

Housing Services Cabinet Committee

Tuesday, 6 September 2022

7.30 pm

Present:

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

Councillors: Ejaz Aslam
Baljit Hayre
Leslie Hills
Leslie Hoskins
Lyn Milner
Leslie Pearton
Elizabeth Mulheran
Emma Elliott

Daniel Killian	Director
Jody Bulman	Service Manager (Housing Landlord Services)
Nicole Arthur	Service Manager (Housing Operations)
Carlie Simmonds	Committee Services Manager (Minutes)
Karen Gingles	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

44. Apologies for Absence

An apology of absence was received from Cllr Jordan Meade. Cllr Emma Elliott attended as his substitute.

45. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 6 June 2022 were signed by the Chair.

46. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interests were made.

47. Draft Disabled Adaptions Policy

The Service Manager (Housing Operations) presented the draft Aids and Adaptations Policy for Council Tenants. The purpose of the report was to inform the Committee of the proposed Aids & Adaptation Policy for Council Tenants and seek comments prior to the policy being agreed by the Cabinet Member for Housing Services.

The Service Manager (Housing Operations) informed the Committee that the policy, replaced the Housing Policy for Discretionary Disabled Adaptations which previously sat outside of the Housing Operations Service and under the previous Housing Partnership Manager. Responsibility for the policy transferred to the Service Manager (Housing Operations) last year. The previous policy was up for renewal in 2022 so creating the proposed policy, gave the opportunity to improve information for both staff and tenants.

The policy outlined how the Council will support tenants to remain, as long as possible, independently in their current home and also in carrying out essential daily activities which may be hampered by long-term health issues or disability, or, if this was not possible or practical, to assist them in finding suitable alternative accommodation. The policy also confirmed the Council's commitment to meeting the needs of tenants, as well as effectively using the Council's existing housing stock and ensuring a fair distribution of aids and adaptations within finite resources. Whilst the needs of tenants will be given proper consideration, it was inevitable that the use of the Council's housing stock must additionally be considered in parallel to ensure that all residents were being treated fairly, particularly where the nature of the adaptation was substantial.

The proposed new policy:

- stated clearly how new aids and adaptation requests would be assessed, considered, prioritised, approved or rejected;
- made better use of existing adaptation in Council properties through the reallocation of those properties to those with needs most closely meeting the property attributes;
- specified threshold indicators and limits related to types of adaptations;
- indicated what support could be offered in terms of re-housing to more suitable accommodation when an option appraisal made the application nonviable for the existing dwelling or its occupants; and
- stated clearly which adaptations would not be funded.

The Service Manager (Housing Operations) advised that the policy covers two areas, adapting existing homes and allocation of and best use of existing stock currently part or fully adapted to meet housing demand. The policy also introduced a change in the application process for adaptations. Previously a tenant would contact the Occupational Therapist directly and the majority of the time without the Council being notified, until the report and recommendations was sent through. Going forward, in order to enquire or apply for an assessment for a disabled adaptation to a Council property, tenants should contact their Housing Officer in the first instance, who will discuss with the tenant their current circumstances and will arrange an initial visit to ensure there aren't any safeguarding concerns, discuss whether a referral to the Occupational Therapy Service was required and if they need any support undertaking the referral. The new improved policy and change in process will ensure that tenants have better support in accessing the service, clearer guidance as to what the Council will and won't do and ensure the Council uses its assets in the best way.

The Committee commended the Service Manager (Housing Operations) for a comprehensive policy.

Members expressed concern that if a property was no longer suitable for the occupant and with the current higher demand for housing, residents would feel under pressure to move. The Service Manager (Housing Operations) assured the Committee, that no one would be under any pressure or forced to move. Members were advised that the Holding Hands Policy (downsizing scheme) would also be reviewed, to be more bespoke to the individual. The Service Manager (Housing Operations) also highlighted that as part of the Holding Hands Policy, there was discretionary financial assistance for downsizing. This was to assist with the cost of moving if it was deemed appropriate for the individual.

The Committee noted the report and accompanying policy.

48. Social Housing White Paper - Draft Tenant Satisfaction Measures

The Service Manager (Housing Landlord Services) presented the Social Housing White Paper – Tenant Satisfaction Measures Report. The purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with an update following the previous report submitted to the Committee in March 2021. The report focused on the roll out of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures that would be implemented, following The Social Housing White Paper 2020.

