sindall team leader told us that the room sizes are much more generous than for the private sector developments they work on, and we visited a couple of the flats at the far end with wraparound balconies and views of the sea in the distance. We also saw the copious solar PV, what is going to be the green wall (the plants themselves have been growing offsite for over a year now) and elements of the heating system (powered by the Council's first ground-source heat pump) some 180 metres underground. The show flat should be ready in the next couple of weeks - and this will enable the maintenance and rehousing teams to familiarise themselves with the equipment ahead of working with tenants.

North Whitehawk play area

At the last housing committee there was a deputation from Park life asking if the Housing committee would spend more money on a much-needed play facility at the top of the estate. My colleague Siriol Hugh Jones visited the area, met residents, and was impressed by the need. I plan to visit and meet residents on Friday this week and am pleased to confirm that officers have agreed to residents' requests and have increased the budget from 35k to 80K

Joint work programme

We have been reviewing our joint work programme with Labour and have prioritised items to update the work plan. A review of 3 years joint working, the updated work plan and joint priorities going forwards will all be reported to Housing Committee in September.

Finally, **Brighton Housing Coalition and Brighton & Hove Community Land Trust** are planning to hold a one-day Housing Conference on Wednesday 19 October entitled "Action on Homes". Further details of the event will be available shortly, but they request that members of Housing Committee give this initiative our full support.

4 APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CHAIR OF HOUSING COMMITTEE

- 4.1 The Chair informed the committee that a deputy chair of the Housing committee had not been appointed at annual council and asked for nominees for the position. Councillor Phillips proposed Councillor Osborne, which was seconded by Councillor Lloyd. No other nominees were proposed. The committee agreed the appointment of Councillor Osborne as deputy chair of the Housing committee.

5 CALL OVER

- 5.1 Agenda items 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 were called for discussion by the committee.

6 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

- 6.1 To consider the following matters raised by members of the public:

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

(b) Written Questions: Four written questions had been submitted.

1. From - Daniel Harris

Question: "June is National Pride Month and I just wanted to say I am very encouraged to see this month Their will also be an LGBTQ+ Housing and Homelessness Conference being held in the city. Excellent news and good to hear officers will also be attending.

I've been very vocal in the needs locally for specific provision and am glad the conference will have a wide scope. Praise to the Switchboard for this work. I continue to get a large number of LGBTQ+ Vulnerable clients who report serious loneliness, suicidal thoughts, planning and other serious mental health issues, much of which is not being helped the longer they stay in chaotic environments.

From the equality data you capture how many people are currently placed in Homelessness Accommodation who define as LGBTQ+?"

Chair: Thank you for your question.

In terms of 'People living in homelessness accommodation', this would come under three different cohorts.

One of these would be single people to whom the local authority does not owe a duty to provide interim accommodation. In these cases, hostel type accommodation may be provided, through partners commissioned by the Council (for example for people who have been rough sleeping). Of these 6% have identified as being LGBTQ+, 76% have identified as heterosexual, and 20% have declined in providing that information.

The second cohort of people would be those who have been assisted to access supported housing. This would tend to be part of a package to help people move towards independent living in future. Within this population, 11% have identified as being LGBTQ+, 62% as heterosexual, and 27% have declined in providing that information.

The third cohort will be households who are owed an interim (or temporary) duty by the local authority and provided with temporary accommodation. It is not possible to establish the number of 'people' in these circumstances who are from the LGBTQ+ community, as it would incorporate families, and primary data is only collected in relation to the 'lead applicant'. (i.e., we would not collect data on all members of a household). However, data from 2021/22 indicates that only 49 homeless applications indicating LGBT+ orientation. This data is gathered specifically for Government returns, but we accept this is likely to be under-representative as a proportion of applicants state they 'do not wish to say' when asked this question on forms.

Chair: Would you like to ask a supplementary question?

"Can the council please tell me the procedure for those living in homelessness accommodation, for reporting incidents of hate crimes, bullying and other forms of abuse that take place in accommodations provided by the council either in-house or contractually via private or charitable organisations?"

These can include homophobic, transphobic, disability related, racial, and religious incidents for example"

Chair: Thank you for the supplementary question.

Where a tenant has encountered an issue in our emergency accommodation, be it a repair, a complaint or an incident of the nature outlined in the question, this can be raised in the first instance with the accommodation provider.

If the provider cannot resolve the issue, or the complainant does not feel confident in raising it directly, they should contact their named Welfare Officer who will be able to escalate their concerns. Issues can also be raised confidentially to the following council mail boxes: Welfare Officers <<mailto:WelfareOfficers@brighton-hove.gov.uk>> Emergency Accommodation <<mailto:EmergencyAccommodation@brighton-hove.gov.uk>> .

