

Housing Services Cabinet Committee

Monday, 15 November 2021

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Dakota Dibben
Leslie Hills
Leslie Hoskins
Jordan Meade
Lyn Milner
Leslie Pearton
Peter Scollard
Gurbax Singh

Jody Bulman Service Manager (Housing Landlord Services)
Nicole Arthur Service Manager (Housing Operations)
Victoria May Service Manager (Housing Options)
Julie Francis-Beard Committee Services Officer (minutes)

18. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Ejaz Aslam and Cllr Jordan Meade attended as his substitute. An apology for absence was received from Cllr Baljit Hayre and Cllr Gurbax Singh attended as his substitute.

19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday, 6 September 2021 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

20. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

21. Corporate Performance Update: Quarter 2 2021-22

The Service Manager (Housing Landlord Services) presented Members with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Two 2021-22 (July to September 2021) and highlighted the following:-

- The average time to re-let Council housing has increased due to the impact of Brexit and Covid. Due to a national shortage of materials, this has then had a knock on effect on void times. The Council is seeking to overcome this by increasing the number of contractors we work with to enable us to have more access to materials.

- Number of households in temporary accommodation has increased due to the number of incidents of domestic abuse and because landlords are now able to evict tenants again which they had not been previously able to do due to the legislative changes put in place throughout covid.

The Service Manager (Housing Options) and team have been helping with this by placing a greater focus on prevention and intervention.

The Chair thanked the Service Manager (Housing Landlord Services) and the team for their hard work.

Resolved that the Committee noted the report.

22. Climate Change in Housing and Digital Innovation

The Service Manager (Housing Operations) updated the Committee of the action plan in regards to Climate Change in Housing Operations and updated on some digital innovation projects that are being progressed.

The Compliance and Project Manager presented the Committee with the portfolio system at the previous Housing Committee on 6 September, which clearly outlined the significant work and funding which would be required to achieve the net zero target by 2030.

Over the last two months, the Service Manager (Housing Operations) have been developing an action plan for all the services within their area of responsibility to capture a number short, medium and long term measures to assist with improving the energy efficiency of council-owned homes as well as reducing carbon emissions within the Borough.

Staff within the Housing Operations Team have had the opportunity to contribute thoughts and ideas around possible actions as well as research into the current thinking and best practice within the industry. The action plan can be found at appendix 2 and will be a working document that will develop as time goes on, capturing new ways of working.

Some of the actions identified in the short term are already in progress:-

- The Resident Engagement Strategy in relation to energy improvement works had been drafted.
- Applied for Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 1 and in January 2022 the Council will find out if they have been successful.
- Received funding for LAD 2, Social Housing funding and are working with a consultant to create an asset management strategy consisting of a grading module system.

As part of the action plan, digital innovation projects have been trialled and developed across the service:-

- **Localz** – expansion of current repairs appointment system. In the next few months, tenants will be able to receive live alerts from engineers undertaking jobs, they can track when the engineer is on their way, how far away they are and be able to send messages back to the engineers where there will be two-way communication. This will benefit the locals, it will enhance the customer experience for those that wish to

use the digital platform, it will also help to reduce the no access rate, ensure that customers are in when their appointment is due, reduce wasted appointments and reduced travel time.

