

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE
4.00pm 24 JANUARY 2024
COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: Williams (Chair), Czolak (Deputy Chair), McLeay (Opposition Spokesperson), Baghoth, Fowler, Grimshaw, Meadows, Nann, Oliveira and Sheard

PART ONE

43 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

- a) **Declaration of Substitutes:** None for this meeting.
- b) **Declarations of Interest:** Councillor Grimshaw declared they were a council tenant.
- c) **Exclusion of Press and Public:** As there were no Part Two items on the agenda, it was agreed that the press and public would not be excluded from the meeting when any of the agenda items were under consideration.

44 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- 44.1 The Minutes of the 15 November 2023 committee meeting were agreed.

45 CHAIRS COMMUNICATIONS

- 45.1 The chair, Councillor Williams, addressed the committee as follows: Welcome to our Housing and new homes committee January 2024. I would like to begin with some updates of our actions in tackling our homeless crisis and improving standards.

Landlord licencing consultation: We completed public consultation on Additional HMO Licensing and Selective Licensing at the beginning of January. I'm really with the level of interest, with over 1,000 responses received across both schemes. Officers are analysing this feedback, before bringing a report for consideration at March's Committee. But in the meantime, I would like to thank everybody who was involved in helping us reach as many people as possible. A special thank you to Acorn community union who have worked so hard on promoting the consultation and to the team for helping to organise the consultation.

Tackling empty homes: I am very pleased to tell you that we have taken action on empty and second homes - New premiums on second and long-term empty homes could come into effect if councillors agree recommendations at the Strategy, Finance and Regeneration Committee on 25 January. A report going to the committee outlines

how councils can apply a premium on second homes and long-term empty properties. This means councils are able to raise additional revenue in recognition of the impact that second and empty homes can have on communities and housing supply. In the case of empty properties, this premium could also incentivise property owners to bring properties back into use.

Hidden Homes: Our Hidden Homes programme provides much needed new council homes for people on the city's housing register through making best use of neglected or redundant spaces in council housing stock and small pieces of land on our housing estates. A 3 bedroom family house in Bevendean is the latest built and through the council's [Hidden Homes project](#) and more are planned. Work is underway to convert disused spaces at Saxonbury and Highleigh flats in Ashton Rise, Brighton, to provide 2 extra flats in each block. The new homes are due to be completed in the autumn. A new 3 bedroom house is to be built in Godwin Road, Hove, using part of the garden of an existing council house. Work is due to start next month. And a storage area at a block of flats on the Bristol Estate in Brighton is going to be converted to provide an additional home. The Hidden Homes project has now delivered 27 new homes since it began in 2019. These include:

- Manor Hill, Whitehawk – a former office was converted into 2 flats and a new house built alongside;
- Swallow Court, Whitehawk – a former office was converted into 3 flats;

Under our wider redevelopment programme, we've also converted 2 buildings in Oxford Street and Tilbury Place, both in central Brighton, to provide 25 new council-owned temporary accommodation flats.

The new home in The Crescent, Bevendean, is built on land previously part of the garden of a neighbouring council house. When the home became vacant, the opportunity was taken to divide the garden to provide the additional home. The new house is designed to be energy efficient, with an air source heat pump heating system and solar panels to help reduce energy bills.

Denman Place - letting of new council homes: Viewing and letting of new council homes in Coldean started on 4th January. The 242 low-cost homes in Coldean, include 127 council-rented homes. Denman Place is the first block to be let, this consists of 41 flats. 25 viewings have taken place, The first tenancy start date was on 15th January, we have agreed future move in dates leading into February. Weekly viewings are continuing to take place, the team are working hard to get these homes let as quickly as possible. 40% of the properties were advertised to Transfers, thereby releasing more homes.

Solar panel installations: Work has started on a new programme installing solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on hundreds of council homes across the city, as part of our action to help residents with the cost-of-living crisis and reduce carbon emissions.

Over the next 3 years, around 800 council-rented houses and bungalows will benefit from new solar panels. The priority for the programme is homes with an Energy Performance Certificate rating of D or lower, those with electric heating, and areas of the city with a higher likelihood of fuel poverty.

Following the procurement of experienced solar PV contractor, Everwarm, installations began in December 2023, starting in Coldean and Stanmer ward. Three install teams will be working in the city with approximately 15 installations completed per week. As of the 23 January 2024 we have undertaken 41 installations.

As part of this project one new electrical supervisor role, 3 roofers and 2 electricians from the local area have been hired as part of the contract. A Brighton based scaffolding company have also been procured as a sub-contractor, providing valuable local economic benefits. The potential benefits of solar panels for residents have significantly increased in light of the cost-of-living crisis and the rise in energy prices. Due to these increases, tenants could now save up to £250 on their electricity bill and the equivalent of 0.5 tonnes carbon dioxide (CO₂e) per year.

Housing allocation policy: Turning to today's agenda we have a paper that will enable us to start consultation on changes we'd like to make to the Council's Allocations Policy. The Allocations Policy is arguably one of the most important policies overseen by the council, as it is the only means through which social housing can be offered and will impact every person on the housing register, as well as effecting existing council tenants and those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. We will not be making any changes to the Policy tonight. The paper is a proposal. What we are wanting to commence is the consultation process. And what I want to emphasis is that this is a consultation. We want to hear people's feedback to the proposals. The present policy was made in 2016 and it is high time it was reviewed. We are keen to hear your views and we hope as many people as possible will take part. We want to make it as fair as possible. Although this will always be difficult when we simply don't have enough supply to meet demand. This is a challenge we continue to face, and we will continue to do all we can.