If you wish to pass on your specific concerns, we can investigate and address them accordingly.

2. From - JIM HORNSBY

In 2019 the council's roofing suppliers photographed brickwork staining caused by blocked rainwater downpipes. I reported the same problem. Two years later a maintenance team successfully repaired the blockage.

The P&I team said the windows should be replaced at the same time as the roof at an extra cost of £35,000. We said the only window that needed attention was in the common ways. Later, the team dropped the requirement, and the damaged window was repaired by maintenance.

My question is could the council save money by acknowledging leaseholder's constructive suggestions and distinguishing between maintenance and major repairs?

Chair: Thank you for your question.

Brighton & Hove City Council is responsible for keeping our residential blocks of flats in good repair including, where necessary, carrying out major works.

Leaseholders are responsible for meeting the relevant costs of works under the terms of their leases so long as:

- The costs are reasonably incurred
- The works are carried out to a reasonable standard
- The consultation requirements have been complied with.

Following our leaseholder engagement review, we have regularly reported to Housing Committee on practical measures we have sought to adopt to improve engagement with leaseholders before, during and after major works projects.

This includes informing tenants and leaseholders of proposed works as early as possible in our consideration of projects. This incorporates meetings with all residents, consultation where there is a genuine ability to influence decisions on proposed works and improved methods of communication carried out to engage around proposed schemes, specifications and tendering of any works.

We are also working with our in-sourced Housing Repairs and Maintenance service to develop a more planned preventative approach toward maintenance of our homes in light of consultation with both tenants and leaseholders.

The proposed window works referred to in the question were not taken forward following such consultation with leaseholders.

However, there will be works that the council is responsible for carrying out to invest in our housing stock as part of our landlord duties, including in relation to the health and safety of residents and to keep our homes and buildings in good repair, that we do have to progress with.

We are committed to keeping these measures under regular review and welcome such feedback from our tenants and leaseholders as we continue to develop and mobilise our future programmes of planned and major works under our new contractual arrangements.

Chair: Would you like to ask a supplementary question?

The questioner considered the answer to such questions was always the same and the repairs team did not know what was going on at ground level. Is there a way the team can look at acknowledging leaseholder's suggestions?

Chair: The chair supported ideas and improvements to the process and will always look to do better.

3. From – JACKIE STRUBE ON BEHALF OF HANOVER ACTION

In November 2021 Hanover Action was promised a timetable early in 2022 that will enable the delivery of the delayed £5.2m warmer homes grants by the end of this

2022/23. In March you agreed we need greater urgency to put this resource to good use. As well as a climate crisis, we have a cost of living crisis especially affecting energy, so we desperately need reassurance that BHCC has the capacity to deliver this budget (first agreed to be spent in for 2020/21 2 years ago). We ask that you agree to send Hanover Action a timetable setting out actions leading to a stated anticipated launch date for the main warmer homes grant scheme within 4 weeks?

Chair: Thank you for your question.

Further to previous updates on progress with developing a Warmer Homes Scheme for Brighton & Hove we can confirm that a study is currently being undertaken by external consultants to examine the delivery options for such a scheme. The first phase of this study, a baseline study of the city housing stock, has been completed and some of the results are included in the Carbon Reduction update report to be discussed later in this meeting.

The next phase of the work currently underway and due to be completed in the next few weeks will examine different delivery model options. A timetable for launching a scheme will follow this and will be dependent on the preferred delivery option. It is likely that this will require further work and decisions, including a further report to Housing Committee, and in terms of policy development and procurement, to ensure that the scheme has robust governance, is targeted at the right homes and is value for money.

We appreciate that residents are keen to see progress and actual delivery through this scheme and we are working hard to achieve this. In the meantime, it is worth noting that support is available to eligible private households (owner occupiers and renters) through both the Disabled Facilities Grant Warm Safe Homes Grant and the new 'Warmer Homes' programme.

The Warmer Homes programme is made up of a consortium of 21 local authorities, led by Portsmouth City Council, that successfully bid for £31.8M through the governments 'Sustainable Warmth' competition. This programme is now live and referrals into the scheme are being accepted, we will be carrying out further promotion of the scheme through our established channels and networks. The funding is available until March 2023, there are 2 different funding streams; one for on-gas homes offering up to £10,000 per property and secondly for off-gas homes offering up to £25,000 per property. Funding availability through the programme is subject to eligibility, technical feasibility and the home's EPC rating. For further information about the programme, visit the Warmer Homes website: www.warmerhomes.org.uk or by calling 0800 038 5737 (freephone) Monday - Friday during office hours.