- **Door data system** – new fire doors will be installed with a unique door data tag which will feed into a National Fire Door compliance software. The data tag will be scanned each time it is inspected and will automatically update the system. The system will also store components used to anyone doorset making recall for future maintenance quick and efficient and ensure the correct materials are used and sourced for remedial works.
- **EmRed** – trialling two sheltered schemes and two residential blocks, EmRed will be fitted to the emergency lighting. This will mean that the emergency lights can be tested remotely and any results, faults or preventative maintenance will be sent direct to the Council.
- **MultiDOT** – installed into 10 properties. It is a time monitoring system for humidity conditions to determine whether the property is at risk of damp or mould. This will help to inform preventative maintenance and customer education. The MultiDOT will also detect if someone is not using their heating or the heating may not be working which will allow the Council to be proactive by contacting the tenant to identify any issues and will also assist with identifying fuel poverty.
- **Digital Noticeboard** – which we have in a sheltered scheme and in one of the new builds, it makes communicating with tenants faster, easier and more inclusive. It can display important information such as maintenance schedules or repair notices, as well as general announcements. The digital noticeboard is an efficient way to keep tenants informed it reduces site visits, reduces paper notice waste. It also has a unique survey feature which allows for a question to be posed to tenants who can then vote by placing their key fob on to the reader. A video of the digital noticeboard was shown to the Committee.

Following questions and comments from Members, the Service Manager (Housing Operations) explained that:

- Following a question, regarding the costs of becoming carbon zero by 2027/287 were, the Service Manager (Housing Operations) explained that there were no exact costs to date but at the last Committee during a presentation it was discussed that approximately £16m would be required to get the rating the Council required. It would be difficult to forecast as these climate change in housing costs were increasing significantly.
- Regarding fire evacuations, could the digital noticeboard give instructions on how to evacuate the building? The Chair explained that new tenants are given the evacuation procedures and full instructions when they move in and in this particular building, the procedures are located on the back of their front door.
- Using the functionality of the digital noticeboard is an easy way of keeping tenants informed without the officers having to go round to the property. Feedback, and if necessary, officer visits to follow up on the survey responses that the tenants have previously given.
- Number 5 of the Action List (appendix 2) – create a resident engagement strategy in relation to energy improvement works is this going out to consultation and will this reported back to the Committee. The Service Manager (Housing Operations) explained that the Council could engage at an early stage and complete the works tailored to the property.

- An update on the resident engagement strategy specific to energy will come back to this Committee and Members and Officers are encouraged to get involved.

The Chair thanked the Service Manager (Housing Operations) and the team for their hard work that had gone into making this report.

Resolved that the Committee noted the contents of the report and action plan.

23. Landlords Forum

The Service Manager (Housing Options) provided Members with a presentation on the Landlords Forum.

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

<https://democracy.gravesham.gov.uk/documents/b14055/Hsg%20Committee%20presentation%20on%20Landlords%20Monday%2015-Nov-2021%2019.30%20Housing%20Services%20Cabinet%20Committ.pdf?T=9>

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

- The Chair explained that this was the first step towards an overdue activity in making firm contacts with private landlords. This provides the tenants with much needed support and not just financial.
- This is a good way of sorting out rogue landlords as well as those that look after their tenants.
- Following a question from a Member about Member involvement. The Service Manager (Housing Options) explained that Member involvement would be welcomed and to know exactly what Members like to see coming out of future presentations. A briefing note about COMF Funding will be sent out to Members in due course to enable them to understand where the money will be spent and to share the link to others.
- The Chair mentioned that if any Members know of any private landlords that are not engaging in the way the Council would prefer to let the Housing Options Team know. If there are any tenants that require further assistance, to let them know.
- The Service Manager (Housing Options) explained in response to a question about how this scheme will impact or strengthen our tenants and it is felt they are not currently given a strong enough platform. Tenants that need support will work with the other roles within the service such as the Prevention Officers and Homeless Officers and there is a framework the service follows to support customers and make enquiries around their circumstances.
- In response to a question about how many private landlords are supporting this scheme, the Services Manager (Housing Options) explained that the team will have to engage and listen to landlords and where we offer a tenant find service we would have to ensure we tailor the right tenants to each property.
- The option of identifying funding was discussed and creating a new incentive package for landlords which included financial / support could be investigated.
- The Service Manager (Housing Options) will look to investigate the cost of a case at Gravesham Borough Council to evidence the long term savings of homeless prevention and when this is done would be happy to report back to this Committee.

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

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8:20pm