

## **Housing Services Cabinet Committee**

**Monday, 6 June 2022**

**7.30 pm**

### **Present:**

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

Councillors:        Baljit Hayre  
                              Leslie Hills  
                              Jordan Meade  
                              Elizabeth Mulheran  
                              Gary Harding  
                              Leslie Pearton  
                              Leslie Hoskins  
                              Lyn Milner

Mark Osborn        Assistant Director (Housing Development & Enabling)  
Nicole Arthur        Service Manager (Housing Operations)  
Bal Chattha         Compliance & Projects Manager  
Joshua Arthur       Project Surveyor, Energy & Sustainability  
Tracy Burrow        Compliance & Projects Officer  
Jackie Denton       Customer Services Manager (Minutes)

### **37. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Ejaz Aslam and Daniel Killian. Cllr Gary Harding and Mark Osborn attended as their respective substitutes.

### **38. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Tuesday, 22 March 2022 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

### **39. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **40. Corporate Performance Report: Q4 2021-22**

The Service Manager (Housing Operations) presented Members of the Committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Four 2021-22 (January to March 2022).

The Service Manager (Housing Operations) highlighted the following areas:

- PI 20 – Total number of households in temporary accommodation – There are currently 162 households in temporary accommodation
- PI 21 - 100% of emergency jobs completed on time

- PI 22 - 100% of council properties with valid gas safety certification

Following questions and comments from Members, the Service Manager (Housing Options) highlighted the following:

- In relation to gas compliancy, 5 or 6 years ago the council took the opportunity to redesign the process for No Access, working closely with other teams looking at the intelligence we have on residents which enabled us to pull together a robust No Access process so we have a clear evidence trail to be able to go to Court to gain access
- Following positive responses from customers it was agreed that this praise should be fed back to the operatives in question
- At previous committees the Service Manager (Housing Options) has highlighted an increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation. The increase has a number of reasons including an increase in Domestic Abuse, evictions can now go ahead therefore people losing properties, broken relationships and this has all had an impact on the demand for temporary accommodation and that isn't peculiar to this area, it is across Kent. We are looking at what we can do in terms of getting more decent temporary accommodation
- During the pandemic there was a lot of outreach work with tenants particularly with residents struggling to pay their rent and helping them with financial plans
- Checks are undertaken by our temporary accommodation officers and private housing to ensure temporary accommodation is habitable, including checking for damp and mould. Any further information on unsuitable properties will be circulated by the Service Manager following the meeting
- PI 18 shows that the average time taken to re-let council housing has decreased in Q4 and this is a very positive step forward
- Final testing of the new housing system is taking place this week and it will hopefully go live next week. An update will be brought to the September committee
- The council is working with landlords to tackle property standards, empty homes and homes in multiple occupation and eight Improvement Notices were served in Q4. The Service Manager agreed to forward a briefing note on the requirements for HMO

The Committee noted the Corporate Performance Report: Quarter Four 2021-2022.

#### **41. Presentation from Energy & Sustainability team**

The Project Surveyor (Energy & Sustainability) gave Members a presentation which introduced the Energy & Sustainability Team and gave an update on the work being carried out by the Team.

At the Housing Services Cabinet Committee in September 2021 the Compliance & 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.

In mid-2020 the council purchased Parity software to store the housing stock's energy data which allows us to run scenarios for improvements and provide financial forecasts for future budgetary requirements. Recently a data update was carried out to ensure the information we hold on our housing stock is accurate. This has improved energy performance generally

and will further assist us to set achievable improvement targets and measure our progress towards Net Zero.

Current projects include:

- The Local Authority Delivery Scheme Phase 2 – Gravesham has been awarded £297k and the council will contribute an additional £148,500 with the aim of helping those most likely to be in fuel poverty. Key rules for funding are that eligible homes are EPC bands E, F and G although some D rated properties are permitted. Around 130 properties will benefit from a number of energy efficiency measures including loft and cavity insulation, air source heat pumps and Solar PV panels
- Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 1 – Received £823k with the council contributing £800k. 364 Council owned homes will benefit from insulation measures to improve the thermal comfort for tenants and improve the energy performance of the property. There is a deadline to finish the works of March 2023
- Merston Court & Hermitage Road – Ground Source Heat Pumps – 16 Flats, 11 on electric storage heating and 5 on gas central heating. Improvement in EPC ratings from E/D to C/B. Carbon saving of 82% for Hermitage Road and 68% for Merston Court. Installation of smart controls will enable residents to save on heating bills
- Empty property whole house retrofit trial – A property in Luddesdown became empty in March 2022. EPC rating was E using electric night storage heaters as no gas. Solar PV, Air Source Heat Pump, Loft and Cavity wall insulation were installed to improve energy efficiency. Solar hot water diverter was also installed so that any excess energy from the solar panels will power the hot water. £5k contribution from Local Authority Delivery funding scheme. Carbon emissions reduced from 4.5 tCO<sub>2</sub> to 0.456 tCO<sub>2</sub> and the EPC rating improved from an E to an A

