

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

4.00pm 1 JULY 2025

HOVE TOWN HALL - COUNCIL CHAMBER

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Evans (Chair) Cattell, Loughran, Goddard, Fowler, Winder, Fishleigh, Sykes, Meadows and Asaduzzaman

Other Members present: Councillors Shanks, Sheard and McLeay (People O&S committee guests), Angela Stretton Older People's Council.

PART ONE

6 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

6 Procedural Business

6 (a) Declarations of substitutions

6.1 Mary Davies, Co-optee for the Older Peoples' Council was unable to attend, so the Chair invited Angela Stretton, from the Older People's Council (OPC) to attend the meeting as a guest to ensure that the views of older people were represented.

6.2 Apologies were received from Mark Strong, CVS co-optee

6.3 Cllr Asaduzzaman attended as substitute for Cllr Mackey

6 (b) Declarations of interest:

6.4 Cllr Loughran declared that she is a trustee for Seaside Community Homes, which owns some leasehold properties in the LPS Blocks. Siobhan Fry (legal services) noted that the report would not focus on seaside homes, and was for discussion rather than decision, so there was no need for Cllr Loughran to be excluded from debate.

6 (c) Exclusion of the press and public

6.5 **RESOLVED** – that the press & public be not excluded from the meeting.

7 CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

7.1 The Chair gave the following communication:

Today we are holding a special Place Overview & Scrutiny meeting to look at the appraisal options for the large panel system (LPS) blocks that require action after structural surveys concluded that they do not meet current safety standards. As this subject has an overlap in remit, I have invited members of People Overview & Scrutiny Committee to attend and provide input if they wish to.

We are being asked to note the appraisal options report on the LPS Blocks and to make comments or recommendations on these proposals to Cabinet.

We are joined by Councillor Gill Williams, Cabinet member for Housing, who will be presenting this item. We also have with us, Darren Levy, Interim Director for Housing Regeneration, supported by officers from the Directorate of Homes and Adult Social Care: Genette Laws, Martin Reid, Harry Williams, Sam Smith, Laura Webster and Siobhan Fry, who are on hand to help with any questions.

Although we only have one item on the agenda, there are a lot of us here this afternoon and so we will have a lot of questions to get through. Can I therefore please request that both those asking and answering questions are as brief and to the point as possible, as we want everyone who wishes to contribute to have the opportunity to do so.

8 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

8.1 There were no public questions.

9 MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

9.1 There were no member questions.

10 LARGE PANEL SYSTEMS PROGRAMME - OPTIONS APPRAISAL AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing, presented the report to the committee. She explained that the LPS blocks are not sustainable in their current condition and that “do nothing” is not an option. The council had lobbied the government for funding to help with the costs of remediation however have been informed that no funding is available. Cllr Williams spoke about the different ways the council has engaged with the residents to date and its plans to continue engagement throughout the process. Darren Levy, Interim Director for Housing Regeneration, explained the three options that had been investigated for the LPS blocks and that strengthening or strengthening with refurbishment would only provide an additional 20 year lifespan with substantial additional costs. Current predicted costs would amount to two thirds of the Council’s 5 year Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital funding for stock investment, which makes these options unaffordable. The recommended option is for regeneration of the sites which would mean the blocks would be demolished. This will provide an opportunity to transform the areas and deliver more homes.

10.2 Councillors Loughran and McLeay asked if the new build for these sites would increase the supply of social housing and whether the new homes would be exclusively for this purpose. Councillor Williams said the aim was to increase the number of social homes but that some of the new build may be multi tenure. There is a lack of 3 bed+ houses in

the city so the new builds would take this into consideration and would better meet the needs of the community. There is also an opportunity to provide more homes that are suitable for people with disabilities. There were subsequent questions about the master plan for North Whitehawk and what it would deliver. Darren Levy said that the plan would be co-produced with residents. It will be more than just housing; they would like to introduce play areas, green spaces, work spaces, local amenities and bring jobs into the area. Councillor Shanks asked if a new secondary school could be considered for Whitehawk. Angela Stretton (OPC) requested and received reassurance that the plans will meet the needs of older people, for example by providing seating in the new outdoor areas. Councillor Winder said they need to bring people with them and do visible things like tree planting and providing green spaces. Councillor Williams said it is an opportunity to transform the area with beautiful buildings and surroundings, making it a place for people to thrive in.