If agreed, then consultation would start on 14 February, and run for 12 weeks until 9 May. We will be contacting all households on the housing register, council tenants and homeless applicants by both email and letters. We will be holding events and inviting people to attend. And we will be giving everyone the opportunity to respond through a public portal. Some people attending tonight's Committee have already started to express views about how the Allocations Policy could be changed. I would encourage all who have an interest to please share these views with us through the consultation process.

We will also soon be consulting on a new Housing Strategy, with a proposed draft coming to the next meeting of this committee before consultation commences. This is so important and crucial to our City. We need to plan for our future and design a strategy that works for everyone. We have sadly been witnessing the closure of schools fundamentally due to a drop in numbers. There is no doubt that families being priced out of our City. We desperately need more family homes as well decent affordable homes for everyone in need of one.

Housing revenue account budget and capital investment: This report presents the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) revenue budget proposals, including provision for service pressures, changes to rents, fees and charges, together with the HRA capital programme. The HRA contains the income and expenditure relating to the council's social landlord duties covering approximately 12,000 rented properties and approximately 2,700 leasehold properties. This must be in balance, we must show in its

financial planning that HRA income meets expenditure and that the HRA is consequently viable. The budget proposals reflect significant legislative and regulatory changes impacting social housing landlords following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. This, quite rightly, includes substantial investment being undertaken in relation to building, health and fire safety compliance and in anticipation of the strengthened role of Regulator of Social Housing, ensuring adherence to their Consumer Standards and mostly importantly ensuring the safety of our residents.

It must be noted that we are in a difficult budget position the Housing service – in line with all Council services – is facing significant pressures. The identified savings in the Housing GF at more £2m will inevitably mean there will real pressure on the service in 2024/25 as we try to cope with increased demands with less resource.

Health and Safety report: Following on from this is our health and safety report. The health & safety of our residents and those who visit and work on our homes is our key priority. In light of significant changes in management and maintenance of council housing, including bring in house our repairs service, and as already highlighted, in anticipation of legislative and regulatory changes. the Housing service continue to review our approach to health & safety compliance and assurance for council homes. This is part of our long-term service improvement plan.

Housing Adaptations Framework Re-let: The Council has duties arising under the Care Act and 1996 Housing Grants, Construction & Regeneration Act to assess a disabled person's need for adaptations and, where both "necessary and appropriate" and "reasonable and practicable", to make funding available for housing adaptations for specific purposes promoting independent living and wellbeing. In honouring this duty, the council has allocated £1.6m from the Housing Revenue Account for the provision of Adaptations in 2023/24. For those who are not council tenants, adaptations are funded through Disabled Facilities Grants. It is essential that we make sure that this essential service continues hence the paper recommends that this goes out to tender as soon as is practicable.

Thank you to everyone who have helped prepared the reports.

46 CALL OVER

46.1 All the items on the agenda were called for discussion by the committee Members.

47 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

47.1 **a) Petitions:** There were none for this meeting.

b) Written Questions from Members of the Public: There were 13 for this agenda. The Chair stated that only the questioners present either online or in the chamber would be able to speak. The remainder would be written to. (Note: Only 30 minutes is allocated per committee to answering public questions).

1. From: Charles Harrison

Question: Looking at Appendix 3 - HRA Capital Investment Programme New Supply, I note the following:

- 769 Homes were delivered in the previous 5yrs from 2019 to March 2024
- 154 Homes are to be delivered in the next 5 years from April 2024 to March 2029

I also note that significant budget allowances have been allocated to health & safety and major works (e.g., structural and fire safety). Whilst I appreciate the importance of public safety, I am concerned that, despite the increasing demand for social housing, the Council has reduced its commitment to only 20% of what was previously achieved. In the face of a deepening housing crisis in Brighton and nationwide, would you agree that this is unacceptable and what steps are the Council taking to bring this to the attention of central government?

Response: *Thank you for your question. Ensuring the health & safety of our residents and those who visit and work on our homes is our key priority. The HRA budget proposals reflect significant legislative and regulatory changes impacting social housing landlords following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. This includes substantial investment the Council is required to undertake in relation to building, health and fire safety compliance and in anticipation of the strengthened role of Regulator of Social Housing, in particular ensuring adherence to their Consumer Standards. The council will continue to pursue opportunities to increase the supply of new homes wherever possible. This includes delivery through our successful joint venture with Hyde Housing – Homes for Brighton & Hove and by utilising all available external funding sources to bring forward schemes and we continue to work closely with Registered Providers to bring forward new housing schemes in the city. The council has a strong track record of applying for and securing external funding to support new schemes and will continue to engage with Homes England and the Department of Levelling Up Communities and Local Government to press for more funding and bid for available funding streams.*

Supplementary question: *Although it is difficult to quantify, has anyone accessed and communicated the knock-on effect of failing to provide sufficient social housing and how it impacts physical and mental health, well-being, education, productivity, crime levels, etc.?*

Response: *Thank you for your question. There has been a range of national academic research reports published which support the benefits of social housing with its impact going far beyond providing accommodation.*

2. From: Diane Montgomery

Question: *Since 1981 national UK governments of all colours have supported the Right to Buy, Brighton and Hove have experienced a net loss of over 5,800 council homes which are no longer available to meet housing need (and many ex-council homes are now being rented privately at around 300% more rent). Governments in Scotland and Wales have abolished the right to buy. Our city cannot afford to lose any more social housing, so we ask the Housing committee to write to government and all 4 opposition parties urging a commitment to abolish the right to buy in England.*

Response: *The chair will respond directly on behalf of the administration.*

Supplementary question: *It is estimated that over £20 billion of public asset has been given away in RTB discounts. Given the great need for truly affordable housing in our*

city will the housing committee issue a public call for national government to refund the money lost through discounts.

