

**BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL**

**HOUSING COMMITTEE**

**4.00pm 25 SEPTEMBER 2013**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillor Randall (Chair), Councillor Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson), Wilson (Group Spokesperson), Duncan, Farrow, Kennedy, Mears, Robins, Rufus, and Wells

**PART ONE**

**14. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS**

**14A Declarations of Substitute Members**

14.1 Councillor Robins declared they were substituting for Councillor Fitch  
Councillor Wells declared they were substituting for Councillor Barnett

**14B Declarations of Interests**

14.2 There were no Declarations of Interest

**14C Exclusion of the Press and Public**

14.3 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

14.4 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public not be excluded from the meeting.

**15. MINUTES**

15.1 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 2.1, and said that he had not yet received a copy of the letter being sent to tenants. The Head of Housing said that copies of the letter had been sent to members of the Housing Committee, but they would be sent

again if some councillors hadn't received them. Councillor Farrow asked if an update could be provided on those affected by the reduction in Housing Benefit. The Head of Housing gave a brief overview, and advised members that there were around 800 people who were affected by the changes to Housing Benefit, but that number continued to change as people's circumstances changed. The Authority was working with those people, and housing officers had visited them to discuss the options available. The Chair said that a report would come to a future meeting of the Committee.

- 15.2 Councillor Mears said that members had received a letter from Seaside Homes, the contents of which needed to be discussed by the Committee, and asked if there was a conflict of interest with those who sat on the Housing Committee and were also board members of Seaside Homes. The solicitor to the Committee said that the letter wouldn't be discussed at the meeting today but if it was, any board members would need to leave the room whilst the matter was considered.
- 15.3 Councillor Mears asked how many homes had been transferred to Seaside Homes, and what criteria would be used to decide which properties would be moved. The Chair said that around 350 homes had been transferred so far, and confirmed that a report would be provided for a future meeting which would give further information on this matter.
- 15.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 8.3 of the Minutes and asked if someone from the Planning Department would be able to provide an update for the Committee. The Chair said that a presentation would be arranged. Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 11.3 and thanked officers for providing the information requested.
- 15.5 RESOLVED:** That the Minutes be agreed as a correct record.

## 16. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 16.1 The Chair provided the following communication.

He had attended the High Rise Action Group AGM the previous week. Repairs were being made to the main door at Essex Place and to ensure the residents felt safe, security staff had been employed whilst the work was being carried out. There had been a complaint from a tenant about re-wiring at Essex Place which was being looked into.

The first meeting of the Strategic Housing Partnership had recently been held, and a number of issues were discussed including the future of Sheltered Housing, and housing for vulnerable 16-25 year olds at a property in Preston Road.

Following the Church of England's comments about money lending, the Chair had written to the Bishop of Chichester to look at ways the Diocese could help with the Credit Union.

The Chair had attended the opening on Balchin Court, which were the first council houses to have been built in Brighton for 30 years. The project had been made possible from joint working with the voluntary sector and Adult Care.

17. **CALL OVER**

17.1 It was agreed that all items would be reserved for discussion

18. **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

## 18(a).1 Petitions:

A petition was received by the Committee regarding Storage at the Poplars. The petition which was signed by four people stated:

'We the undersigned petition the Council to: Form an understanding with the tenants and leaseholders that occupy the poplars the block washroom on the second floor of the poplars block of flats to be used for storage of personal items. Whilst we the leaseholders and tenants agree to keep the space tidy and accessible. I also note reference to the lease held by three of the flats that states the leaseholder has the right to use any part of the building so designated by the council for purpose of storage of articles or things.'

## 18(a).2 The following written response had been provided to the petitioner:

'Our Neighbourhoods Team became aware that many of the drying rooms in the area were full of bulk items and personal belongings, some of which had been stored in the rooms for a very long time. They have been working closely with the Residents Association to restore the drying rooms to their original purpose – the drying of washing. They have agreed an exception, which is that bicycles and buggies may be stored there.'

18(a).3 **RESOLVED** -That the petition and response be noted.

