

Housing Services Cabinet Committee

Monday, 6 September 2021

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Jenny Wallace (Chair)
Cllr Christina Rolles (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Ejaz Aslam
Dakota Dibben
Baljit Hayre
Leslie Hills
Leslie Hoskins
Harold Craske
Lyn Milner
Peter Scollard

Daniel Killian	Director (Housing)
Nicole Arthur	Service Manager (Housing Operations)
Victoria May	Service Manager (Housing Options)
Florentina Bela	Rough Sleeping Project Manager
Bal Chattha	Compliance & Projects Manager
Jackie Denton	Customer Services Manager (minutes)

9. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Leslie Pearton. Cllr Harold Craske attended as his substitute.

10. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday, 7 June 2021 were signed by the Chair.

11. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

12. Chair's Announcements

The Chair asked that thanks be given to Sharon Donald who will be leaving the council this week. For years she has been extremely helpful and the Committee wish her well for the future.

The Chair reminded Members of some upcoming Member training and asked that they encourage others to attend.

Wednesday, 13 October 2021 – Homeless Member Training

Thursday, 25 November 2021 – Housing Allocations Member Training

13. Corporate Performance Report: Q1 2021-22

The Committee were presented with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter One 2021-21 (April to June 2021).

The Director (Housing) guided Members to Appendix 2 of the report. Performance remains positive for the Housing Services although there has been a consistent increase in relation to PI 20 (Total number of households in temporary accommodation) which isn't surprising bearing in mind what we have been through over the last 18 months. However, Housing is currently going through a significant restructure which will result in dedicated teams in place to support Housing Services, and in particular, those in temporary accommodation.

The Committee noted the Corporate Performance Update Quarter One 2020-2021.

14. Corporate Register of Partnerships - June 2021

The Committee was informed of the council's involvement in partnerships that are within the remit of the committee. Housing rely on a number of partnerships to ensure objectives are met and transparent. The council has a Corporate Register of Partnerships and Shared Working Arrangements which provide a central record of partnerships and a full copy of the Register can be found in Appendix 2 of the report. The register provides a general overview of the partnership along with details of the main aims and objectives of the partnership and how it contributes and supports the delivery of the council's objectives.

The Committee noted the Corporate Register of Partnerships June 2021.

15. CCTV on Housing Estates

The Service Manager (Housing Operations) informed Members of the current provision of closed circuit television (CCTV) systems on council managed housing estates and updated them on future plans.

There are currently 130 CCTV cameras across 10 sites and all units operate and record 24 hours / 7 days a week but they are not actively monitored. Data is only obtained by request when there is a legitimate reason to do so or requested by Kent Police.

Since taking on responsibility for the Caretaking Service the Service Manager has identified a range of issues which has highlighted a number of operational difficulties and shortcomings in relation to CCTV:

- There has been no investment in the equipment and a number of cameras were not fully operational and the quality of the footage was poor on many that did work
- There is no maintenance contract in place or inspection regime to identify potential faults
- Any requests for footage from Kent Police results in the Estate Services Manager spending hours trawling through and downloading the relevant footage taking him away from essential caretaking duties

- Lack of prosecutions due to the individual committing the crime being a minor. The majority of crimes were linked to vandalism with £5,000 of damage on lifts alone in the last 12 months. If the cameras had been monitored the act of vandalism may have been stopped at an earlier stage
- There has been some extremely serious incidents such as violent attacks on some of the estates which may have had a different outcome if the cameras had been monitored. These generally happen outside of the working day when there is no council presence on site

The council will enter into a contract with an external provider, Kindy, to provide an observational and retrieval function of the CCTV cameras on the housing estates. This will allow operators to view real time footage via a central control room with the ability to retrieve any archived footage. As part of this agreement there will be an upgrade of equipment and infrastructure as well as on-going maintenance and upkeep.

The council will promote the health, safety and security of the residents, staff and other users of buildings, communal areas and open spaces where the council has a controlling interest. It will maintain the asset value of properties and equipment by deterring vandalism or theft. It will also assist in the prevention of crime and anti-social behaviour.