Response: *The chair will respond directly on behalf of the administration.*

3. From: Maggie Gordon-Walker

Question: *A decision was taken in March last year to bring seaside homes in house enabling lower rents for nearly 500 homeless households also saving money for the council. At the time officers advised that it would take around 3 months. In June, the chair of housing re-assured that this was a priority for the administration. 10 months have now passed and if the council doesn't get a move on predicted future falls in interest rates will increase the loan buy out costs for the council. Is bringing seaside in house still a priority and why is it taking so long?*

Response: *Thank you for your question. A very similar question was raised last month at Full Council and the - response remains the same. In line with the delegation of authority agreed at Joint Housing Committee and Policy & Resources Committee (27th February 2023). The council is in discussion with Seaside Homes and other parties with a shared interest to seek to end the current Local Delivery Vehicle arrangement in order to bring the temporary accommodation currently leased to Seaside Homes back into Council control. These discussions are complex. We can neither pre-determine the outcome of these discussions, nor the time it will take should an agreement be reached, in order to undertake the due diligence required for the Committee to make a final decision.*

4. From: Lynn-Ora Knott

Question: *The average time that rough sleepers on the streets when SWEP and winter provision is not operating was around 6-8 weeks for the off-street offer. This is detrimental to vulnerable people's health. In the spirit of the Homeless Bill of Rights agreed by council, can the housing committee monitor and report how long people are waiting and put in place measures to shorten the time people are spending on the streets such as agreeing to make offers of emergency accommodation to verified rough sleepers?*

Response: *Thank you for your question. The council currently provides 739 units of accommodation for single people including those who are sleeping rough, or at risk of sleeping rough. This is non-statutory provision, so does not include people we have a duty to accommodate in temporary accommodation. This is among the highest, if not the highest in the country. The reference of a 6-8 week wait before accessing the off-street offer is not a figure we recognise. If the source of this data can be provided to officers, they will investigate this further. Of course, we want to reduce any wait that people sleep rough before they are able to access. However, bearing in mind the units we already offer, part of the solution sits with how we manage to move people through a structured pathway, so they are equipped to be living independently. This one of the key outcomes for the newly commissioned single homelessness pathway that will be operational later this year.*

Supplementary question: *Brighton and Hove have the highest homeless death rate in UK.*

Response: *Pathways are provided for all on the street.*

5. From: From Sarah McCarthy of Phoenix Community Association

Question: *Rent Controls: It was reported in the Guardian (11.12.23) that Britain has seen its highest rent increase for a decade at 10.2%. Rents in Brighton and Hove are already unaffordable and so high that many have been forced to move away from their hometown away from family and community. The Living Rent Campaign believes that our city needs a form of rent controls capable of reducing rents. Will the Housing Committee declare their support for rent controls able to lower rents in the city?*

Response: *The chair will respond directly on behalf of the administration.*

6. From: Dr Fiona Wright

Question: *Given the all-party commitment to carbon neutral 2030, why does the HRA budget propose to abolish the £4.8 million reserve set aside for sustainability and retrofitting of council homes which should be spent making homes cheaper to heat?*

Response: *Thank you for your question. We are committed to investing to ensure our council tenants live in well-insulated, efficiently heated, healthy homes. The HRA Capital Investment Programme 2024/25 to 2028/29 sets out resources of £30.800m; an average investment of £6.160m per annum, on sustainability works for council homes, with the 2024/25 programme being £6.390m. This includes investment in making improvements to communal and domestic heating systems as well as identifying opportunities to install energy efficient & low carbon heating systems. The council's solar panel programme is also being taken forward. Over the next 3 years, around 800 council-rented houses and bungalows will benefit from new solar panels. The proposal to un-ringfence earmarked reserves provides the flexibility necessary to meet challenges to HRA budgets in the coming years, in particular relating to investment likely to be required to meeting building and fire safety requirements. The rationale for doing this is supported by a capital programme that already includes proposals for significant investment in sustainability works, in addition to the sustainability benefits of undertaking other planned works, including replacement of windows, doors and roofing. Un-ringfencing earmarked reserves releases £4.800m that can be used across the whole of the HRA to help manage the financial position more holistically and enable greater flexibility to address emerging and priority pressures.*

7. From: From Amy White

Question: *After being placed out of area for nearly 5 years, away from all my family and friends. It's lonely and detrimental to mental health when you rely strongly on help from others who still live in Brighton. I strongly agree with prioritising households who have been placed out of area in long term temporary accommodation, whom have a local connection for over 5 years to band A, or higher priority bidding. How have you considered/prioritised households who are placed out of area with local connection, who has needs to come back to the area?*

Response: *Thank you for your question. Unfortunately, because of the lack of available temporary accommodation in the city, some households have to be placed outside the city. Geographical TA placement is not linked to priority need for housing. Where households are placed in TA outside Brighton & Hove, there will be circumstances where they may be prioritised to be transferred to TA within the city, when this is available. The Housing Allocations Policy Review: Consultation report on today's agenda recommends that consultation commences on changes to be made to the Allocations Policy. Households already on the register, and those who have homeless applications, will be contacted directly and invited to respond to the proposals, and we welcome comments from those who are directly impacted by the policy.*

Supplementary question: *More transparency please.*

Response: *Transparency is important, and the authority work towards this.*

8. From: David Gibson

Question: *The Moulsecomb hub project has planning permission and was on track to deliver over 200 much needed new council homes over the next couple of years. This is a big part of the 800 additional council homes promised by Labour in the election yet looking at the appendix 3 of the HRA budget report there is no budget outlined for 25/6 and only sufficient to deliver around 30 homes in 2024/5. Can you assure me that there are no plans to downsize this flagship project for new council homes?*

