

Bristol City Council Minutes of the Housing Management Board

26 January 2023 at 6.00 pm



Members Present: -

Independent Member: Alex Marsh (Chair), Sarah Classick, Carla Denyer, Tony Dyer, Tom Renhard, Pete Daw, Christine Jory, Morris, Tshabalala and Varley

Officers in Attendance:-

Donald Graham (Interim Director Homes and Landlord Services), Sarah Spicer (Business Innovation Manager) and Liz Cheetham (Engagement Team Leader) and Jeremy Livitt (Democratic Services)

Additional Presenters:

Alison Napper (Minute Number 21 – Fire Safety Update), Liz Denning (Minute Number 23 – Home Choice Allocations Review)

Other Attendees: Adam Postans (Local Reporter)

18 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Alex Marsh welcomed all parties to the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paul Goggin, Councillor Richard Eddy and Peter Edwards.

19 Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on Monday 30th May 2022

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the above meeting be agreed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

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Page 8: Matters Arising from 30th May 2022 Minutes - It was noted that due to illness Philip Morris had been unable to provide Sarah Spicer with details of continuing problems of people riding scooters in the hallway at a number of housing blocks nearby. ACTION: Sarah Spicer to obtain details from Phillip Morris and investigate further. Councillor Tony Dyer to assist as required in relation to Northfield House in the same ward

Homes and Communities Board Meetings – Peter Daw stated that, despite being the HMB’s official nominee for Homes and Communities Board meetings, he had still not been invited to attend any meetings despite having been appointed 18 months ago. ACTION: Councillor Tom Renhard to follow up

Social Disorder at Northfield House ACTION: Sarah Spicer to follow up further with Philip Morris by e-mail

Halston Drive – issue raised by Sibusiso Tshabalala ACTION: Sarah Spicer to pursue further with one of the managers

Goram Homes – (1) Investment - Agreement for the Director of Homes and Landlords to raise comments made directly with Goram Homes relating to investment and work closely with them – Donald Graham advised that he had now been assigned strategic oversight of this function and was undertaking regular meetings with Stephen Baker (Goram Homes) and had meetings with Councillor Renhard and Councillor Cheney concerning this.

(2) Social Value Assessment - Sibusiso Tshabalala advised that the assessment of social value from Goram Homes was not the same as Bristol City Council’s TOMS mechanism. It was therefore difficult to assess Goram Homes’ impact on social value implementation. A recent report had indicated that £28 Million had been spent in the South West which was only 2% of total expenditure.

Donald Graham confirmed that all organisations which built homes were required to complete a Social Value Statement as part of their assessment through the Capital Investment Board. This would also include Goram Homes.

ACTION: Cllr Tom Renhard to pick up the issue of the TOMS mechanism as required.



20 Public Forum

There were no Public Forum items.

21 Fire Safety Update

Alison Napper gave a presentation on this issue and made the following points:

- Details of the arrangements from last year were provided in addition to the significant changes that had now been made
- Prior to 2022, investment amounting to on average £2.5 Million a year had been made to address any concerns related to fire safety which was a very high priority
- High rise blocks had been prioritised as high risks with the safety of fire doors prioritised
- There were 62 high rise blocks in Bristol and around 450 low rise homes. Within 2 years, an assessment of risk across Bristol City Council properties had been made including communal areas
- An independent ACM cladding independent assessment for high rise blocks had never been made.
ACTION: Alison Napper to follow up on Nigel Varley's previous request for a response to concerns about the impact of vents spreading smoke through flats
- An external company would be carrying out the fire risk assessments

ACTIONS: Alison Napper to address the following issues raised by HMB members – (1) fire marshals not closing fire doors as required in some flats and in some instances fire doors being wedged open – AN to remind fire marshals of their responsibilities (2) fire doors not being smoke proof as there were gaps underneath them where carpets had been removed

- Last year there had been a number of significant changes with lessons continuing to be learnt from the Hackett Report and the Grenfell fire
- Guidance issues earlier last year had not included an assessment of external walls. Therefore, an assessment was required to address this. 4 blocks in Barton Hill had shown issues with cladding following further surveys in March 2022
- There had been a fire and fatality in Twinell House and a fire in Eccleston House with EPS contributing to the spread of the fire
- A new Waking Watch and Simultaneous Evacuation Policy was being implemented for 38 EPS clad blocks ie NOT a Stay Put Policy with the changes communicated to residents through a variety of means and new programmes being developed for this approach

In response to Board Member's concerns at the length of time it could take to replace all cladding, Alison Napper confirmed that all expanded polystyrene EPS would be removed with temporary arrangements being put in place if required.



