

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT ADVISORY BOARD
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 18 July 2019

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: **Councillors:** John Lloyd (Vice-Chair in the Chair), Lizzy Kelly and Margaret Notley

Resident Members: Fiona Plumridge (Tenant) and Jon Thurlow (Leaseholder)

Staff Members: J Cresser (Assistant Director – Housing and Investment) and C Miller (Assistant Director – Direct Services)

In Attendance: D Dharmasuriya (Service Delivery Manager), P Harris (Operations Manager – Providing Homes) , C Philippou (Investment Programme Manager), K Reynoldson (Finance Business Partner - Housing and Investment) and Cllr J Thomas (Portfolio Holder – Housing, Health and Older People)

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 7.40pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Len Saunders and Cllr L Martin-Haugh.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 20 JUNE 2019

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Housing Management Advisory Board (HMAB) meeting held on 20 June 2019 be approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chair.

3 HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY

The Operations Manager (Providing Homes) introduced the Draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy (2019-2024). Members were informed that the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy (2019-2024) was drafted following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Rough Sleeper Initiative Strategy. It was pointed out that the previous strategy covered the period up to 2020. The Operations Manager (Providing Homes) gave a presentation covering the following:

- Rationale on the Strategy update

- Aim of the strategy
- Outcomes
- Consultation and Survey
- Measures

The Operations Manager (Providing Homes) informed Members that the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was the most extensive homelessness-related legislation change since 2002. It was reported that the Council had successfully applied for a grant from the government's Rough Sleeper Initiative. The grant has been used to recruit a Rough Sleeper Coordinator and Support Worker. The Rough Sleeper Coordinator and Support Worker would be tasked with building trust with rough sleepers, assisting them to acquire sustainable tenancy and referring them to support groups such as the No More Service, Operation Urban and mental health and drug and alcohol rehabilitation charities. The annual Rough Sleeper count which was held in November 2018 advised that there were 11 known Rough Sleepers within Stevenage.

Members were informed that local authorities were now using a new statistics recording system known as H-CLIC (Homelessness Case Level Information Collection). It was noted that H-CLIC figures were not comparable with MHCLG's previous quarterly homelessness statistics series (P1E), but they provided some new information. H-CLIC was still experiencing some data quality issues. It was reported that for the Municipal Year 2018/19, the Council had dealt with 1,268 cases involving those in need of housing advice or facing the threat of homelessness. This was a 33 % increase compared to the previous year. Through the Council's initiatives, 73% of the cases had been prevented from becoming homeless. There was pressure on staff to resolve cases in a timely manner and where decisions had gone against the applicant, this had contributed to an increase in the number of complaints. Stevenage benchmarked its performance against local authorities in Hertfordshire and those with similar stock nationally such as Harlow. Homelessness was one of the performance themes that the Council monitored via InPhase Performance Management system.

Members highlighted the following issues:

- An increasing number of young people in the town were approaching homelessness charities
- The majority of rough sleepers were in the 20 to 40 year age bracket

The Portfolio Holder informed Members that the Council actively engaged parents to prevent children becoming homeless. It was pointed out that there were more than 2,000 applicants on the Housing Register. It was noted that the Council did not have enough suitable land for new houses. Members were informed that the rate of house building in Stevenage did not match the demand. Operations Manager advised that Local authorities will carry out an initial assessment for every person applying for assistance stating that they are or are going to be homeless. If there is reason to believe that they may be homeless or threatened with homelessness within 56 days the Council will carry out an assessment to determine if this is the case, and whether they are eligible for assistance. If the applicant is not eligible for assistance or if the authority is satisfied that they are not homeless or threatened with homelessness

within 56 days, the Council will give a written notification of the decision reached.

In response to Members' questions, the Operations Manager indicated that:

- The new Housing Options and Supply team had increased from 2 permanent staff (plus 8 temporary agency staff) to 10 permanent full time staff (80% increase)
- The Council did not currently routinely collect statistics of people from outside Stevenage who sought housing advice
- There will be more frequent monitoring of rough sleepers through Operation Urban and other initiatives
- Some cases of unnecessary evictions were due to the breakdown of communication between private landlords and tenants. The Council mediated in such cases to prevent homelessness
- Changes to conditions for serving Section 21 Notices should result in a reduction in unnecessary evictions
- The Council was proactive in the prevention of homelessness through support measures such as offering rent advance and participating at the Landlords' Forum
- A statutory definition of "intentional homelessness" was provided in Housing Act 1996
- People are deemed to be "intentional homelessness" if they voluntarily give up tenancy and it would have been reasonable for them to continue to occupy the accommodation
- Residents who were evicted for anti-social behaviour or failure to pay affordable rents were declared intentionally homeless
- The Council assessed affordability of rents on a case-by-case basis
- The Council provided financial support to Herts Young Homeless – a charity aimed at preventing homelessness among young people
- The Council had an obligation to provide housing assistance to young people aged between 16 and 21
- A pathway support worker provides housing application support and debt advice to those that had been through the care system
- The Council faced a challenge with those aged between 16 and 17 as they cannot be accommodated in hotels but in self-contained temporary accommodation
- The Council automatically referred to Children Services all intentionally homelessness cases involving children
- The Council's relationship with a lot of private landlords was generally good and most landlords were keen to assist in alleviating the housing shortage
- Plans were in place for an additional 10 to 12 temporary accommodation bed spaces between September and December this year
- The Council tries to minimise the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for people facing homelessness
- In 2018, the average bed and breakfast occupancy for the homeless was 2 days
- SBC did not routinely record enquiries from those not living in Stevenage
- Applications from those outside the town were subject to the local connection test unless the applicants were at risk of becoming homeless

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

4 **MAJOR REFURBISHMENT CONTRACT UPDATE**

The Investment Programme Manager provided an update on the Major Refurbishment Contract for the period March 2019 to June 2019.