In December 2021, the Regulator for Social Housing launched a consultation on proposed Tenant Satisfaction Measures. The aim of these measures was to provide residents and the Regulator with clear and comparable information about a landlords' performance. This data would help residents hold their landlords to account and would also be used by the Regulator in their role of assessing how well social housing landlords in England were doing at providing good quality homes and services.

Currently, there were 22 tenant satisfaction measures that would be addressed. 10 of the 22 measures would be directly measured using data already collected by the service, such as how many homes meet the Decent Homes Standard set by Government or how many complaints that officers responded to within the Housing Ombudsman's Code timescales. The remaining 12 would be measured by surveying tenants to establish their perception of the service.

It was proposed that the survey to residents would be available in a variety of formats such as by post, email, phone, face to face, online and social media etc making it accessible to all. Data would be collected from April 2023 and be collated and presented to the Regulator in April 2024. Going forward, the service will be responsible for conducting tenant perception surveys to collect the data for the tenant satisfaction measures on a yearly basis.

The Service Manager (Housing Landlord Services) informed the Committee that to prepare for the official resident survey being issued in April next year, a test run of the satisfaction survey would be carried out beforehand. This was an exercise that the Regulator had suggested would be best practice. From the test run, results would be collated and an action plan created to ensure that when the survey begins in April 2023, any improvements to the format and/or service could be made.

The Committee considered the report and highlighted the following:-

- the test run will allow the Council to understand its tenants' views on the homes and services it provides with any areas highlighted being considered for inclusion in the action plan. It will also allow the Council to promote/make tenants aware of what it is doing in order to change their perception;
- what action is taken when a tenant is not keeping their home to a good standard. Members were informed that estate inspections were carried out on a regular basis and if the home was to be found badly neglected then the Housing Officer would support the tenant to improve the situation with further action be taken if required;
- whether the survey could be extended to private tenants. The Service Manager (Housing Landlord Services) advised that the survey related to Social Housing tenants only, but if successful, government may extend to the private housing sector in the future; and
- would the test run offer sufficient time to rectify any issues prior to the survey going live in April 2023. The Service Manager (Housing Landlord Services) advised this

would be dependant on the size of the issues, as larger issues may require a longer-term plan.

The Committee noted the report.

49. Corporate Register of Partnerships - Housing

The Director (Housing) presented the Corporate Register of Partnership – July 2022. The purpose of the report was to inform Members of the Council's involvement in partnerships, that were within the remit of Housing Services Cabinet Committee.

The Director (Housing) referred Members to appendix 2 of the report which outlined the current partnerships that most directly related to the work of the Committee. Partnerships and shared working arrangements were reviewed on an annual basis. The current partnerships were:-

- Energy Saving Trust Advice Centre (ESTAC) (Careline Services)
- Greater South East Energy Hub
- Kent Energy Efficiency Partnership (KEEP)
- Kent Home Choice
- Kent Housing Group
- Kent and Medway Sustainable Energy Partnership (KMSEP)
- Kent 'No Use Empty' Initiative
- Rough Sleeping Partnership

The Committee noted the report.

50. Corporate Performance Report: Q1 2022-23

The Director (Housing) presented the Corporate Performance Update: Quarter One 2022-23. The purpose of the report was to present Members of the Housing Services Committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter One 2022-23 (April to June 2022).

The Director (Housing) highlighted the following:-

- PI 17 – Total number of private sector homes brought up to standard

The outturn in the first quarter was 0 which related to category one hazards that had been identified in private properties. However, Members were advised that during the first quarter the service had issued 7 Notices to 7 properties, following identification of 25 category 2 hazards.

- PI 18 – Average time taken to re-let Council housing (days)

It was noted that the average time taken to re-let Council Housing had reduced to 28 days.

- PI 20 – Total number of households in temporary accommodation

In the first quarter there had been a significant increase, with the number of households in temporary accommodation having risen to 185. Members were advised that there were several contributing factors to this rise including COVID-19, domestic abuse, inflation and the Ukraine settlement scheme etc.

The Director (Housing) stated that sadly with the impending housing crisis, there was no sign of this figure reducing. There was significant work taking place regarding the best way forward and that data was currently being collated as all other local authorities in Kent were in a similar situation.

It was suggested that it would be useful for the Committee to be provided with a breakdown/statistics on the reasons for the demand on temporary accommodation. The Director (Housing) advised that he would explore if this could be provided to the Committee in future performance reports as part of the contextual update.

The Committee noted the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm