

Housing Services Cabinet Committee

Wednesday, 11 September 2024

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Karina O'Malley (Chair)
Cllr Christina Rolles (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: David Beattie
 Gurdip Ram Bungar
 Lee Croxton
 Emma Elliott
 Jordan Meade
 Leslie Pearton
 Tony Rana

Vicky May – Assistant Director (Social Housing)
Nicole Arthur - Head of Housing Assets
Kenan Dogan – Head of Housing Solutions
Andrew Johnson – Head of Neighbourhood Services
Bal Chattha – Building Safety & Investment Manager
Karen Gingles - Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

9. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lyn Milner and Ejaz Alam.
Councillors Tony Rana and David Beattie attended as their substitutes.

10. Minutes

Members highlighted two points from the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 5 June 2024, in which clarification was sought:

- MEES Policy – whether work had been carried out to establish how many F & G rated properties were classified as listed properties.
- Rent Deposit Scheme – When a draft policy was expected to be produced and presented to the Committee.

The Assistant Director (Social Housing) advised that in respect of the MEES Policy, work was underway with a stock condition survey, which would be shared with Committee once completed. The Rent Deposit Scheme Policy would be brought back to the next Housing Services Cabinet Committee Meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 5 June 2024 were signed by the Chair.

11. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

12. Allocations Scheme Update Presentation

The Committee were presented with the annual review of the Housing Allocation Scheme. The presentation can be viewed via the following link: [\(Public Pack\)Supplementary Document – Presentations Agenda Supplement for Housing Services Cabinet Committee, 11/09/2024 19:30](#)

The Head of Housing Solutions ran through the presentation and highlighted that:

- Local Authorities were required to publish a Housing Allocation Scheme, setting out the council's priorities for social housing along with the guidelines which determined eligibility to social housing.
- A number of amendments had been made to the policy including some new additions to the Housing Allocations Scheme. The new aspects of the policy were:
 - Move on from supported accommodation
 - Deliberately worsening of housing circumstances
 - Victims and survivors of domestic abuse
 - Care Leavers
 - Temporary Housing Support
 - Pitches for gypsies and travellers.
- The amendments had been delegated to the Director (Housing) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and the updated policy would be published on the Council's website from September 2024.

The Chair invited Member questions:

- Members noted that a copy of the presentation would have been useful before the meeting.
- Members sought clarity on what was meant by deliberately worsening of housing circumstances. The Head of Housing Solutions explained that deliberately worsening housing circumstance could include tenants being evicted from their homes due to rent arrears, contributing to their own eviction, or privately renting tenants who have given up larger properties and moved into smaller accommodation, purposely to obtain a higher banding for council housing.
- Members queried the new process for traveller site allocation. It was explained that the new section of the policy outlined how pitches were prioritised, such as if family members were already living on the site, other family members would have priority.
- The Committee requested more information on care leavers and how these were determined for housing. The Head of Housing solutions advised that care leavers were young people aged between 18 and 21 years old, who were being supported by Social Services and were now ready to move on from their placements.
- Members noted that under this guidance, care leavers were not required to have resided in Gravesham for 3 years or more and queried if this was in line with national guidance. The Committee were advised the system was Kent wide with the team working closely with Social Services. The team would always look at any family ties to the area and work with social services and young people as early as 6 month prior to move on. Care leavers would be those who fell under the remit of Kent County Council.

Members were interested to hear about the initiative to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation and wondered if further information could be provided. The

Assistant Director (Social Housing) added that this is a pilot initiative and would share the findings with the Committee once there were outcomes of the pilot.

The Committee noted the presentation.

13. 2024/25 Quarter 1 Compliance Dashboard

The Committee were presented with the 2024/25 Quarter 1 Compliance Dashboard. The Council's housing assets team managed the occupation, refurbishment and maintenance of the council's residential properties and were therefore responsible for the safety of residents under the Health and Safety at Work Act, the Housing Act, the Fire Safety and Building Safety Act and other associated legislation.