Members were informed that survey delays for Year 1 works would have an impact on works on Year 2 and Year 3 blocks. A proportion of payment due to Wates and Mulalley for works on year 1 properties would be paid out of year 2 budget.

The Investment Manager reported that:

- Surveys for Year 2 blocks had been commenced
- Resident consultation events (Section 20 meetings) for leaseholders and tenants have also commenced and been scheduled for daytimes, late afternoons and evenings
- A review of Year 1 works had been done
- Scaffolding at a block in Albert Street had been removed following the discovery of suspected bat roosts
- The standard of works completed to date was considered by SBC to be high
- Resident feedback on the standard of works would be captured on completion of works on the blocks
- The Council was in negotiations with UK Power Network (UKPN) to minimise delays related to power works on the blocks
- There were plans to identify priority blocks and liaise with UKPN to ensure that electrical work is completed ahead of the other planned works on the blocks
- 246 street properties had been completed to date and there was 100% tenant satisfaction based on 171 returns
- The Council had identified standard window, door and insulation works to be delivered throughout the town

In response to questions, the Investment Programme Manager stated that:

- There was a contractual provision to make a payment to the contractors within 28 days of completion of the works
- Customers were given time to assess the completed works before being asked to complete satisfaction surveys
- In the event of unforeseen circumstances, the Council implemented measures to minimise costs – for example removing scaffolding from an affected block to the next block on the refurbishment programme
- A proportion of additional costs arising from unforeseen circumstances would be passed on to leaseholders
- The charge to individual leaseholders would be calculated on completion of the works on the block and apportioned among the properties in each block

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

5 HRA OUTTURN 2018/2019

The Finance Business Partner (Housing and Investment) updated the HMAB on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Outturn 2018/19. The update covered the following:

- HRA Budget Position
- Budget Carry Forwards
- Main Variances
- 2018/19 Capital Spend
- Capital Spend – Major Works
- Capital Spend
- Right to Buy Sales
- HRA Balances
- Future Balances

With regard to the proposed changes to the rules governing the money raised from Right to Buy sales, it was stated that the Council would consider a number of options including using the funds to redevelop neighbourhood centres and building on new sites in the event of an expansion of the town's boundary.

The Finance Business Partner indicated that local authorities were anticipating legislation in response to the Hackitt Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety. The Council was still assessing the impact of Universal Credit on income collection. The Board was notified that local authorities and other stakeholders were awaiting the Government's response following submission of opinions, issues and concerns regarding the social housing green paper that was published in August 2018. It was pointed out that the Council was assessing financial impact (if any) of the transfer of responsibility for the regulation of social housing rents in England to the Regulator of Social Housing.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

6 UPDATE FROM EXECUTIVE MEETINGS

The Portfolio Holder (Housing, Health and Older People) informed the HMAB that the agenda for the 10 July 2019 meeting of the Executive included the following items:

- Housing Revenue Account
- Procurement of a Principal Contractor at Symonds Green
- Procurement of a Principal Contractor at North Road
- Procurement approach to the regeneration scheme at Kenilworth Close

The Board was notified that the Executive had given the Deputy Chief Executive delegated authority to consult the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Health and Older People in awarding and finalising the terms of the contract with the winning bidder for the procurement of a Principal Contractor at Symonds Green. The Executive had approved the recommendations in the reports for the procurement of a Principal

Contractor at North Road and the procurement approach to the regeneration scheme at Kenilworth Close.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

7 **HOUSING ALL UNDER ONE ROOF UPDATE**

The Assistant Director (Housing and Investment) gave an update on Housing All Under One Roof (HAUOR) programme. The Assistant Director acknowledged the presence of a number of Members at the Housing and Investment Away Day that was held on 3 July. The Away Day programme included a staff survey, an introduction to Tier 5 managers and staff workshops aimed at helping to shape services. It was reported that plans for the next phase of the Business Unit restructuring were going ahead as scheduled. The Assistant Director highlighted a new digital platform that would provide online access to customers for services such as arranging housing repairs, paying for services and applying for housing. It was confirmed that the Council would continue to provide paper-based services for those that had no access to computers.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director confirmed that the Choice-Based System for housing allocations was still in place. The Council was no longer routinely providing booklets to assist with housing applications. However, there were plans to offer applicants virtual tours of properties on offer.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

8 **REPAIRS AND VOIDS UPDATE**

The Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) reported to the HMAB that Repairs and Voids performance continued to improve. The Assistant Director also demonstrated the benefits of using the InPhase Performance Management System. The InPhase system facilitated detailed analysis of performance measures and also improved the scope for collaboration among teams. The Assistant Director confirmed that all key performance indicators were subject to regular review by the senior leadership team. It was stated that there were plans to roll out mobile phone and tablet computer devices to the wider Direct Services team including the caretaking/estate management team. The digital way of working would result in reduced process times and the effective deployment of resources.

It was **RESOLVED** that the update is noted.

9 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None.

10 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Thursday 15 August 2019, 6.00pm, Shimkent Room

CHAIR