Response: *Thank you for your question. This is a key project for the council and are no plans to reduce the number of homes. An update on progress and final budget for delivering this project will be brought in a separate committee report to a future committee.*

Supplementary question: *If there are financial challenges to delivering the Moulsecomb hub project, any gap could be closed by either accepting that not every new homes project has to 100% break even (especially if it is delivering a huge social good) or use the £4 million + profit from the joint venture (previously earmarked for re investment in social housing) or both of these suggestions to make up any shortfall, please offer some thoughts how we can ensure this flagship project is not downsized and goes ahead?*

Response: *Thank you for the question. Officers are continuing to develop this project and are always reviewing options in order to ensure value for money. This priority project for the council which will deliver over 200 new council homes, a multi-agency hub, improved public realm, as well as new sports and youth facilities.*

9. From: Paul Norman for Hanover Action

Question: *Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF): Noting that Lewes District Council are bidding for £2.845m over 2 years from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) to make homes more energy efficient, has Brighton & Hove City Council taken the opportunity to apply to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF)?*

Response: *Thank you for your question. The HRA Capital Investment Programme 2024/25 to 2028/29 to be considered on today's agenda, sets out resources of £30.800m; an average investment of £6.160m per annum, on sustainability works for council homes. We have not applied for SHDF funding to date, we have explored options and have participated in the Social Housing Retrofit Accelerator programme to support developing robust bids. To date we have not identified a suitable size project that can be delivered within the criteria and time frames of the funding. We will continue to build on the work carried out to date to identify a deliverable project for future funding rounds or other external funding to support this work.*

Supplementary question: *Assuming that the Council has taken the opportunity to gain this additional resource for its carbon neutral responsibilities for the city, please confirm the sum applied for with any breakdowns as appropriate.*

Response: *Thank you for your question. We have not applied for SHDF funding to date.*

10. From: Nichola Woolven of Home Move Action Group

Question: *I'd like to question the fairness of changing the Band start date policy within the home move bidding system. For instance, a family of six has been part of the system since 2005, initially in Band D, later upgraded to Band C with a new start date of 2015. This shift resulted in them losing 10 years of bidding, creating an unfair disadvantage compared to others in the same Banding. Despite their 18-year involvement, the adjusted banding start date reduces their effective bidding time to only 8 years. Could the committee review and rectify this policy for equal opportunity within the home move bidding system?*

Response: *Thank you for your question. The Housing Allocations Policy Review: Consultation report on today's agenda recommends that consultation commences on changes to be made to the Allocations Policy. If agreed, this consultation would start on 14 February 2024, and run for 12 weeks until 9 May. We will seek views on these proposals before approving a new policy. Households already on the register, and those who have homeless applications, will be contacted directly and invited to respond to the proposals. I would welcome the questioner to express her views through this mechanism.*

Supplementary question: *Many residents have been moved permanently into poorly repaired homes.*

Response: *The report on the agenda for this committee covers access issues.*

11. From: Ian Needham

Question: *At housing and new homes committee in June, when asked to confirm the Labour election pledge of 800 additional council homes, we were told there was a target of 318 schemes already in the pipeline from the previous administration for the financial year and that a review expected numbers for future years were under review. Please could you tell us of the outcome of the review and whether the election pledge*

of 800 additional council homes over the 4 years of the current administration (May 2023-May 2027) still stands?

Response: *Thank you for your question. A key aim of the Council's Plan is to increase the supply of affordable housing in the city. Alongside the target for this financial year which is on track to be our most successful year to date we continue to identify sites for our New Homes for Neighbourhoods Programme and our joint venture with Hyde Housing 'Homes for Brighton & Hove'. Acquisition opportunities continue to be reviewed alongside our popular and successful 'buy back' scheme. All of these opportunities will provide us with a steady flow of new affordable homes with targets set each year once delivery timescales are clear and new schemes on our pipeline have budgets approved. Progress against our targets are reported through the quarterly Performance Report which is available on the council's website.*

12. From: Daniel Harris

Question: *I am a preciously looked after child. I would like to broadly praise a lot of the amendments to the allocations policy suggested but want to raise concerns. I see nothing written about care leavers; we are facing a real crisis locally. I've suggested an amendment to add care leaver priority, rebutted. We know they are dying young here in B&H, 1/4 prisoners were/are care leavers, 1in2 leave care with an undiagnosed mental health condition, can you explain why this report is presented but with no actual mention of care leavers let alone a full draft of the policy to digest?*

Response: *Thank you for your question. The Housing Allocations Policy Review: Consultation report on today's agenda recommends that consultation commences on changes to be made to the Allocations Policy. If agreed, this consultation would start on 14 February 2024, and run for 12 weeks until 9 May. We will seek views on these proposals before approving a new policy. Households already on the register, and those who have homeless applications, will be contacted directly and invited to respond to the proposals. Other interested stakeholders will also have the opportunity to respond. I would welcome the questioner to express his views through this mechanism.*

Supplementary question: *Are all parties spoken too?*

Response: *All parties are consulted, and more may be submitted for inclusion.*

13. From: Magdalena Okeke

Question: *Many families facing benefit caps and the third child rule in the private rental sector endure financial strain due to deductions from their £22k cap, impacting their ability to afford high rents. With LHA increases benefiting landlords but leaving capped households with less, the situation raises concerns. How many benefit-capped households are currently on Homemove waiting for social housing, highlighting the urgency to address this disproportionate impact on vulnerable families?*