The new provision will be widely publicised to act as a deterrent for any potential future incidents but also to reinforce to residents that their voice matters and we are listening to their requests and will go live in October.

Discussions have also taken place with Kindy around longer term aspirations of introducing a concierge service to some of our high-rise stock. The improvement of the CCTV provision will be complemented by the upgrading of lighting, both internally and externally as well as widening the door entry systems to restrict unauthorised access to the landing areas of our buildings.

In response to Member questions, the Service Manager (Housing Operations) and the Director (Housing) explained that:

- Housing Estate cameras have always been separate to the corporate ones in the town centre which are monitored by Medway Council / Kindy
- There is sufficient money in the budget to cover the capital investment in terms of upgrading the equipment and infrastructure but also the monitoring going forward. It does need to be kept under regular review to ensure it is value for money and achieving what we want it to achieve, a reduction in crime
- Kindy is the Local Authority trading company for Medway Council and currently maintain our corporate licences
- The Police are on board with what we are doing. We have had a number of successful prosecutions through our current operation but anything we do will be extra. The Environmental Enforcement Team will work with us to develop the processes
- Working closely with the CSU in terms of bringing this provision forward as they already monitor through that partnership
- If a crime is identified that will be dealt with by the Police, if it is anti-social behaviour there will be a process in place to contact the relevant team within the council or the Out of Hours service

- Some authorities have rapid response teams who go out and clear up blood or glass and whilst it isn't an emergency it is the quicker the better to get it cleared up so that is what we are working towards
- There aren't any plans to monitor cameras in the private sector as it is just social housing that falls into our responsibility. It is about our council housing estates but there is CCTV around the borough but it would be the responsibility of the private landlords if they wanted an enhanced system on their own land
- There are cases of anti-social behaviour on Wallis Park and cameras are being used as evidence at the moment in terms of working with Housing and the CSU. If there is a perpetrator we do supply footage but with real time footage there is more opportunity to catch them at an earlier stage

The Committee noted the report on CCTV on Housing Estates.

16. New Rough Sleeping Service

The Service Manager (Housing Options) provided Members with a presentation on the Gravesham Rough Sleeping Service which was relaunched on 1 July 2021 and introduced the multi-disciplinary team committed to ensuring the wellbeing and positive future of rough sleepers.

The presentation has been published and can be found on the link below:

<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b13958/Supplementary%20-%20Rough%20Sleeper%20Presentation%20Monday%2006-Sep-2021%2019.30%20Housing%20Services%20Cabinet%20Comm.pdf?T=9>

In response to Member questions, the Service Manager (Housing Options) and the Director (Housing) explained that:

- If someone is provided with accommodation and is found using drink or drugs they would receive a warning. We need to move people when it is the right time for them. In the Wrotham Road property there will be a whole framework depending on the circumstances and situations they are dealing with
- There is the Homeless Reduction Act so anyone rough sleeping will make a presentation to the homeless service first. There is a framework of priority need under the Housing Act 1996 (amended 2002) so if you were single and required emergency accommodation you would have to meet the criteria. We would always try to engage with someone if they were living in poor conditions with no basic facilities such as hot water and a toilet
- For verification purposes there is a need to establish where someone is bedding down and then it needs to be evidenced. Homeless Link guidance suggests the definition of rough sleeping is *'People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes")*.
- Every borough has a Prison Navigator who connect them to their local area

- Anyone not eligible for assistance has to go through Housing Options to review their eligibility. Support is available through the Red Cross for anyone who cannot access council services and work will continue with the Home Officer and Immigration.
- The Rough Sleeper Manager has been working closely with the partnerships such as House of Mercy, the Methodist Church and Sanctuary to encourage a joined up approach. There is currently a lot of solo work going on. We all have the same goals and need to pull together. Charities in particular have been struggling and may not be able to offer the same type of service they have done previously

The Chair thanked the Service Manager (Housing Options) for an excellent presentation.