In the light of both the Cost of Living and climate crises, we are anxious to get Warmer Homes grants out of the door to help households. Whilst a start has been made on our very significant £5.2 million budget, it is insufficient, and I am grateful to Hanover Action for drawing attention to this apparent lack of urgency. I am keen that the Council commits to a timetable of actions taking us up to a start date for issuing grants under our new Warmer Homes scheme and we will endeavour to provide the long-awaited timetable within 4 weeks as requested, subject to the timetable I have already outlined.

Chair: Would you like to ask a supplementary question?

No supplementary question was asked.

4. From - JIM DEANS

The Kerslake report calls for an increase in social rented homes and this is supported by national and local charities. Whilst some progress has been made recently, the BHCC Progress Update and Performance Report for 2021/2022 Q4 indicates that we are “off track” to achieve the 800 additional council homes target.

We are aware that the Council has land available, and that central government appear to be willing to grant funding, in addition to contributions from private sector developers. We are also aware that other Local Authorities have shown that cost effective, decent, zero carbon council homes can be built to meet the increasing demand for social housing.

What is stopping our Council building at scale on council-owned land to meet the demand for social rented homes?

Chair: Thank you for your question.

The 800 additional council homes target is a Housing Committee Work Plan target and relates to 2019 -2023 period. Projected delivery is now just under 500 homes and whilst lower than had been anticipated this is largely due to delays in new schemes coming forward during the pandemic. This has been a challenging period; however, officers have worked hard to ensure that projects continued. As the restrictions have lifted new schemes will now be coming forward for approval and delivery. It is disappointing that we will not achieve our ambitious target of 800 homes mostly due the pandemic, but it is worth remembering that this target was 4 times more than was achieved by the previous administration and despite the difficult circumstances we have more than doubled the yearly average of additional homes and are for the first time this century expanding council housing outstripping losses from the right to buy by 211 additional homes over the last 3 years as can be seen on p89 and 91 of today’s committee papers.

In addition to the 500 homes, the council has also been pushing forward a number of larger scale project in this period. This includes the council’s partnership with Hyde Housing ‘Homes for Brighton & Hove’ have two schemes on site at Coldean Lane and at the former Belgrave Centre in Portslade. These are due for delivery during 2023/24 and 2024/25 and will deliver 176 new council homes which will be let at Social Rents, as well as 170 Shared Ownership homes. So within 18 months of May 2023 there will be 176 new council homes at the lowest rents at scale this council has achieved since the programme started. I am very proud of this. A planning application has also been made for the Moulsecoomb Hub site which if agreed will deliver a further 212 council owned homes, the largest scheme to date to be delivered by the New Homes for Neighbourhoods programme.

Capacity within the delivery teams has been increased to ensure that new projects can come forward as quickly as possible. Further sites have also been identified in the programme and will be brought through this committee for approval.

The council works closely with Homes England in support of our affordable homes programme, and we will continue to utilise the funding opportunities available to us to maximise our delivery.

Chair: Would you like to ask a supplementary question?

The speaker commended the effort made by the council, however, realistically the housing crisis was not being solved. Why can't the council take land and build new housing estate instead of squeezing a few homes into a small space? A vast number of homes would be needed to solve the housing crisis.

Chair: The council have made good progress. A large land fall would be helpful but would not solve the housing crisis. The council are open to exploring new areas. The Moulsecomb Hub is one of the biggest projects for many years and is refer to later in this meeting. Please submit any further suggestions.

Chair: I note that concludes the public questions and that there are no other public items for this meeting.

c) Deputations coming to Committee for the first time

None for this meeting.

7 ITEMS REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

7.1 There were none for this meeting.

8 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

8.1 To consider the following matters raised by councillors:

(a) **Petitions:** to receive any petitions submitted to the full Council or at the meeting itself; There none for this meeting.

(b) **Written Questions:** to consider any written questions; There were five questions submitted for this meeting.

Question 1: Councillor Barnett to Chair of Housing Committee

Phone services

The Argus has reported that phone lines for the council's housing customer service have not been fully operational for two years.

Can the Chair provide an explanation as to why a full phone service have not been fully provided for so long?

Supporting information:

<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/20165779.council-brighton-fully-re-opening-phone-lines-housing-services/>

Response

There has not been a time over the last two years that customers could not contact the Housing service. The main customer service lines in Housing are Repairs Helpdesk, Housing Customer Services, Housing Options and Homemove.

The Repairs Helpdesk takes by far the highest volume of calls in the Housing service at around 7000 per calendar month.

From September 2020 to date, the Repairs Helpdesk day-to-day phone service has been fully operational, 8am until 5pm, Monday to Friday except Bank Holidays. During the initial phase of the pandemic, a voicemail service was used for 5 months prior to September 2020 until the remote phone technology became available. This voicemail service was regularly monitored throughout the working day to ensure residents were called back.