Response: *Thank you for your question. This information is not relevant for the purposes of making a housing register application, and therefore is not held on Home Move. If a household is impacted by the Benefit Cap, they can seek advice by emailing benefitcapsupport@brighton-hove.gov.uk. There are exemptions to the benefit cap*

which can be applied in certain circumstances, such as access to specific welfare benefits, or working families tax credits, or by being in employment for a certain number of hours.

c) Deputations: One for this meeting:

Living Rent Campaign deputation to Housing & New homes Committee

There is a chronic shortage of social housing in Brighton and Hove. 1,724 households are currently in temporary and emergency homeless accommodation (and the number is rising (1)). The number of rough sleepers on our streets is increasing (by 27% between the last official rough sleeper counts) Many people born in the city can no longer afford to live here and move away from family and community. Private rents are far too high and unaffordable (an average 2 bed rent is £1,773 per month (2) and the middle income in the city is only £2,250 a month) and in part as a consequence the greatest cause of homelessness is the loss of a private rented home-) The councils' recent decision to compel some homeless households into the private rented (despite previously making a move to the private rented sector voluntary) is a step backwards.

In order to tackle the housing crisis, we need a return to rent controls in the private rented sector, an end to the loss of social housing through the right to buy and a return to investment in council housing by massively expanding social housing grant to deliver a significant programme of additional council homes. Sadly, both conservative and labour governments since 1989 have failed to do this. However, in Scotland and Wales the Right to Buy has been abolished. In Scotland rent controls have also been introduced and are being considered in Wales. In 2012 over £8 billion of government debt was taken on by councils under the self-financing settlement (3) This money, now equivalent of approximately £11.7 billion, is desperately needed and should be returned to councils as social housing grant to enable around 120,000 additional council homes at social/living rents.

We ask that the Housing committee agree to write to government and the 4 main opposition parties in England calling for:

- 1) Rent controls in areas like ours where private rents are unaffordable;
- 2) An end to the right to buy;
- 3) £11.7 billion provision of social grant to enable over 120,000 additional council homes at living/social rents.

Locally there are measures that the council can take we ask that the housing committee to:

- 1) Press ahead with the Moulsecomb hub project which has planning approval to deliver 200 + new council homes;
- 2) Review rent policy to make new and additional council homes more affordable;
- 3) Abandon the policy of forcing homeless people into the private rented sector and instead give them a choice of whether the home is suitable.

From Living Rent Campaign (signed by):

Rimmer, Montgomery, Knott, Needham, Gordon-Walker, Gorton, Gibson

Sources: (1) BHCC Q2 stats, (2) BHCC website, (3) DCLG self-financing final determination.

Response: *Response in writing will be provided.*

48 ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS

(a) **Petitions:** None for this agenda

(b) **Written Questions:** Four for this agenda:

1. **Councillor Shanks:** *When will a commissioning decision be made on the Housing Advice and Support service for under 25s be made. The current commission with YMCA Youth Advice Centre finishes on March 31st and they have not been notified of any uplift and continuation.*

Response: *Thank you for the question. All services in the Council have had to identify savings from budgets, particularly non-statutory activities, to ensure we have a balanced budget. This includes our supported housing commissioning budget and so unfortunately impacts on decisions to commission services such as the Youth Advice Centre, operating through the YMCA Downslink Group. This is no reflection on our appreciation of what is a valuable service. YMCA Downslink Group have been informally notified of the parts of the currently commissioned services that will impact them.*

Supplementary Question: *What is happening to young people?*

Response: *The council have written to the YMCA informally and have arranged a meeting.*

2. **Councillor Mcleay: Private Rented Sector Offer (PRSO) Policy**

At last housing committee I did not agree with the proposed Private Rented Sector Offer Policy that allows the council to withdraw support for homeless people if they don't accept private rental accommodation. I wanted to vote against this, but there was no formal vote. I also called for further consultation on this downgrading of support for homeless people in an amendment, but my amendment was rejected by the Chair. When can we review this policy, which I fear places homeless people in insecure tenancies, given the private rental sector is the largest cause of homelessness in this city? And how could this be reported to committee?

Response: *Thank you for the question. There is no 'downgrading of homelessness support'. When a household is homeless or threatened with homelessness, it is the council's responsibility to prevent or relieve that homelessness, which can be achieved by helping people secure settled accommodation. Private rented accommodation is settled accommodation and provides a home for around a third of residents living in the city. When agreeing the PRSO Policy we did ensure additional safeguards will be in place. Before a property is offered, the council will undertake an assessment to ensure the offer is suitable, which includes making sure it meets the household's needs and is affordable. If a household requires additional support, this may still be provided, depending on need, and not necessarily tenancy. For example, the new services commissioned through the Single Homelessness Pathway will include floating support in*

the Private Rented Sector. And the policy will allow people to request a review and maintain a 2-year period where they remain on the Housing Register. On today's agenda, we have a report seeking approval to commence consultation on reviewing the Allocations Policy. This could include extending the period where a household remains on the Housing Register. Once the review is complete, any subsequent changes to the Allocations Policy will need to be approved by this committee.

3. Councillor Mcleay: Empty Homes

It was recently reported that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities recorded figures showing that 1,695 homes in Brighton and Hove were long-term empty as of October 2023 - an increase from 1,596 during the same period in 2022. What is the plan to manage this, given Brighton and Hove is experiencing an acute housing crisis?

Response: *Thank you for the question. The administration has acted as quickly as possible, and a report is going to the Thursday 25 January 2024 Full Council proposing 100% premium council tax on second homes and properties empty for longer than one year. That is an action taken by the administration.*

4. Councillor Mcleay: Warmer Homes - [Action to cut carbon emissions from homes \(brighton-hove.gov.uk\)](https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk)

In September 2022, the Green administration reported on progress on their budget to promote warmer homes in a cost of living crisis. With £3.0m agreed upon for the warmer homes initiative for 2023/24 – how much of this has been spent on providing warmer houses in the city in the past 9 months and how many people have benefitted so far?