The Head of Housing Assets explained that the Compliance Dashboard will be presented to the Housing Services Cabinet Committee on a quarterly basis and formally documented the Council's compliance and position with the associated compliance work programmes.

The Building Safety Manager gave a summary of the report explaining that the dashboard covered the big six asset safety risks which were fire, gas, legionella, asbestos, lifts and electrical. Members were informed that due to recent legislation the dashboard had now been updated to also include damp and mould plus property energy and performance. The Building Safety Manager gave an overview on each element of the dashboard and the work that had been carried out.

The Chair invited Member questions:

- Members queried whether technology was used to monitor water temperature levels in respect of legionella, or whether these checks relied on Council resources to manually check levels. The Building Safety Manager explained that currently this was done manually but the option was being explored to fit devices to take readings. This approach was due to start with LED emergency lighting checks.
- The Committee asked if there had been any consideration in carrying out a large asbestos removal programme. The Building Safety Manager explained there was a programme for removal. Residential communal areas were assessed to see how feasible any removal was and how cost-effective removal would be. In some cases, asbestos could be deeply built into the fabric of the building, so if the asbestos was not exposed with no direct risk to residents, it would be inspected yearly and managed. Asbestos was currently being removed in communal areas where it was deemed feasible. When major works were underway in a block it was often an appropriate time to carry out this removal work also.
- Clarity was sought on how the impressive reduction of carbon emissions was being achieved. The Building Safety Manager advised that many properties had been insulated over the last 3 years to improve the fabric of the buildings but also there were a number of properties where the EPC surveys that were not adequate and therefore revisited, raising the EPC rating. Software calculated the carbon emissions saved by the improvements made and the EPC rating. The system created reports, which were generated on a monthly basis and used as a comparative tool for reporting each quarter.
- Members queried what the average turnaround time would be for cases of mould. The Head of Housing Assets explained that the team were following the draft guidelines which fell under Awaab's Law which the Government consulted on. There

were fixed timescales to triage, diagnose, remedy and post inspect mould cases. This could vary depending on the severity of mould and the health situation of the residents of the properties. The timescale could vary from 7 days and rise up to a few months depending on the complexity of the case and building. The Head of Housing Assets team advised that a report separate to the dashboard would be brought to the Housing Services Cabinet Committee in the future, updating on the new processes and the new data obtained.

The Committee noted the report.

14. Outturn of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures

The Committee were provided with a presentation on the Outturn of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures. The presentation can be viewed via the following link: [\(Public Pack\)Supplementary Document - Presentations Agenda Supplement for Housing Services Cabinet Committee, 11/09/2024 19:30](#)

The Head of Neighbourhood Services ran through the presentation and highlighted that:

- Members were informed that the Tenant Satisfaction Measures were introduced after the regulatory reform, as part of the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023. One of the key requirements was for the collection and use of data on tenant satisfaction in relation to repairs and other relevant issues.
- The measures were managed by the Regulator of Social Housing and set to assess how landlords were performing through comparison nationally with a ranking. The process was very transparent, giving customers an insight into how the authority was performing against other authorities.
- The key areas assessed by the measures were:
 - Overall satisfaction
 - Repairs and maintenance
 - Safety checks
 - Communication
 - Complaint handling
 - Tenant involvement
- Findings were required to be published on the Council's website and in various publications across the borough.
- There were 22 measures specified by the regulator, which appeared as questions in a survey, 10 of which were data measures and 12 were tenant perception measures. The tenant perception questions were prescribed by the regulator and could not be amended. The Head of Neighbourhood Services referred to a link within the presentation for further detail of the 22 measures. This link was https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6321e7738fa8f51828b8306b/15739_R_SH_TSM_Updates_Sept_22_Digital_AW.pdf
- Surveys were sent to all Council tenant in the borough to obtain as many responses as possible. One survey was permitted per household. In the recent survey a data sample was achieved of approximately 22% of tenants, which was considered a good customer base.
- The results from the first year's survey were encouraging with the overall customer satisfaction at 75.4%. Compared to other authorities in Kent this was the highest score.