The Repairs Helpdesk phone service for Out of Hours (5pm until 8am Monday to Friday, Bank Holidays and weekends) has continued normally throughout the period since the beginning of the pandemic.

During the initial phase of the pandemic, from March to December 2020, the Housing Customer Service team operated a voicemail service, this was monitored throughout the day and calls returned quickly, with priority given to urgent issues. In light of the Covid emergency, the team also re-prioritised work and made outbound calls to over 4,000 vulnerable residents. This was to check on their welfare as part of the corporate response to the pandemic and resident welfare.

In December 2020 the Housing Customer Service Team began taking calls again. Housing Customer Services Team phone lines are currently open 12.30 to 3.30pm Monday, Tuesday and Friday and 9.30 – 1.30 Wednesday and Thursday. From 29th June 2022 Housing Customer Service phone lines will be open from 9.00 – 5.00 Monday to Friday.

Both Homemove and Housing Options phone lines are operational and taking a high volume of calls. If during peak periods, a caller is requested to leave a message, a Housing Advisor will respond as quickly as possible to offer assistance.

Chair: Do you have a supplementary question?

Why not open Housing offices across the city?

Response: The council need to provide a service and phone lines have been open from 29 June 2022. The date of the re-opening of all the housing offices across the city will be supplied to the councillor.

Question 2: Councillor Meadows to Chair of Housing Committee

Empty homes and Housing Repairs Backlog

Can the Chair provide the latest figures on:

- a) *Empty Homes;*
- b) *Housing repairs backlog;*

- c) *Capital cost of accumulated backlog of repairs;*
- d) *Lost rent from empty homes for the 2021-2 municipal year.*

Has there been any improvement from when the last figures were published in December 2021, when the housing repairs backlog was 8,801; there were 284 empty homes; and £1,042,000 in potential rent had been lost from empty homes in the first part of the 2021-2 municipal year?

Supporting information:

<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/19800519.2-million-rent-lost-empty-brighton-council-houses/>

Response

- a) Empty Homes; 210 (May 2022)
- b) Housing repairs backlog; 9608 jobs (May 2022)
- c) Capital cost of accumulated backlog of repairs; We have currently earmarked £1.5m over and above our normal repairs budget to deal with our Covid repairs back-log recovery programme.
- d) Lost rent from empty homes for the 2021-2 municipal year. Lost rent from empty HRA general needs and sheltered homes for the 2021/2 financial year was 1,343m. It is important to remember that rent is lost every year because of empty properties, the HRA budgeted for £0.636m of void rent loss during 2021/22.

Housing Repairs & Maintenance staff have worked throughout the pandemic, including the lockdowns, to provide tenants with an essential repairs service.

However, as reported to Housing Committee a backlog of routine repairs and empty council homes has been caused by a combination of the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and staffing levels below the required level to complete the typical number of jobs raised each month.

The Housing Repairs & Maintenance service continues to make good progress in our Covid recovery programme, in particular, improving performance in relation to empty council homes. The number of re-lets during 2021/22 (472) was up on 2020/21 (213) and above pre-pandemic levels seen during 2019/20 (445). In April 2022 the team let 60 council homes and in May 2022, 84 council homes were let. Our 'key to key' re-let times continue to improve although remain higher than we would wish. Figures include re-lets of some homes which have been empty for long periods of time. Our average 'key to key' re-let time for previously occupied homes was 177 days in May 2022 compared with 210 days in 2021/22.

It has taken some time to get on top of voids however recently thanks to some good, focussed work from officers, during the first 2 months of this financial year the % of voids on the last day of the month fell by almost 20% as we work toward restoring the level of voids to pre pandemic levels, to match the pre-pandemic levels of re-let activity already achieved.

The number of outstanding repairs when reported in December 2021 were still growing. At that time, we were part way through our recruitment process and therefore the incoming works still exceeded our capacity. As our recruitment is now complete, we have seen this number stabilise. To put these figures into context we are currently completing over 2000 responsive repairs per month. This work rate is also resulting in some reduction in the number of outstanding jobs.

We anticipate mobilising our new sub-contractor framework in July 2022. This will provide additional resource which, along with additional staff resources, will also enable us to start progressing the backlogged works at more pace.

Chair: Do you have a supplementary question?

The re-lets have been higher than previous years. Who have they been let to?

Response

Re-lets will be debated later in the meeting.

Question 3: Cllr Meadows to Chair of Housing Committee

Private Contractors

Are private contractors being used to clear the Housing repairs backlog?

Response

The Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service has benefitted from the use of a range of contractors over many years. In June 2021, Housing Committee granted approval for the procurement of a multi-contractor Repairs and Maintenance Contractor Framework. This provides a mechanism to move on from our existing sub-contractors retained under Waiver and procured through other routes.