Response: *Thank you for the question. Following approval to procure at Housing Committee on 28th September 2022 a tender was published to enable procurement of a Managing Agent to deliver a Brighton & Hove Warmer Homes scheme. 22 providers registered an interest in bidding for the contract. However only one submitted a complete tender. The tender was evaluated but did not meet the required standard for us to proceed. Receiving only one tender would have required a very good quality bid that could also be bench marked for price for us to proceed on this basis. As we were unable to proceed with delivering a Brighton & Hove Warmer Homes scheme at this time we have since instead focussed the resource we have available on maximising the funding opportunity coming into the city through the Warmer Homes Consortium. The Warmer Homes Consortium is a group of 23 local authorities led by Portsmouth City Council and Agility Eco Services. The consortium has been awarded funding of £41,400,000 from phase two of the governments Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2) scheme. This grant provides energy efficiency upgrades and low carbon heating to households that are low income, off the gas grid. This scheme targets similar households to those identified in the analysis for our own scheme. The HUG2 Warmer Homes programme is being promoted through our local networks with leaflets being distributed around the city, social media posts and adverts in local community magazines. We are also take this opportunity to explore attracting more Energy Company Obligation (ECO) and Great British Insulation Scheme funding into the city, we hope to provide details of this scheme in the coming months. In addition, the council has a budget for the Warm Safe Homes Grant which was set at £1m over 3 years in*

2022/23 with £319,000 spent in 2022/23. Since 1 April 2023 we have completed works to 50 properties with a total value of £350,000. There is currently £252,000 committed across 44 grants. The HRA Capital Investment Programme 2024/25 to 2028/29 to be considered on today's agenda, sets out resources of £30.800m; an average investment of £6.160m per annum, on sustainability works for council homes.

(a) Members Letters

One for this agenda from Councillor McLeay:

Will Tuckley
Chief Executive Office
Brighton and Hove City Council
Hove Town Hall
Norton Road
Hove, BN3 3BQ
11.01.2024

LETTER TO HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE

Dear Will,

I am submitting the following letter under Council Procedure Rule 23.3 to be included on the agenda for the Housing and New Homes Committee meeting of 24th January 2024.

As temperatures drop during the winter months, the council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) service is activated. As I'm sure you're aware, SWEP operates outside usual eligibility and entitlement frameworks that govern access to housing. It should be accessible to everyone, including all those who may otherwise be excluded from services; people with restrictions due to immigration status, people who may have previously been excluded or banned from services, and those with no local connection.

A street pastor who does significant outreach work with the street community in my ward communicated that the current format of the Brighton & Hove SWEP service is based on a referral system that is slowing down the ability for those sleeping rough to access the service. That the referrals are not instantaneous, in that they need to be picked up by the team on shift, then actioned by sending someone out to "verify" the person is a rough sleeper, and this can take up to 36 hours in some cases.

I can confirm that when I reported a rough sleeper to the SWEP service at 9:30PM on January 8th there was a lag in the response to verify the rough sleeper, and the team got to them by 8AM the next morning. In this particular case, the individual refused help from the service – there can be many complex reasons why rough sleepers refuse help.

I appreciate that the referral system in place allows the SWEP team to triage appropriately, and I can see that it has important benefits. However, at the same time an element may be missing which is the option for rough sleepers to simply 'turn up' and be dealt with 'on the door' in a timely manner. That they have the option of a safe and warm place to sleep, without being formally brought into council services.

As I investigated the guidance shared with local authorities as to implementing best practice for SWEP services, I came across Homeless Link's winter provision and SWEP toolkit guide – a resource drafted to support local authorities and partner agencies to provide emergency accommodation to people sleeping rough during cold weather. They highlight that the process of verification (confirming someone has been seen sleeping rough) is sometimes used to ensure that people who are most in need are prioritised for accommodation, however, a flexible approach should be adopted. That people should not be sent back onto the streets to be verified. They also highlighted that individuals often have good reasons for concealing their sleep sites, for example, due to vulnerability to assault or fears of enforcement, and so verification of rough sleeping should not be used as a barrier to offer SWEP.

Museum of Homelessness (MoH), who led a six-month investigation into SWEP services provided by 91 local authorities across the UK, over two years of activity, found that SWEP is often offered conditionally, when it should be an emergency humanitarian offer, open to all. That a conditional approach requires rough sleepers to meet certain criteria or behave a certain way to receive help.

It is obvious that the team who manage the SWEP service work incredibly hard and are doing their utmost to support those who are rough sleeping across the city. This letter does not set out to criticise their work, but rather **calls for a review of the referral's process of the service, which has been reported to me as creating a barrier to access for those looking for shelter. Is there a way to facilitate a turn-up at the door process, where the person sleeping rough has the option to accept ongoing support or not?**

The Government advice for those with responsibilities for people sleeping rough in England, is that "*they should develop best practice by collaborating with local authorities, relevant partners, and **people sleeping rough**, to provide mutual support and share learning.*" I think an important point to note here is **that we should be engaging in a listening exercise with the people this service is designed to support. To speak with people sleeping rough and seek to co-produce provision, as this is likely to increase take-up and positive outcomes.** If there is one too many barriers in place to access the service, how can we help them?

As I read the 2023 -2027 Directorate Plan for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities, I can see that "*a responsive council with well-run services*" is a key goal. To be responsive is to listen and I hope this request to review the referrals process for SWEP will be acknowledged.