Other achievements:

- Delivered two Air Sourced Heat Pumps to a property on solid fuel and to a property on electric storage heating
- Working with the Energy Saving Trust - delivered first cohort of Energy Advice Training to create 'Energy Champions' within the Housing Service and created an Energy Saving Advice Leaflet for residents
- Developed a Retrofit Resident Engagement Strategy
- Progressed 28 ECO3 projects consisting of cavity wall and loft insulation. Properties completed to date equate to over £50k fully funded measures by Central Government
- Forming good relationships with other councils and providers sharing advice including London Borough of Waltham Forest, Medway Council, MHS Homes and West Kent Housing
- Both the Projects Surveyor and Apprentice Surveyor have successfully passed the Domestic Energy Assessor training allowing us to carry out EPCs in houses from April 2022 which will result in a £16k p.a. saving
- Both the Projects Surveyor and Apprentice Surveyor have completed the Retrofit Assessor Certification enabling us to undertake domestic retrofit assessments

In progress:

- Energy efficiency contracts to deliver essential works
- Designs for GSHPs for residential blocks and Independent Living Schemes with poor energy ratings

- Installation of Solar PV, battery storage and Electric Vehicle Charging at Carl Ekman House
- Feasibility surveys for Solar PV and EV charging to all high-rise blocks to power communal electrics and create a network of charging points for our own fleet of electric vehicles of which we currently have 7
- Working with retrofit specialist WarmFront to secure funding through the ECO3 and 4 schemes
- Identified 10 suitable properties for Whole House Retrofit pilots. Working with a consultant to explore different techniques including Energiesprong and submitted joint bid through the Heat Pump Read Programme with West Kent Housing Association
- Review of communal waste and recycling facilities across all council owned estates and identifying a programme of improvements
- Exploring the implementation of water saving initiatives such as installing water efficient shower heads, tap aerators, dual flush toilets, waste water heat recovery and providing water butts
- Government requirement for properties to reach EPC C by 2030. We aim to get our homes to a minimum EPC C by 2025 and decarbonising our stock to reach Net Carbon Zero using the data from Parity and the new asset grading system
- Working with the Housing Development & Strategy Team to share ideas, contractors and future planning of energy efficiency of new build homes

In 2020 57% of our stock was EPC C or above with an average SAP score of 69.57. Currently 63% of our stock is now EPC C or above with an average SAP score of 70.93. 14% (333) of the poorest performing properties have migrated from a EPC D or below to an EPC C or above since 2020.

Within the next 12 months we will:

- Further rollout of the Energy Advice training to all housing staff creating staff 'Energy Champions' to provide support and advice to our residents
- Research into the potential link between poor energy performance, voids and rent arrears, identifying the need for property improvements and resident support
- Review the void property lettable standard to include air tightness, adequate ventilation and other suitable energy improvements
- Review and align all planned works programmes with energy efficiency projects where long-term cost savings can be achieved
- Continue to apply for and utilise further waves of Government funding such as ECO4 and Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (Wave 2)

Following questions and comments from Members, the Project Surveyor highlighted the following:

- Members noted the comprehensive report and the good work being done and the significant amount of grants received
- A study was carried out using Parity software and the forecast showed £90m was required to get us to Net Zero taking into account properties that are hard to treat
- In terms of the heat pumps, there has been a history of poor performance but government are actively encouraging LAs to move towards heat pumps. There is now more confidence in the market and there is a benefit to our tenants by installing these

- Around 10 years ago there were some issues with cavity wall insulation and spots on the walls but at this time there were no standards in place whereas now there are legal requirements and so work is insured. Sometimes where an air source heat pump is installed there can be problems with solid walls and a complete extraction has to be done first
- Some properties only require minor work whereas some require vast amounts. We have a lot of non-traditional properties with steel frames and to retrofit energy efficiency could be up to £150k per property but there are various things that can be done to reduce the cost. Some properties might only cost £30k. It depends on what work we are carrying out and the type of the property we are doing it on.

The Committee thanked the Project Surveyor for the presentation.

#### **42. Energy Efficient Retrofit Projects- Resident Engagement Plan**

The Service Manager (Housing Operations) updated the Committee on tenant engagement activities within Housing Options in relation to Net Carbon Zero and asked for comments on the content of the Resident Engagement Plan and Energy Advice Leaflet prior to the design work commencing.

Decarbonisation of homes is essential if the council is to reach its net zero carbon targets and this cannot be achieved without retrofitting the majority of its existing housing stock. To enable this to happen it is important to have buy-in from the residents.

The Resident Engagement Plan outlines the different stages of the customer journey from pre-works, right the way through to handover and aftercare. A copy will be available on the website and residents will receive a hard copy which the Resident Engagement Officer will talk through with the tenant. There will also be an Energy Advice Leaflet which will educate tenants on a number of matters including ways to reduce energy costs. The leaflet will be available on our website and will be issued to new tenants on sign-up and rolled out to all tenants.