Board Members also noted the following issues:

- An incident of arson in 2006 in which the cladding had initially turned black but was otherwise unaffected and did not spread.
- Bristol City Council had historically taken a very risk averse approach. It was therefore disappointing to see that the cladding which had previously been installed appeared to be a greater risk than what had replaced it. The impact on residents' ability to feel safe in their own homes should not be underestimated

Alison Napper further stated that:

- A new Fire Risk Assessments Company would start in February 2023 and would be delivering new programmes of work relating to waking watch, alarms, sprinklers and EPS Removal
- A proposal would be submitted to Full Council for the following capital expenditure - a 10 year timeframe would be operating under which all EPS cladding would be removed at a cost of £46 Million over 10 years, with further funding for a sprinkler installation programme, Waking watch and Simultaneous Evacuation Programme
- Following the introduction of new Fire Safety Regulations in 2023, changes were proposed in respect of building plans, external walls, secure information boxes, fire safety equipment, way finding signage, notice boards + annual confirmation communication to residents and a new inspection programme for fire doors

Board members expressed concern about the following issues arising from this:

- proposals for simultaneous evacuations as an interim measure and how they would be implemented to avoid safety problems
- the likely opposition to sprinklers which could soak most contents in flats when they were deployed and the need for engagement with tenants prior to their installation
- The importance of fire marshals being advised about any tenants' Personal Evacuation Plan (PEP) and that each tenant had the right to see their own PEP
- Most communal rooms needed to be upgraded to make them fit for purpose
- The mains connected fire alarm system in one block had not been checked since before the pandemic **ACTION: Alison Napper to check with Christine Jory**

In response, Alison Napper confirmed that

- Vulnerable Residents - most fire wardens knew their residents well and had information concerning all vulnerable residents. This information was also shared with the Fire Service and Bristol emergency service.
- Fire Officers - There were significant numbers of fire officers who would tackle the fire and assist residents to evacuate buildings safely



- Cladding removal - The removal and replacement of cladding would all be carried out as part of the same process. Whilst there may be a gap between these two, this process would be carried out quickly to ensure that flats were less cold and prevent damp and mould
- Renovation and Upgrades – other works would be carried out at the same time as the cladding work
- Sprinklers – It was acknowledged that a great deal of communication was required with residents. Since they were activated by heat levels, the trigger mechanisms for them were very different to smoke alarms

22 HRA Budget 2023/24

Sarah Spicer gave a presentation on this issue and made the following points:

- The purpose of the presentation was to identify a strategic interest, provide feedback regarding investment in blocks and identify potential future agenda items
- The HRA was a separate ring-fenced account for managing council housing, income from tenants and leaseholder rents and service charges
- Its role was to repair, maintain and invest in assets; and for tenancy and estate management
- A Thirty Year Plan was maintained, enabling the projection of income and expenditure, with no deficit
- There were approximately 28,500 homes, both rented and for leaseholders. Rents were low in comparison to Housing Associations and the private rented sector
- There were a number of challenges which the Council faced in this area – since rent was low, the stock was expensive to maintain with high levels of support needs. The costs included above inflationary uplifts. Due to the uncertainty of future rent setting levels, there was no policy for rent levels beyond 2025
- Housing demand is high
- Preparations were required for new regulatory requirements for fire safety
- Reserves were needed to cover £5 million insurance excess
- Pressures had been addressed by building in efficiency savings targets from 2024 or 2025. There was a commitment to reviewing service charges since these needed to be increased to cover additional costs
- Programmes had been slowed, stopped or slipped in accordance with this
- There had been a need for changes across the system since due to previous underspends, an optimism bias had been applied across the capital programme



- The following expenditure had been committed - £180,000 to continue provision of the rapid response team, £120,000 assisted gardens, £190,000 to increase the Environmental Improvement and Neighbourhood Improvement Bids and £204,000 to improve communal waste and recycling facilities
- £1.3 Million remained non-committed – opportunities for commitment of this investment included capital investment in CCTV infrastructure (cameras and cables) and contingency for damp and mould. The views of Board members was sought in respect of these options
- The report would be submitted to Full Council on 21st February 2023. Public Forum statements were welcomed

Board members made the following comments:

- In Northfield House there were door cameras but no recording facility. Since there was a warden's office, there should be an investigation into the possibility of recordings being made and held for a specific time period. This would allow people to look back at past incidents if required
- The pay of wardens needed to be maintained. Officers pointed out that the recent industrial action had involved Housing Officers not wardens and that negotiations to resolve these were currently taking place
- It was good to see Bristol City Council making the council estate accessible
- £1 Million set aside for parks needed to be identified to clarify how much would be used for council estates parks as funding requests for community resources such as these often took a long time to be authorised. Bristol City Council's internal funding capacity needed to improve
- Some "Safer Streets" funding was being used for CCTV purposes. Given the concerns about the impact of damp and mould on residents' health, there needed to be considerable investment in this area. 90% of case work involving tenants involved some form of damp or mould
- Since housing was connected to the issue of Safer Streets, an internal project board had been set up to investigate this. When play parks were on HRA land, the condition of the space was examined to assess their use

ACTION: Sarah Spicer/Jeremy Livitt to include an agenda item on the next HMB meeting relating to damp and mould.