Yours sincerely, Councillor Ellen McLeay
Green Party - West Hill & North Laine

References:

[Supporting vulnerable people before and during cold weather: people homeless and sleeping rough - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)
\[https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/SWEP and Winter Provision Toolkit Nov 23.pdf\]\(https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/SWEP_and_Winter_Provision_Toolkit_Nov_23.pdf\)
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/623b05f9825aa34cda99921f/t/6423301d2f6abf0202364811/1680027696562/Severe+Weather+Emergency+a+Museum+of+Homelessnes+s+Investigation+2023.pdf>](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/Supporting_vulnerable_people_before_and_during_cold_weather_people_homeless_and_sleeping_rough_-_GOV.UK_(www.gov.uk)_https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/SWEP_and_Winter_Provision_Toolkit_Nov_23.pdf_https://static1.squarespace.com/static/623b05f9825aa34cda99921f/t/6423301d2f6abf0202364811/1680027696562/Severe+Weather+Emergency+a+Museum+of+Homelessnes+s+Investigation+2023.pdf)

Response:

Dear Cllr McLeay

Thank you for your letter raised under Council Procedure Rule 23.3, regarding the council's response to rough sleeping, particularly during periods where the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol is active. I would like to emphasise how seriously we take the matter of rough sleeping, by virtue of the fact we currently provide 739 units of accommodation for single people, including those who sadly sleep rough, or are at risk of sleeping rough, through our Single Homelessness Supported Accommodation Pathway. This is among the highest – if not THE highest – in the country. Furthermore, our commissioning of future provision will prioritise this accommodation, while seeking to encourage more people moving into independent accommodation and reducing unplanned evictions.

I have also outlined the SWEP referral process below with the aim to resolve some of your concerns. The referral system is reported by Officers both within BHCC and with external agencies to be working well. It is kept under review throughout the winter, and we will make changes, while balancing resources, if these are likely to improve the process. This would include taking into account feedback from partner agencies, as well as people who use the service. However, it's important to note the council must balance the SWEP response to ensure it can be mobilised quickly, efficiently and safely. The SWEP response is around preventing loss of life, so this needs to be considered when taking into account the provision offered, within what is available in the city.

It is acknowledged that a very small number of clients may not wish to come into SWEP, and while we will seek to understand the reasons why, it is simply not feasible to create an offer that fits all preferences, and the provision is available for those who wish to accept it. There is no requirement to engage with the Council or Outreach to come into provision (or remain in it), and the support is always available if people want to take this or reconsider a previous decision.

There also seems to be a misunderstanding that a StreetLink referral is the starting point for a client to access SWEP. This is not correct. StreetLink is the reporting tool for agencies or members of the public to let services know about a rough sleeper. This system is in place 365 days regardless of the weather. People do not need to be 'verified' as rough sleeping to access SWEP accommodation and the system in place is designed to also capture those who might not have slept rough before but are highly likely to that night. This system has been developed taking into account the Homeless Link Guidance referenced your question. There is further information about this below.

Clients currently rough sleeping

During periods of cold/extreme weather the Street Outreach Team will be continuing to engage with residents rough sleeping. Part of their work during the winter is to encourage clients to come in when SWEP is called and supporting to them understand the SWEP provision. This means that when SWEP is called the team can quickly notify the SWEP Co-Ordinator of clients to offer placement to in the 24/48 hours before the start date and rooms can be allocated. Any clients working with the Street Outreach

Team who decline SWEP will continue to be supported through the period and the offer continue to be made. If they would like to come in later this placement can be made.

Clients at high risk of rough sleeping

Alongside the clients above partner agencies such as Changing Futures, First Base Day Centre, YAC, Clock Tower Sanctuary and Housing Options can refer following what is called a 'verification lite' triage process, assessing where the person was previously staying. This needs to be completed to ensure that provision is offered only to those who would be rough sleeping, as SWEP is not a response for those insecurely housed. If there is not an alternative and the agency deems the person is likely to sleep rough that night a referral is sent to the SWEP Co-ordinator to triage and confirm a placement. Outside of contact with these agencies (Monday-Friday 9 to 5) residents at risk of rough sleeping during SWEP periods can also contact the Council's emergency out of hours phone number and an officer will be able to make a SWEP placement if one is required.

Street Link and Out of Hours

The StreetLink system can sometimes alert services to a rough sleeper not previously known. This is unusual as the majority of rough sleepers will be known to services, through active Outreach work, and would tend to be isolated people who have recently arrived in the city. If a StreetLink referral is received for an unknown person, the team will target this asap. You have mentioned in your letter about a referral made and the time before Outreach attended (9.30pm to 8am the next day). Please be aware, the Council's Commissioned Street Outreach Service is not available 24/7. However, shifts are increased during SWEP periods. As above people sleeping rough (or someone acting on their behalf) can also contact the Council's emergency out of hours number, during a SWEP period to ask for an emergency placement if they are at risk of rough sleeping.

You have also mentioned a change to the model to allow rough sleepers to 'turn up' and be dealt with 'on the door' without being formally brought into Council Services. We would not support such a 'direct access' option, as this would require a substantial increase in budget, as well as there being very specific health, safety & security risks linked to such provision which would also need additional finance. Furthermore, we work very closely with advisers within DLUHC and through this can draw upon experience of other areas similar to Brighton & Hove. This indicates such a model can be ineffective and increase demand from households who are insecurely housed, rather than rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping. However, for next year we are considering returning to a non-congregate model that was in place prior to the pandemic. A return to such a model would continue to need a level of information on residents to ensure safe placement as well as managing numbers within the venue. We need to make sure if this model moves forward, it is done correctly and safely for rough sleepers as well as any staff/volunteers within the service. The current rough sleeping profile needs to be considered as well. With large numbers (around 50-60 on any given night) finding a venue that can safely support this number of clients in a hall type space, with dignity of space for sleeping/privacy is difficult. Officers will continue to develop this through the year.