This framework has been designed to supplement the current in-house trade teams and provide specialist resource in area such as scaffolding and asbestos removal. The framework is formed of lots covering empty homes, general building, scaffolding, asbestos removal, window & door repair and roof repairs.

We await completion of the Leasehold consultation process before we engage the new contractors selected through the Framework. When consultation is complete, we will mobilise these contractors and they will contribute to our capacity to tackle the backlog of repairs.

If so, which companies are being contracted, and how much has been budgeted for this?

Response

As outlined in the report to Housing Committee in June 2021, the total 4-year value of the framework to Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) is anticipated to be £16,000,000 (As above, contracting these companies is currently subject to leaseholder consultation. We propose to update members when this is complete.

By way of context our total Housing Repairs & Maintenance spend in 2021/22 was £11.5m with £7.5m on in house staffing and services and £4m on sub-contractors.

Chair: Do you have a supplementary question?
Will sub-contractors run alongside in-house services?

Chair: There is no subcontracting out of the in-house service.

Question 4: Councillor Barnett to Chair of Housing Committee

Student flats

In recent years there have been hundreds of purpose built flats for students built across the city, including along London Road, Lewes Road and Circus Street. We were told that building more students flats would free up family homes.

However, many students are saying that the purpose built accommodation is too expensive and they still prefer house shares.

How many of these purpose-built student flats were empty or vacant during the past academic year?

Response

The council does not have specific data on how much purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) was empty or vacant during the past academic year. However, most vacancies for private PBSA developments can be determined by searching for availability on their websites at any point in the academic year. Recent information submitted in support of a planning application indicates that there is continued demand for PBSA rooms in the city.

The City Plan includes a requirement for new PBSA developments to predominantly comprise of cluster flats, which are likely to be more affordable and more likely to appeal to students who would otherwise live in HMOs.

Given neither university in the city is planning a significant increase in student numbers, additional Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA), assuming it is occupied, will ease the pressure from students in the private rented sector. It is important to note that not all students live in shared houses, many live in smaller flats.

Recent Council Tax data suggests that fewer students are living in flats or HMOs since the number of student exemptions in place on 1st April each year shows that there has been a decline this year. Some of the decline is in properties that are Band A and B which are likely to be flats. Those in the higher bands are probably HMOs which have also seen a decrease.

A HMO no longer occupied by students doesn't necessarily revert to a family home. It could remain an HMO with alternative occupants, including lower income, more mobile, younger working households for whom this is also an important source of accommodation.

Chair: Do you have a supplementary question?

Should student homes be stopped?

Chair: The priority is for affordable housing for residents across the city and the council are willing to look at every avenue.

Question 5: Councillor Barnett to Chair of Housing Committee

Allocations

Many council tenants who wish to downsize to smaller properties due to their circumstances are being told by the council that they are not able to because one-bedroom flats are currently being reserved for homeless people.

What is the current allocations policy for council homes that become available?

What proportion of one-bedroom flats are being allocated to homeless people?

Response

We prioritise tenants downsizing from their homes, giving them our highest priority, so clearly 1 bed properties are not being reserved for homeless households

However, as reported to Housing Committee in November 2020, temporary adjustments were made within the Allocation Plan in response to the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic, to enable us to move more homeless households to whom we owed a housing duty on from temporary and emergency accommodation. The Allocations Plan was amended to revise the percentage of properties advertised as priority to accepted homeless households to 80%. In practice considerable fewer than the 80% advertised have been let to homeless households

A breakdown of the proportion of one-bedroom flats let over the last six months is below.

Let property: 17/12/21 and 17/06/2022:

- Homeless 88 lets to 1 bed properties – 51%
- Transfer 34 lets to 1 bedroom properties. – 19%
- Home seekers 40 lets to 1 bedroom properties – 23%
- community Interest Queue 12 lets to 1 bedroom properties – 7%.

Chair: Do you have a supplementary question?

It is reported that St Mungo's accommodate outsiders, and this is not sustainable. It takes five years to get on the housing waiting list. Why are homeless being prioritised over local residents?

Chair: Those without local connections are re-connected with staff focusing on reconnections.

(c) Letters: to consider any letters; There were none for this meeting.

(d) **Notices of Motion:** to consider any Notices of Motion referred from Council or submitted directly to the Committee. Three Notices of Motion were submitted.

1. Performance of Housing services

Councillor Meadows proposed the Motion and stated that the Housing services had recently received a poor star rating and outstanding repairs needed to be dealt with immediately. It was noted that a lift repair had taken 16 weeks to complete, and this had left residents complaining. There is a lack of repairs. Why are they not being done, we are not in COVID lockdown, and why are local housing offices open. Working at home impacts on the mental health of residents. The councillor had been informed directly that there are no face-to-face meetings. The quality and quantity of repairs has deteriorated.