- There remained a deficit throughout the South West region of support for people wishing to study Housing Policy and Management in order to make it as a career progression. Funding was also required for areas such as Eastfield Park which lacked benches or bins. Councillor Renhard confirmed that he had recently investigated whether or not HRA funding could be used for this purpose and was awaiting a response
- Reference was made to a footpath which was overgrown and where ownership continued to be unclear



Officers confirmed that a review was currently being carried out into tenant participation and that recruitment was taking place to fill three vacancies. Discussions were taking place with community development to establish where estates most needed these posts.

23 Home Choice Allocations review

Elizabeth Denning gave a presentation on this item and made the following points:

- Previous briefings to the HMB had taken place in October 2021 and May 2022
- Consultation on proposed changes had taken place from July to October 2022. Final changes would be submitted to Cabinet on 7th March 2023.
- Proposals were being put forward as a part of a major technology programme for changes to current systems which were not currently viable
- 21 questions had been put forward with 1653 complete responses over the 12-week consultation period
- The responses were as follows: (1) broad support for a move to managed choice but a degree of ambivalence concerning restrictions proposed for Band (2) support for extending downsizing assistance and 64% approve increased priority for under-occupiers (3) 67% in favour of wider use of Local Letting Policies (4) 63% in favour of increased priority and provision for people exiting adult social care (5) 51% in favour of increasing priority of care leavers (6) support for placing all homelessness cases in a single band, and for introducing a 'new deal' for the homeless at home (7) strong support (75%) for changes to the rules regarding effective date (8) no general support for a change to the current income, savings, or debt thresholds
- The following themes were raised: (1) the current scheme was perceived as unfair/ not working and there had been issues with the length of time taken to be made an offer of housing (2) there was a desire for changes to the current application process, systems, (more access, more information, quicker and easier system) (4) there was a need for more 'hands on' support and more feedback to applicants (5) there were issues with overcrowding/bedroom and rules were needed to address this (6) more priority needed to be given to various categories
- The following issues were raised but are out of the scope of the housing review – (1) the need for more social housing, both smaller and larger properties (2) more was required to tackle issues in social housing – ASB, fraud, non-occupation, subletting etc (3) there was a need to improve the Private rented sector/rent caps/better conditions/provide more help for those on benefits
- The following changes were proposed for Quarter 1 2023/24 – (1) a move to 'Managed Choice' in which up to 50% of allocations can be made by means of direct offer (2) Care Leavers priority to be changed to band 1 and improved access to general needs housing for those exiting supported care (Adults and Young People)



- Further changes were proposed for Quarter 2 and 3 of 2023/24 as follows: (1) moving to 'Managed Choice' in which up to 50% of allocations can be made by means of direct offer (2) Care Leavers priority to be changed to band 1, and improved access to general needs housing for those exiting supported care (Adults and Young People) (3) Composite need – increasing the backdating of effective date to 12 months for those with three or more qualifying needs (Change not retrospective) (4) Extended use of Local Lettings Policies (Already in development in Knowle)
- The following changes were proposed for when new technology is available (1) a revised approach to savings and income thresholds, making greater provision for a variety of household circumstances (2) targeting those in band 4 with additional information to better manage expectations and a review whether to restrict band 4 bidding to age-restricted/ SHOP and targeted properties only (3) provision of an application form and process improvements (4) introduction of more automated functionality (annual renewals, auto-matching and auto-bidding etc)
- Other action to be taken included the following (1) a pilot to test the value of different approaches to incentivising downsizing (2) enhancements to communication, information and guidance, and information / data insight provision to better manage people's expectations and increase individual agency through the process of seeking housing (3) improvements are also being considered for associated policies and processes including the Priority (4) a move On Scheme (prioritisation of clients in homelessness supported housing), and mutual Exchange to make sure they are used effectively

The Board noted that voids between people being advised they are moving into a property and making it fit for purpose lay with the estates team.

Board members also raised the following issues:

- The issue of support for vulnerable residents needed to be considered, particularly those with medical problems
- 17,000 people were currently on the housing waiting list. In Slough Borough Council, anyone placed on the waiting list needed to be also on the electoral roll to prevent multiple applications on housing lists throughout the country

In response to concerns raised by Board members, officers noted the difficulties caused by multiple applications and instances of fraud. They indicated that work was taking place with Councillor Renhard to tackle this. Details of the scheme would be further promoted to get tenants assistance in tackling this.

ACTION: Liz Dewing to put an article in the next edition of Housing News concerning the requirements for people to be on the electoral roll and provide information on how to provide the appropriate identification



24 Future Meeting Dates

Sarah Spicer advised the Board that dates for the next three meetings had been agreed for April 2023, July 2023 and October 2023.

ACTION: Jeremy Livitt to confirm these dates with HMB members

25 Any Other Business

Councillor Renhard referred to the issue of improved provision for Eastfield Park which he had mentioned earlier in the meeting. He requested that all HMB members advise him of any further issues that needed to be addressed as soon as possible so that the necessary action could be taken.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm

CHAIR _____