The referral system for this winter will continue to be kept under review by Officers, taking into account feedback from partner agencies and service users. It is not expected

that there will be any large change this winter as the system is working for the provision the Council has made available.

Yours sincerely Councillor Williams

(b) Notices of Motion

None for this agenda.

49 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW: CONSULTATION

49.1 The Head of Homelessness & Housing Options introduced the report to the committee.

49.2 Following questions the committee Members were informed of the following: data from the online consultation will be analysed; the limit on income per household is currently being reviewed; statutory partners will be targeted in the consultation which will be an open portal on the website, also written response will be accepted and point of contact officers will be able to submit on behalf of the homeless; support is offered to all that access the council services; those in accommodation outside the city are included; direct offers to households are made on a case-by-case basis and residents have a right to review decisions; all council tenants can express concerns in the consultation, including those who have gone through the process; any suggestions for stakeholders to be consulted are welcome; feedback on any parts of the service can be given at the end of the consultation.

49.2 The Chair presented the recommendations to the committee.

Vote

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

RESOLVED:

2.1 That Committee agrees for consultation to begin on the proposed changes to the Council's Allocations Policy (set out in Appendix 1).

50 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET & CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2024/25 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

50.1 The Assistant Director Housing Management introduced the report to the committee.

50.2 Following questions the committee Members were informed of the following: the overspend from 18 months ago is balanced as the direct revenue fund was used and the budget papers agreed; the rent rise of 7.7% is within the government guidelines as the cap was set at 10% last year. The council are committed to support tenants; the issue of 'no-win-no-fee' with tenants regarding repairs has increased. Claims need to be understood and extra-legal resources are required; un-ringfencing releases funds, however, this is not always necessary and cost recovery needs to be proportionate.

50.3 The chair presented the recommendations to the committee.

Vote

- 50.4 A vote was taken, and by 8 to 2 abstentions the recommendations were agreed. (Councillors Meadows and McLeay abstained).

RESOLVED:**That the Housing & New Homes Committee:**

- 2.1 Approves a rent increase of up to 7.7% in line with government legislation as detailed in paragraph 3.14 of the report.
- 2.2 Approves the service charges and fees as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report.
- 2.3 Notes the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and 30-year financial projections shown in Appendix 4 to the report.
- 2.4 Approves the Travellers fees and Charges set out in Appendix 5 to the report.

That the Housing & New Homes Committee approves and recommends to Strategy, Finance & City Regeneration Committee:

- 2.5 The updated HRA Revenue Budget for 2024/25 as shown in Table 1 of the main report and Appendix 1 to the report be agreed and recommended to Full Council for approval.
- 2.6 That the un-ringfencing of reserves is approved as set out in paragraphs 3.20 to 3.23 of the main report and Appendix 1 to the report.
- 2.7 That the new Capital Programme Budget of £57.955m for 2024/25 be agreed as part of the revised capital budget of £87.623m (which includes reprofiles of £29.668m from 2023/24), and recommended to Full Council for approval; and
- 2.8 That the 5-year capital programme as set out in Appendix 3 to the report is noted and recommended to Full Council for approval.

That Full Council:

- 2.9 Approves the updated HRA Revenue Budget for 2024/25 as shown in Table 1 of the main report and Appendix 1 to the report.
- 2.10 Approves the new Capital Programme Budget of £57.955m for 2024/25 as part of the revised capital budget of £87.623m (which includes reprofiles of £29.668m from 2023/24); and
- 2.11 Notes the 5-year capital programme as set out in Appendix 3 to the report.

51 HOUSING, HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATE.

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

51.2 Following questions the committee were informed of the following: all social landlords fall within the same requirements as the council and are encouraged to listen to councillors; asbestos manager position has been offered and awaiting agreement; there is no back log of emergency repairs and a specialist contractor is being procured for repairs outstanding from the pandemic; difficult and challenging to enter properties are being accessed for gas and electricity safety, whilst giving support to vulnerable tenants; access to properties is gained as soon as possible, and time given is maximum and not necessarily time taken; the works are undertaken by the in-house team and therefore not charged by length of works; the council are reacting to legislation on damp and mold and take the issues very seriously; inclusion of all hard to reach groups and cultural issues are taken seriously, with engagement events, translation services, consultations reaching out to communities; vulnerability of residents is take into consideration when looking at repairs.

51.3 The chair presented the recommendations to the committee.

Vote

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

RESOLVED:

2.1 That Committee notes the Housing, Health & Safety Update Report and current engagement with the Regulator of Social Housing.

52 HOUSING ADAPTATIONS FRAMEWORK RE-LET

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

52.2 Following questions the committee Members were informed of the following: all residents can access grants by following the set process and occupational health can be involved.

52.3 The chair presented the recommendations to the committee.

Vote

52.4 A vote was taken, and by 9 to 1 abstention the committee agreed the recommendations. (Councillor Meadows abstained).

RESOLVED:

2.1 That Committee approve the procurement of the Adaptations Framework Agreement for three years from October 2024 with the option to extend for a further 12 months.

2.2 That Committee authorise the Executive Director for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities to enter into a Framework Agreement with contractors following a compliant procurement process.

53 ITEMS REFERRED FOR FULL COUNCIL

53.1 There were no agenda items referred to Full Council.

54 PART TWO PROCEEDINGS

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

The meeting concluded at 6.48pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