Councillor Barnett seconded the Motion.

Debate

Councillor Clare was sorry to hear there were no appointments and requested that the Executive Director - Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities look into the matter.

Councillor Williams considered the service was improving slowly but surely.

Councillor Gibson considered that Star surveys were not very useful and at benchmarking level all was found to be positive. The councillor was concerned at the lack of face-to-face meetings, however there was no need for a report and the councillor did not support the motion.

Councillor Meadows considered that other Members may have had a different experience but they had been told no to face-to-face meetings and they would wait to hear from the Executive Director - Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities.

The chair called for a vote and the committee voted by 8 to 2 against the motion.

2. Cost of in-house responsive repairs and empty property refurbishment service

Councillor Meadows proposed the motion and requested that a report be submitted to the next Housing committee meeting on the costs of set up and mobilisation of the in-house repairs service. To include the costs of removing logos from vehicles. 10m was set aside years ago to cover the costs of set up. What is the final cost, and this should include subcontractors please. It would be helpful to know if any improvements have been made.

Councillor Barnett seconded the motion.

Councillor Osborne spoke to the amendment to the motion and considered that the Audit & Standards committee would be better for this motion. The amendments had been made to reflect the context over the last two years. The councillor considered that comparing like-for-like was not good and a report to a future meeting would allow time to deliver a report properly.

Councillor Williams seconded the amendment and stated that the considered submitting the report to a future meeting would allow officers more time and noted that pre and post COVID conditions were very different.

Debate

Councillor Gibson considered the service and costs needed looking at as they were complex and this needs to be done properly.

Councillor Meadows considered the amendment was not right for the report and a quick report would be better. The Councillor did not accept the amendment.

The chair called for a vote and the committee voted by 8 to 2 to agree the motion as amended.

3. Stop Unlawful Discrimination Against Benefit Claimants by Landlords and Letting Agents.

Councillor asked if the proposer and seconder agreed the amendments. Councillors Williams and Osborne agreed to accept the amendments.

Councillor Williams proposed the amended motion and stated that they wanted to stop unlawful discrimination, and this needed to be tackled. The Equality Act of 2010 was against discrimination and Shelter charity had exposed actions by landlords and letting agents. Renters have been asked to present high earning guarantors or six months rent upfront. The government need to act as well and now. Support and signposting to information is needed by existing and potential tenants. The ethical landlord charter will cover this when it arrives later this year. It would be good if the council acted as guarantor when necessary.

Councillor Osborne seconded the amended motion and thanked the Acorn public meeting with feedback indicating that $\frac{2}{3}$ of landlords would not accept tenants on benefits. The government white paper will clampdown on this, and it is hoped that the government move forward. Information and signposting on how to report issues is needed. The Councillor supported the amended motion.

Debate

Councillor Meadows considered that private renters have lots of difficulties in the city, with the lack of homes driving up the rents. The enforcement of the Equalities Act should be supported. When serious support is required, the government should

give benefit payments directly to the landlords. The councillor was against the amended motion until the details of the government white paper is known.

Councillor Lloyd noted that renters have many hurdles, and the situation is extraordinary. The Councillor supported the amended motion.

Councillor Williams understood Councillor Meadows point and noted that this was a complicated process for renters and signposting to support services was wanted.

The chair called for a vote and by 8 to 2 the committee agreed to accept the motion as amended.

9 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR REVIEW

9.1 The Head of Tenancy Services introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

9.2 Councillor Fowler was informed that the consultation reach will be improved, and the survey did go to area panels.

9.3 Councillor Williams was informed that the report does not cover everything, and the response will be multi agency.

9.4 Councillor Meadows was informed that all communications with residents will be looked at, including standard letters. It is wanted that the review will cover everything.

Vote

9.5 A vote was taken, and the committee unanimously agreed the recommendations. (Councillor Clare had left the meeting and took not part in the decision making process or the vote).

9.6 RESOLVED:

2.1 That Committee note the outcome of the ASB review and its recommendations.

2.2 That Committee note that from the review we will develop a new ASB policy which we will bring back to a future Housing Committee for approval.

10 CARBON REDUCTION IN HOUSING UPDATE

10.1 The Sustainability & Energy Manager introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

10.2 Councillor Philips was informed that the Assisted Management Strategy was still in progress, with the task force being an ongoing project using local suppliers working together. The councillor would be written to regarding Warm Safe Homes grant.