## 18(b).4 Written Questions:

There were no Written Questions.

## 18(c).5 Deputations:

A Deputation which had been presented at the Council meeting held on 18 July 2013 was referred to the Housing Committee for information. A response to the Deputation had been given by the Chair of the Housing Committee at the Council meeting. The wording of the Deputation and response was as follows:

**DEPUTATION FROM MR M BARRADELL AND MS G AHMADI**

'As students of Brighton University and residents of private sector Houses of Multiple Occupancy, we are subject to any rent changes of HMOs in the city. We are bringing this deputation to clarify with the council the possible effects of Additional HMO Licensing on the following five wards; Hanover and Elm Grove, Moulsecoomb and Bevendean, St Peters and North Laine, Hollingdean & Stanmer and Queen's Park.

In the Student Housing Strategy maps of student distribution in the city, it is shown that these 5 wards are home to the majority of students studying at Brighton or Sussex Universities and living in the city. Moulsecoomb and Bevendean are regarded as the most noticeable student areas in the city, along with Hanover and Elm Grove, which houses 4% of University students. St Peters and North Laine, Hollingdean and Stanmer and Queens Park wards also have high levels of student residence. Because

of these high concentrations of students in the 5 wards affected by Additional HMO Licensing, it will greatly affect the student population of Brighton and Hove.

We appreciate that the decision to implement additional licensing onto smaller HMOs in the city was not a decision made lightly by the council, with an extensive consultation process preceding its implementation which included all relevant parties. Furthermore the student community recognises that such additional licensing can be justified. In the 5 wards affected there are between 1500 and 3000 small HMOs and 70% of the large HMOs in the city. Your own figures have shown that HMOs in these wards are subject to disproportionate complaints, interventions and substandard accommodation including lack of smoke detectors and gas/electricity certificates. The aim of the additional HMO licensing and standards is admirable and well-intentioned in its attempts to tackle these problems and is in the interest of many groupings in Brighton, as well as families and businesses and HMO residents like us.

However, as students, our main concern regarding the additional licensing scheme is the lack of consideration for the effect of the scheme on rents in the HMO sector. Although the average license fee amount for a property is £641 over 5 years, averaging at £2.46 per week, it is still not beyond the realms of possibility that landlords will use this fee as justification for raising rents on properties. In addition the majority of properties licensed under the new scheme, 1451 as of June this year, have been required to carry out maintenance and often improvement works as a condition to receiving their license. There is a real danger that these landlord costs, which for many houses will run into thousands of pounds, will be passed onto tenants. Furthermore, there is no restriction against landlords raising rents by an amount above the cost of work done, effectively profiting from the licensing programme at the expense of tenants.

Brighton already has amongst the highest house prices and rents in the country. Our concern is that if HMO rents in the city artificially increase as a result of the additional licensing of small HMOs it will hit the pockets of students like us. This will affect our quality of life, reduce our disposable income and possibly impact on student spending in the city. In turn this would have a massive effect on Brighton and the Brighton economy as, according to a study by Sussex University, spending by Brighton and Sussex University students generates £151 million of output in the city and

surrounding area. In particular students spend more money on entertainment and nightlife than other sections of the population, industries that contribute to the identity of Brighton and its appeal to tourists. These sections of the Brighton economy would be hard hit by a reduction in Student spending.

Such possible and unintended consequences of the Additional Licensing Program for small HMOs would be regrettable and not in the interests of anyone in Brighton, especially for something which is intended to improve quality of life for HMO tenants and the communities of these 5 wards. To this end, can we request that the council monitor rents for HMOs in the 5 wards as part of its assessment of the scheme? And that if this monitoring finds evidence that average rents in these wards have increased

as a result of additional licensing that this is considered in the 2 year review of the scheme with the potential for council action to combat it.'

#### **RESPONSE FROM COUNCILLOR BILL RANDALL**

'Brighton and Hove has about 30% of it's housing in the private rented sector, it has the 6<sup>th</sup> highest number of HMOs of any local authority in Britain and of course we should at this point say that not all are lived in by students. This is a problem for all tenants in HMOs not all students.