- 10.3 Councillors Fowler and McLeay raised concerns from residents who have expressed that they love living where they do, they have beautiful views and a close community and are worried about ending up somewhere dark and dingy away from the area and their friends. Some residents have reported having sleepless nights about it. Councillor Williams acknowledged that this is distressing for residents. They will be treated with compassion and care, with individual visits to each home to assess their needs for relocation and that where possible, people who wish to stay in the same area will be rehoused locally. Councillor McLeay reported that council tenants are concerned about the cost of moving and the logistics and that leaseholders are worried about the significant increase in property prices and not being able to afford to stay in the city. Councillor Williams assured them that all tenants will have help throughout the process; they will offer tailored support, a single point of contact from a dedicated engagement team; they will be offered like for like in relation to their current housing and the council will continue to buy back properties from leaseholders at rates that mean they will not be disadvantaged.
- 10.4 Councillor Meadows asked about leaseholders whose mortgages and insurances are now invalid because the condemned blocks have no value. They can only sell to the council, which is a large cost pressure for the council who are offering to pay for the cost of an independent valuation, £500 + VAT, 10% uplift on the purchase cost, stamp duty, mortgage redemption fees, repayment of Right to Buy discount, removal costs etc and whether £43m would be enough to cover this. She asked what advice is being given to tenants on their contents insurance. Martin Reid said they would respond to the question about contents insurance in writing following the committee.
- 10.5 There were further questions about how the project would be financed. There are several options being looked into including: the new Affordable Homes Programme (more details coming in September), liaising with Homes England, the joint venture with Hyde Homes, looking into Brownfield infrastructure levy funding, and talking to potential funders, taking advice from other Local Authorities who have been in the same situation. Martin Reid said that no money had been diverted from the existing Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget for stock investment, and he went on to explain how this is broken down into specific funding pots. The HRA covers all main requirements but there is still the need to look in to forward funding for the regeneration and renewal of the LPS blocks which is not from the HRA.

- 10.6 Councillor Cattell asked about people who are currently on the housing waiting list. Harry Williams said there would be several hundred households joining the housing register which will have a significant impact unless it is managed carefully. There are some new developments coming up in the city which could house some of these people and help offset the waiting list. People waiting for homes with 3 + bedrooms are having to wait in excess of 8 years so they are hoping to increase the supply of these homes in the longer term to meet the needs of those in the city.
- 10.7 Councillor Sheard asked specifically about the offer to private sector tenants and whether they are covered by the right to return policy. Darren Levy explained the right to return policy will be a core principle within the proposed offer for secure tenants. Harry Williams said that private sector tenants can access help from the council's homelessness service and the dedicated team for support and that secure tenants are prioritised and have access to different benefits. Councillor Sheard said that it seemed harsh to signpost private sector tenants into the homelessness system when they are being evicted through no fault of their own, they have paid their rent and done everything by the book and the council has made them homeless. They also need help to find alternative accommodation. Darren Levy acknowledged this and said he will re-look at it as part of the approach to the re-housing policy.
- 10.8 Councillors Fowler, Meadows, McLeay and Fishleigh asked about timelines. Darren Levy said that there will be a phased approach beginning with St James' House where they are aiming to start the rehousing process in January 2026, with the blocks in Hollingdean starting by the end of 2026 and North Whitehawk in 2027. The design phase and procurement will take 4 – 6 months, they should be on site at St James' House within 3 years depending on the rehousing programme, so from start to finish it will take 5 years in total. The Hollingdean blocks will take around 6 years in total, and the Whitehawk master plan will be around 7 years. They need to start acting now and will be producing planning applications as soon as possible. Councillor Meadows warned that things do slip and there may be an increase in the cost of labour and materials. She asked about putting resident feedback into the development of the City Plan. Sam Smith said the project was aligning with the renewal of City Plan and looking at wider place making.
- 10.9 Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee RESOLVED to note the report.

The meeting concluded at 5.45pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