- 10.3 Councillor Fowler was informed that hydrogen boilers were being looked at in the city and in Sussex and it was noted that the boilers were more for commercial use rather than homes. Ground source heat pumps are best used in larger new build housing schemes. Air source heat pumps are also being investigated, as are all new technologies.
- 10.4 Councillor Evans was informed by the Assistant Director Housing Management that the removal of flooring was not done automatically when tenants move. Furniture recycling project was being expanded and flooring was being left in place now. The service has changed.
- 10.5 Councillor Williams was informed that solar panels are being looked at and there is a programme running this year. Commercial roofs are an issue and systems are being trailed. Pilot schemes have been carried out.
- 10.6 Councillor Meadows was informed by the Assistant Director Housing Management that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) would be used to improve council homes, creating jobs from funding linked to different stock at Lewes District Council (LDC) and Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) with information being fed back to Chester University as part of a study project. The Sustainability & Energy Manager noted that Lewes did not have a lot of high rise buildings and the report reflects the various types of housing found in both Brighton & Hove and Lewes covered in the study. Jobs and skills created benefits greater Brighton, not just one area. Support to landlords was being given under Warm Homes scheme and private tenants are able to access funding with landlords' permission.

Vote

- 10.6 A vote was taken, and the committee unanimously agreed the recommendations. (Councillor Clare had left the meeting and took not part in the decision making process or the vote).

10.7 **RESOLVED:**

- 2.1 That Committee note progress and planned action with regard to carbon reductions in housing.
- 2.2 That Committee notes expenditure of up to £50,000 as the council's financial contribution toward costs of the work of the Retrofit Taskforce to Deliver Zero Carbon Homes as outlined in paragraphs 3.11 to 3.13.

11 **HOUSING COMMITTEE WORKPLAN PROGRESS UPDATE AND HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4 AND END OF YEAR 2021/22**

- 11.1 The Assistant Director Housing Management introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

- 11.2 Councillor Fowler was informed by the Chair that under the Severe Weather Emergency Protocols (SWEP) the Severe Weather Shelter would be open this winter, the incentivisation programme for moving to smaller homes formed part of the

workprogramme, which would be reported back to the committee and bulk ordering of lift parts was being undertaken to supply lift repairs.

- 11.3 Councillor Meadows was informed by the Chair that the Star survey was not a rating of the service and was a council comparison survey. The emergency accommodation lower target is for the short term only. Under Seaside Homes, the council guarantees a percentage of the rent. The Assistant Director of Housing Management noted that repairs continued throughout the pandemic. It was agreed that there was room for improvement, however, 95% of repairs were completed on time. The timings of re-lets has been improved with levels higher than before the pandemic. Good progress has been made and timings are being improved. Further information will be supplied to Area Housing Panels on the letting of more homes. Private sector housing will receive more funding. The cost of the high turnover in temporary and emergency accommodation is being looked at, including ways to improve the service. The council do not want to evict residents and are looking at supporting those who are struggling. Gas Safety certificates are dealt with by landlords not the council. It was noted that homes were let to those in need and were allocations policy compliant.
- 11.4 Councillor Evans was informed by the Chair that the lodger's scheme was for those with rooms not being used and there would be a report to the next committee. The Executive Director - Housing Neighbourhoods & Communities noted that the use of properties, such as AirBnB, was a Planning matter not a Housing committee issue.
- 11.5 Councillor Williams commented that some rent arrears may be due to Universal Credit taking a long time to process a request and residents of Seaside Homes suffer from the benefits cap.
- 11.6 Councillor Osborne noted that the number of days a AirBnB is used can not be limited, however the Planning enforcement team can be more active. The TECC committee will have a paper on this matter in September. The councillor supported the lodger's scheme and considered it worked well and considered that those lodging students should receive a Council Tax reduction. The Assistant Director of Housing Management stated that the Social Housing White Paper is awaited from the government and timescales for housing standards would be improved.
- 11.7 The Chair supported the lodger scheme and considered that more rooms were available now than ever before. It was also noted that the number of households in emergency and temporary accommodation had fallen over the last year.

Vote

- 11.7 A vote was taken, and the committee unanimously agreed the recommendations. (Councillor Clare had left the meeting and took not part in the decision making process or the vote).
- 11.8 **RESOLVED:**

2.1 That Housing Committee notes the report.

12 MOULSECOOMB HUB & HOUSING PROJECT UPDATE

12.1 The Estate Regeneration Project Manager introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

12.2 Councillor Williams congratulated the officers on the report.

12.3 Councillor Meadows was informed that stage 3 was Planning approval, including the technical design ongoing before construction and the costs are attributed to architect's design and enabling works. The grant funding is for capital works only. The preliminary works, such as site boundary hoarding is from the grant funding. The Principal Accountant confirmed that all borrowing was covered.

12.4 Councillor Fowler was informed that three leaflets dating back to 2019 have been sent to local residents and more will follow. Social media is being used in conjunction with the leaflets. The project is subject to planning permission and the consultation is ongoing. The Planning case officer will look at representations submitted regarding the application. The Assistant Director for Housing Management would set up a meeting to discuss the matter of consulting the community.