We have also recently commissioned Tpas, the tenant engagement experts, to help increase tenant engagement around Net Zero and building safety. The programme will include behavioural insight workshops for housing staff, data analysis, qualitative research and trialling using the new engagement methods for tenants who are due to have energy efficiency improvements carried out to ensure what we do is going to make a difference to our estates.

Tpas have confirmed that we will be the first housing provider in the country to take this approach to Net Zero and building safety and believe it will be an award winning scheme.

Following questions and comments from Members, the Service Manager (Housing Operations) highlighted the following:

- The Energy Advice Leaflet will be shared with Private Housing and can be disseminated across the borough. We are turning projects into case studies to share
- The heat pump caused a positive stir with private residents asking contractors how it works and how much it costs. We are making positive progress on the social housing side and it is a good opportunity to use this in the rest of the borough

- Communication with Merston Court was second to none and residents were impressed at how they cleaned up after works

The Committee thanked the Service Manager (Housing Options) for the update.

### **43. Carl Ekman House Compliance & Improvement Works**

The Compliance & Projects Officer gave a presentation to update the Committee on the substantial compliance, health and safety, energy sustainability and improvement works carried out at Carl Ekman House and works planned for 2022/2023.

Carl Ekman House is the tallest GBC residential building in the borough with 14 floors. The Building Safety Bill introduces new requirements for building owners and landlords to assess and manage building safety risks in high-rise residential buildings. Reasonable measures must be taken to manage the risk of the spread of fire and structural failure.

As well as meeting requirements and safety of tenants much of the work will prolong the life of the building and reduce future maintenance. In addition, delivering energy efficiency measures such as renewable heating and solar PV will contribute to climate change, thus reducing carbon emissions, lowering energy consumption and fuel bills for tenants and the council.

Highlights in making the building safer:

- As a result of the degrading condition of the 60 year old water main, soil vent and rainwater pipework a new booster pump system was installed to ensure water supply is maintained in the event of a major power cut
- Fire sprinkler upgrade – As part of the water mains upgrade it presented us with an opportunity to upgrade to the latest system
- Evacuation Alert Control & Indicating Equipment – Upgraded as part of the upgrade to the sprinkler system. It is operated by the Fire Service via a control panel located on the ground floor.
- Flat Entrance Fire Door Replacement Programme – The new doors have data pin identification which can be read by a mobile device linked to a web based platform which allows us to digitally record installation certification, component parts and maintenance records
- Balcony Safety Guards – To install steel mesh to all three sides of each balcony and eliminate the gaps between the metal railings to provide a safer balcony for residents and mitigate danger from falling items
- Passenger Lifts Replacement – Replaced with new modern gearless versions which can travel at a faster speed, are more energy efficient and have a quieter and smoother operation. They will be easier to maintain, increase reliability and provide a cleaner, more welcoming experience for residents and visitors. Also installed cloud-based remote monitoring equipment. The lift can be viewed live via CCTV and controlled remotely via the web-based portal. Faults can be identified faster
- New motor room equipment – a number of service and maintenance inspections are carried out, gas, electrical safety etc which would take 5-6 days for different inspections. What we are doing in the high-rise schemes is incorporating them in safety inspection days to reduce the inconvenience of residents having to stay home 5-6 times over the year to carry out this work. It has given us a better non-access

rate, we now achieve 90% access whereas before it was 70=80%. It provides a more efficient joined-up service and feedback has been very positive from residents

- Currently reviewing options to improve the front entrance as the existing is both uninviting and confined for residents and visitors alike. One option is to bring the front entrance out in line with the front of the building to create a modern frontage which provides space and light for a welcoming area and a more inviting experience for all
- Also looking at a ground source heat pump to reduce carbon emissions and the team are currently carrying out a feasibility study. The work is dependent on funding but it's important that the work is scoped out so we can move quickly if a funding stream becomes available

Following questions and comments from Members, the Compliance & Projects Officer highlighted the following:

- Members congratulated the team on the presentation and the scale of the work
- All of the essential work has been carried out within budget and with any remaining funds there is the potential to replace the communal floor covering as there is a lot of wear and tear
- The sprinkler heads in flats – there would be one per room although a larger room such as a lounge may have 2. It would be activated by heat at 65 degrees
- There are still smoke detectors in the flats which would activate first.
- The sprinkler will only activate in the room where the fire is and will knock off the sprinkler cover to activate and run for approximately 20 minutes and then shut off, this gives time for the Fire Service to attend
- It is a requirement to do an annual safety inspection but also as part of the safety day an engineer checks that heads are not obstructed

The Committee thanked the Compliance & Projects Officer for the presentation.

### **Close of meeting**

The meeting ended at 20:45pm.