- It was noted that of the 12 questions, 10 were in the upper end of the median quartile and this is a promising position at the end of the first set of TSM's; it puts the Council in a positive position on which to improve in future years. 2 questions were highlighted as scoring in the lower quartile. These were, 'satisfaction with complaint handling' at 29.6% and 'satisfaction with landlords handling of antisocial behaviour' at 54%. These scores were on par with other authorities, but action plans were in place to improve these scores moving forward.
- The survey would take place annually with the next reporting of survey data in June 2025. This time an external provider would be collecting the data on behalf of the authority. This was decided due to the large resource implication for the team and to give an impartial external view of the data.

The Chair invited Member questions:

- Members commended the report and the presentation of the data. They felt the work should be used across the authority as an organisational working tool for future presentations of data.
- Members welcomed the identification of the two areas for improvement, in which progress in these areas, would make a big difference to residents, offering the emotional support required for such issues.
- Members queried whether feedback was requested after each repair was carried out to capture levels of satisfaction. The Head of Housing Assets advised that simple surveys were completed on the phone for 30% of the appointments carried out per week. Also, for every appointment, once complete the tenant received a text message with a link to leave comments and rate the engineer out of 5 stars and leave any additional comments.

The Committee noted the presentation.

15. Corporate Performance Report: Q1 2024-25

The Committee were presented with the Corporate Performance: Quarter One 2024-25. The purpose of the report was to present Members of the Housing Services Cabinet Committee with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter One 2024-25 (April to June 2024).

The Assistant Director (Social Housing) outlined the report was overall positive and covered key areas from the report:

- PI27 – Total licensed houses of multiple occupation. In Quarter 1 this stood at 80, which was the highest number of licensed HMOs that the authority had seen. There had been a great deal of work on this area including an amnesty.
- PI29 – Average time taken to re-let council housing (days). Quarter 1 had seen a reduction in the time taken to re-let Council housing. There had been work undertaken to have homes re-let as soon as possible to avoid any loss of rent.
- PI31 – Total households in temporary accommodation. This figure had dropped considerably in Quarter 1. Work was being carried out to reduce the pressure of nightly paid accommodation.
- PI33 – Average verified rough sleepers in the borough. This had unfortunately increased which was concerning. It was confirmed that the team are regularly conducting outreach and bi-monthly counts in line with the grant conditions. In

addition, the team were regularly meeting with the Ministry of Housing, who would look at the authorities figures and ask questions also.

The Chair invited Member questions and comments:

- Members acknowledged that the report indicated a positive outturn for the quarter and appreciated the work that had been carried out.
- Members praised the high number of licensed HMOs but queried whether resources were sufficient to cope with the work involved. The Assistant Director (Social Housing) alluded that the Private Sector Housing Manager was currently carrying out a piece of work to look into what had already been achieved and the resources required. Management team would also be presented with what the service could look like moving forward. The HMO amnesty had now finished but had proved very useful with reports of unlicensed HMOs which were followed up.

The Committee noted the report.

16. Corporate Register of Partnership - July 2024

The Committee were presented with the Corporate Register of Partnership – July 2024. The purpose of the report was to inform Members of the Housing Services Committee of the Council's involvement in partnerships that were within the remit of the committee.

The Assistant Director (Social Housing) outlined the key partnerships:

- The most significant partner for the housing team was KentHomeChoice, a Kent wide partnership to deliver the choice based letting service. This platform is for customers applying on the housing register and provides adverts to let social housing.
- Another large partner was the Rough Sleeping Initiative, which also has multiple partners including North Kent Mind, Serveco to name a few.

The Chair invited Member Questions:

- Members queried why Elizabeth Huggins was not included as a partner within the report, due to the fact that the Council had provided a loan to the organisation, refurbished bungalows and used some properties as temporary accommodation. The Assistant Director (Social Housing) advised she would look into this matter and come back to the Committee outside of the meeting.

The committee noted the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 9:06pm