We felt it was necessary to have additional licensing to deal with the smaller houses that were moving into HMOs at some rapid pace. I think all of the Councillors in this room who represent those 5 wards and perhaps some of those in other wards have had complaints about the quality of standards and living in HMOs and as you rightly said, we've had 1525 applications for smaller HMO registration of which 1203 have been dealt with.

There is so far no evidence that this has put the rents up. I have to say rents are going up in this City in the private rented sector at an astonishing rate. I'm told by our Housing Department that already this year, they have gone up by 27% and the problem is every time a flat or a house changes hands, letting agents and landlords take the opportunity to put the rents up.

I'm glad to see that the government is apparently looking at a report produced by shelter recently which call for rent controls in the private rented sector and 5 year tenancies which I certainly support. We've had it in the social housing sector we should have it in the private rented sector as well.

I did meet the president of Brighton Students' Union last week and the previous resident plus 2 other representatives and we did talk about this whole issue. Their main concern was not so much about the issue of the registration of smaller HMOs but about the article for declaration that we have which restricts the number of HMOs in some areas and although you've not mentioned it I will touch on that briefly because that too is an important subject.

There are streets in my ward which have been changed radically because of the increase in the number of HMOs. Small domestic house where conservatories built in the garden; the roof has turned into bedrooms and you end up with conservatories being a sitting room inside the house, only a kitchen and a bathroom plus all the rest are bedrooms in fact I had some advice from a resident recently who pointed out that on Gumtree a small house of this nature is being advertised as space for 7 people.

We will take away what you say about the rents. We will monitor them but we do feel that we have a responsibility to maintain standards in the private rented sector after all landlords are making a great deal out of their tenants they should in turn provide a good standard of service.'

18(c).6 Councillor Summers, who attended the meeting with the Deputies, said that there was concern about rents being raised and asked whether the level of rents within the five wards in question could be monitored but the Chair said that it wouldn't be possible to

do. However, the Committee were advised that when the larger HMOs were licensed in 2004 there hadn't been any signs that the rents had increased.

18(c).7 RESOLVED – That the Deputation and response be noted.

## 19. ISSUES RAISED BY COUNCILLORS

19(a).1 Petitions:

There were no Petitions

19(b).2 Written Questions:

There were no Written Questions

19 (c).3 Letters:

There were no Letters

19(d).4 Notices of Motion:

The Chair noted that the following Notice of Motion had been referred to the Committee from the Council meeting held on 18 July 2013.

### **STIMULATING NEW HOUSE BUILDING IN BRIGHTON & HOVE**

'This Council welcomes progress with the regeneration of sites on council land and notes that an extra care scheme of 44 homes on the Brookmead site has been submitted for planning permission as the next stage of this work, which delivered 15 new council homes under the last administration.

This council recognizes it has been necessary to revisit the previous administration's Estates Masterplan, which was optimistic in identifying land for a potential 800 new

homes in the city. The revised figure is 500 homes, a substantial number, and a new house building programme of this scale would not only help to reduce the growing waiting list but would also benefit the local economy by creating local jobs and apprenticeships.

This Council notes the proactive and innovative approaches to financing new affordable housing being taken by other local authorities in recent years in response to the climate of reduced public funding. For example, The London Borough of Southwark, which has ambitious plans to build new council homes, Wealden District Council, directly funding new council housing; a growing number of councils – e.g. Thurrock and South Holland setting up stand alone housing companies; councils such as Hammersmith & Fulham who have made use of the value in their housing stock to lever in new funding; and councils such as Hastings and Warrington who have loaned money to Housing Associations to develop housing.

Furthermore, this Council notes:

(a) The administration's plans to continue to build new council homes and involve

housing co-ops and self-build groups in the provision of new homes on the council's own sites and on other sites across the city.

(b) The Government's Affordable Rent model, which significantly reduces the amount of public subsidy required for new affordable housing. If adopted in Brighton & Hove, this could potentially increase the amount of affordable housing built by five and a half times.

(c) The Government's Affordable Housing Guarantee Scheme, which will help to reduce borrowing costs thereby increasing the number of new affordable homes that can be built.

However, it expresses its deep concern on the question of affordability and believes that homes built under (b) and (c) will be beyond the pocket of many of those in the most critical housing need in the city.

Therefore, this council requests that a report be brought to the next Housing Committee to

- (a) Look at how best practice from other councils could be applied in Brighton and Hove;
- (b) Explore every housing avenue available to deal with the city's housing crisis; and
- (c) Ask for a report to be brought to the next Housing Committee looking at all the options for speeding up the Estate Regeneration programme to provide more homes.

19(d).5 The Chair advised that a report in response to the Notice of Motion had prepared and was item 23 on the agenda.

19(d).6 **RESOLVED** That item 23 be noted in response to the Notice of Motion.

## 20. COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS FOR HOUSING RELATED SUPPORT

20.1 The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Environment Development and Housing on the cost benefit analysis for housing related support services. The report was presented by Mr D Parsonage, Commissioning Officer.

20.2 The report provided an overview of the updated Cost Benefit Analysis for housing related support services in 2013. The full document was provided in appendix 1 to the report.

- 20.3 Councillor Peltzer Dunn thanked the officer for the report and for the detailed information provided. Council Wilson also thanked officers for the report and said that the on going benefits of the services provided were enormous.
- 20.4 Councillor Mears thanked the officer for the report, and suggested that a representative from Housing be on the newly formed Health and Wellbeing Board. The Chair and Deputy Chair agreed that there should be someone from Housing on the Board, and the Chair confirmed that the matter was already in hand. The Chair thanked the officer for the report and said it was a good example of the benefits of working jointly with other organisations and departments.
- 20.5 **RESOLVED** That the Housing Committee noted the report and the Cost Benefit Analysis 2013.

21. **HOUSING AND SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 16-25 JOINT COMMISSIONING STRATEGY**

- 21.1 The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Environment Development and Housing regarding a joint strategy on housing and support for young people aged 16-25. The report was presented by Ms J Sharp, Commissioning Officer.
- 21.2 The report set out the Housing and Support Joint Commissioning Strategy, which was a joint strategy being undertaken with Children's Services. A Housing and Support for Young People Needs Assessment was undertaken in October 2012 which identified the local housing and support needs for young people in the city. The Strategy for young people aged 16-25 had three main aims; the first was to increase the numbers of young people who were prevented from homelessness; the second was to ensure the young people had a more positive transition to adulthood through the provision of a Young Peoples' accommodation and support pathway, and the third aim was to ensure the better use of resources through a joint commissioning approach to accommodation and support for young people. Ms Sharp informed the Committee that the Department of Communities and Local Government had been in touch to discuss whether Brighton and Hove Council would like to be part of a future working group looking at how to develop positive accommodation and support pathways for young people.
- 21.3 The Chair thanked the officer for the report and said that the Joint Strategy was great news and was a good example of working with other departments and a better way to manage budgets. The Chair added that he was very pleased that the government had asked the Council to be involved in a working group which reflected the great work the officers had undertaken.
- 21.4 Councillor Mears noted that last year it had been agreed that young people leaving care would get priority for housing, and asked if those who were giving housing were provided with appropriate support. Councillor Mears said an update on those leaving care who were given housing would be useful. The Head of Housing confirmed that support was given, and a report on care leavers would come to a future Housing Committee meeting.



- 21.5 Councillor Wilson referred to Appendix A of the strategy and asked if that could be extended to include families. The Chair confirmed that work was done with families, and that was undertaken by Sussex Central YMCA.
- 21.6 Councillor Mears asked what savings would be made through the implementation of the strategy. Officers advised that there wouldn't be savings as such, but there were important financial implications which would enable the care leavers team to better manage their budget and improve the service provided.
- 21.7 Councillor Robins was aware that some young people who were under the care of other local authorities had been given housing within the city, and asked whether this authority were aware of them and what support was given to them. Officers confirmed that young people were given housing outside of their area, and where that happened the new local authority would be informed. The solicitor confirmed that the Community Safety Team were currently devising a protocol to address the matter.
- 21.8 **RESOLVED** That the Housing Committee approved the strategy.