Vote

12.5 A vote was held, and the committee agreed the recommendations unanimously. (Councillor Clare has left the meeting and took no part in the decision making process or the vote).

12.6 **RESOLVED:** That Housing Committee:

2.1 Recommends to Policy & Resources committee that Policy & Resources Committee:

2.1.1. Notes the progress made on the Moulsecoomb Hub and Housing project to date

2.1.2. Authorises officers to progress RIBA stage 4 (technical design)

2.1.3. Approves an additional budget of £3.771m for this work, to be funded by HRA Borrowing and BLRF grant allocation and included as part of the 2022/23 HRA Capital Programme

2.1.4. Approves the grant-funded enabling works to commence, including the demolition of Moulsecoomb Hubs north and south, to be financed by £1.694m BLRF grant allocation

2.1.5. Confirms minor changes to the appropriation of land as approved at Policy & Resources Committee in November 2021 to include land around the buildings on site, and delegates authority to the Executive Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Communities to approve further minor changes

That Policy & Resources Committee:

- 2.1.6. Notes the progress made on the Moulsecoomb Hub and Housing project to date
- 2.1.7. Authorises officers to progress RIBA stage 4 (technical design)
- 2.1.8. Approves an additional budget of £3.771m for this work, to be funded by HRA Borrowing and BLRF grant allocation and included as part of the 2022/23 HRA Capital Programme
- 2.1.9. Approves the grant-funded enabling works to commence, including the demolition of Moulsecoomb Hubs north and south, to be financed by £1.694m BLRF grant allocation
- 2.1.10. Confirms minor changes to the appropriation of land as approved at Policy & Resources Committee in November 2021 to include land around the buildings on site, and delegates authority to the Executive Director of Housing, Neighbourhood & Communities to approve further minor changes

13 HOMES FOR BRIGHTON & HOVE - REVISED BUSINESS PLAN

- 13.1 The Head of Regeneration introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

- 13.2 Councillor Meadows was informed by the chair that the business plan was for completing homes in 2022/23 and the shared ownership units would be sold first to repay loans. The process is on track with the model working towards new homes programme at Portslade and Coldean. The Head of Regeneration confirmed that they would share the financial information with the councillor and the 100% affordable homes would be sold back to the council. The Principal Accountant confirmed that the pre payments were for off plan construction, with legal agreements in place, and loans handed over earlier than anticipated. The councillor did not consider the finances to be clear. It was confirmed that the affordable housing would be sold off plan. The councillor requested a financial briefing, which was agreed by the Head of Regeneration. The councillor stated they could not support till the briefing had taken place.
- 13.3 Councillor Williams noted that all three political parties were represented on the Housing Supply Board and Councillor Meadows was welcome to the join the meetings.

Vote

- 13.4 A vote was taken and by 7 to 2, the committee agreed the recommendations. (Councillor Clare has left the meeting and took no part in the decision making process or the vote).
- 13.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Housing committee:

- 2.1 Recommends to Policy & Resources Committee that it agrees the revised business plan in the Part 2 report and that it delegates authority to the Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities to take all steps necessary to enable and facilitate the implementation of the revised Business Plan including providing reserved matters approval pursuant to the Agreement.

That Policy & Resources Committee:

- 2.2 Agrees to the revised business plan in the Part 2 report and delegates authority to the Executive Director Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities to take all steps necessary to enable and facilitate the implementation of the revised Business Plan including providing reserved matters approval pursuant to the Members Agreement.

14 NEW HOMES FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS FREDERICK STREET - PROCUREMENT OF CONTRACTOR

- 14.1 The Estate Regeneration Project Manager introduced the report to the committee.

Answers to Committee Member Questions

- 14.2 Councillor Williams stated they were aware of the issues surrounding procurement and expressed their thanks for getting the process underway.
- 14.3 Councillor Meadows was informed that the original budget was £995,000 in 2020, since which time prices have risen resulting from Brexit and supply issues, so the figure was £1.884,000 now.

Vote

- 14.4 A vote was taken, and the committee unanimously agreed the recommendations. (Councillor Clare had left the meeting and took no part in the decision making process or the vote).

14.5 RESOLVED:

- 2.1 That Committee delegates authority to the Executive Director for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities to procure and award a contract for construction through an existing framework process.

15 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL

- 15.1 There were none.

16 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

17 HOMES FOR BRIGHTON & HOVE - REVISED BUSINESS PLAN - PART TWO

- 17.1 The committee did not move to Part Two to discuss the confidential appendix to item 13 – Homes for Brighton & Hove – Revised Business Plan.

The meeting concluded at 7.43pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this day of