17. Managing Housing Stock and Climate Change

The Compliance and Projects Manager gave a demonstration of Portfolio to Members which is a web based assessment tool to help design, cost and implement strategic carbon reduction programmes for our housing stock. It identifies energy efficiency measures and costs to improve SAP ratings, achieve fuel savings and reduce CO2 emissions. It can produce reports on existing SAP ratings and the potential SAP ratings after the improvements. The results are based on property age and type; wall, roof and glazing type; insulation (cavity, loft and external wall); heating type and fuel used.

We already know that from 2025 all properties in the private rental sector are required to have a minimum EPC rating of C or above in order to be rented out. Although this does not apply to social housing, as a landlord, Gravesham wants to lead by example and therefore will look to mirror these requirements, where possible, within its own stock. Currently, Gravesham has 58 properties rated E or below and some extensive improvements will be required to meet these standards. There are exemptions in place to continue to let properties if landlords have done everything possible but the property still doesn't meet an EPC rating of C or above.

Currently 42% of GBC's housing stock (2,384 homes) are rated below C. £3.7m is required to upgrade these homes to a minimum C rating averaging £1,538 per property.

£90.7m is required to lower carbon emissions of our housing stock to the minimum possible with the energy efficiency improvements currently available. This would reduce emissions from 13,772 to 3,560 tonnes – a 75% reduction and we would need to offset our carbon emissions to compensate for the remaining 25%.

Current projects include:

- **Local Authority Delivery Phase 2 (LAD2).** The council has been awarded up to £297,000 under the Government scheme. To be eligible to receive the funding we would need to contribute 33% of the total project costs. We are currently working with our colleagues in Finance to identify savings within our existing budget to meet our contribution commitment.

We are currently carrying out feasibility studies to best use the funding which has a project completion date of March 2022. One such project is to install Gas Source Heat Pumps at one of our sheltered schemes which is not connected to the gas grid. The 16 homes will see an improvement in the current "D" and "E" EPC ratings, reduce energy costs to the resident and lower carbon emissions.

- **Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund – WAVE 1 (SHDF).** We have applied for and been allocated technical assistance for bid development for the SHDF. If successful with the bid we will be targeting properties with a lower than “D” EPC rated homes with a view to improve the fabric of the building first i.e. cavity wall, external wall and loft insulation improvements. The successful bidders will be informed in January 2022 with projects to be completed by the end of the same year. Depending on the size of our funding allocation we will be liaising with colleagues in Finance to discuss our budget commitment towards energy efficiency improvements for 2022/23.
- **Lawrence Drive, Cobham.** One of the few properties remaining with a solid-fuel boiler within our housing stock and in an area with no gas infrastructure. The only realistic alternative in the past has been to install electric storage heating which has made a negative impact on the property’s SAP score and increase fuel bills to the resident. Therefore by using Portfolio we have identified specific energy improvements such as cavity and loft insulation and we will be trialling our first installation of an Air Source Heat Pump in our housing stock.

Next steps include:

- To set a baseline of SAP ratings and carbon emissions of our housing stock and measure improvements in the future
- Create a priority list of works focusing on those that will yield the biggest impact and align with EPC rating C by 2025
- Bid for government funding to enable retrofitting of insulation and new heating types
- Consider measuring the impact of on-going programmes to ensure all planned and major works have a positive impact on carbon emissions
- Consider recommendations from the system when properties become void or require major works
- Work with finance to ensure budgets are set to enable carbon reduction works
- Lobby government to make more funding available to LA’s to improve and decarbonise aging housing stock
- Create a longer term Asset Strategy

In response to Member questions, the Compliance and Projects Manager and Director (Housing) explained that:

- We generate in the region of £28m a year through rental income and operate a balanced budget. The money made available recently through government grants is a drop in the ocean to what we need to get our housing stock to net zero. We have an ageing stock so we will never get it all to be carbon neutral and only a small amount of our stock will be
- The Team are looking at all of our improvement works and planned maintenance work to see what will have the biggest impact. Working with colleagues in Finance we will continue to maintain a balanced budget but put pressure on government to make some sensible decisions around decarbonising social housing

The Committee noted the report on Managing Housing Stock and Climate Change.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.46 pm