## 22. HOMELESS STRATEGY REVIEW

- 22.1 Ms N Sundar, Supporting People Manager, provided an update on the Homelessness Strategy. The Committee were advised that a review of homelessness in the city was currently being undertaken. Consultation with local stakeholders would begin in October 2013, and a local consultation event would be held on 2 December 2013. Following the consultation a new draft strategy would be presented to the Housing Committee in April 2014. The Commissioning Strategy for housing related support was also being reviewed and was currently under consultation. The consultation was being coordinated with the homelessness review process. A Rough Sleeper count would be held in November, and severe weather provision for rough sleepers was currently being prepared.
- 22.2 Councillor Farrow was concerned that the draft strategy would not be provided until April 2014. Ms Sundar said that it was important to consult with partners and that would take time, but if it was helpful an update could be provided for the meeting in January. The Chair agreed that an update would be provided to the Housing Committee in January 2014.

## 23. STIMULATING NEW HOUSE BUILDING IN BRIGHTON & HOVE

- 23.1 The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Environment Development and Housing on Stimulating News House Building in Brighton and Hove. The report was presented by Mr M Reid, Head of Housing Strategy. The report was written in response to the Notice of Motion which was referred from the Council meeting held on 18 July 2013.
- 23.2 Councillor Farrow said he was concerned at the high level of rents and the comparatively low wages in the city, and whilst he accepted there was no answer to that he did want to register his concern. The Chair said that he agreed that the level of rents

were too high in the city, and was concerned that the level of rents had increased so much over the last few years.

- 23.3 Councillor Farrow referred to the reduction in the level of affordable housing which developers now had to provide, and was concerned at how that would impact on new house builds. Councillor Kennedy agreed, and said that due to changes in national legislation developers could now argue that it wasn't viable to have a 40% element of affordable housing in new builds.
- 23.4 Councillor Mears was concerned that a lot of money had been spent on the process of building new homes, but few properties built and only 534 new homes projected to be constructed under the Affordable Housing Programme in the next two years.
- 23.5 Councillor Peltzer Dunn thanked officers for the response to the Notice of Motion, and for the information on the work being undertaken. He accepted that things took time, but was concerned on the lack of progress on the development of the old Gala Bingo site in Portland Road and the various garage sites.

23.6 **RESOLVED:**

That Housing Committee:

- (1) Note the response to Notice of Motion, Stimulating New House Building in Brighton & Hove;  
(2) Note the progress made in the Estate Regeneration programme.

24. **BROOKE MEAD**

- 24.1 This item was deferred to a future meeting of the Housing Committee.

25. **GARAGE SITES**

- 25.1 Mr N Hibberd, Head of City Regeneration, gave a presentation on New Homes for Neighbourhoods with an update on the Estate Regeneration Programme. The Committee were advised that the Programme would: build much needed homes on council housing land; work with ward councillors and local residents to improve neighbourhoods; make best use of council housing assets; build sustainable housing and communities; meet City Plan target of 500 new homes on HRA land by 2030. There were three phases to the programme. The first phase took forward the development of the former garage and parking sites as approved by the Housing Committee in September 2012, the second phase concerned the infill development of vacant land buildings and the third phase looked at wider estate regeneration.
- 25.2 Ms R Sayers, Architect, provided an update on the development in Preston Road.
- 25.3 Councillors thanked officers for the information, and suggested that a workshop be held to discuss the various potential developments within the city. The Committee agreed that a workshop would be useful and asked that one be arranged as soon as possible.

**26. ITEMS REFERRED FOR COUNCIL**

26.1 There were no items to be referred to the next Council meeting.

The meeting concluded at 6.40pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

