

Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 21 March 2024, 2.00 pm



SOUTH
KESTEVEN
DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Committee Members present

Councillor Virginia Moran (Chairman)
Councillor Lee Steptoe (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Matthew Bailey
Councillor Emma Baker
Councillor Anna Kelly
Councillor Habibur Rahman

Other Members present

Councillor Ian Selby
Councillor Tim Harrison

Cabinet Members

Councillor Ashley Baxter, the Leader of the Council
Councillor Phil Dilks, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning

Officers

Karen Bradford, Chief Executive
Alison Hall-Wright, Director of Housing
Sarah McQueen, Housing Options Manager
Debbie Roberts, Head of Corporate Projects, Performance and Climate Change
Phil Swinton, Health, Safety and Compliance Manager
Lucy Bonshor, Democratic Officer

60. Public Speaking

There were no public speakers.

61. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Zoe Lane, Councillor Penny Milnes and Councillor Paul Wood.

62. Disclosure of Interest

None disclosed.

63. Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2024 were **AGREED**.

64. Announcements or updates from the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members or the Head of Paid Service

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning welcomed Alison Hall-Wright to the meeting in her role as the new Director of Housing. The Chairman of the Housing OSC also echoed these sentiments.

The Chairman informed the Committee that the order of the agenda would be changed. Agenda item 8 - Build and Acquisitions would be dealt with at agenda item 6 and agenda item 6 (Housing Regulatory Compliance) and 7 (Earlesfield Project Update) would be moved to the end of the agenda.

65. Building and Acquisitions update

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the regular report to the Committee which updated Members on the Housing Revenue Account New Build Programme which included acquisitions. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning stated that work at the Swinegate, Grantham site had been halted. Originally it had been hoped to retain the façade to 20 Swinegate, however, since December the façade had deteriorated significantly and Building Control had advised that the façade be demolished and a new Planning Application be submitted to this effect.

The Elizabeth Road site of 4 one bedroom units at Stamford was on time to be completed by August 2024.

Procurement in respect of the 21 unit scheme at Larch Close, Grantham had been sent out the previous day, planning permission for the site had been granted in November 2023.

Further engagement was taking place in respect of the outlined plans for the Wellington Way, Market Deeping development.

Twenty-one units had been purchased under the first phase of the Local Authority Housing Funding (LAHF1). A further eight units would be purchased under phase 2 (LAHF2), no funding had been sought for phase 3 (LAHF3).

Comments were made in respect of the loss of revenue for the car park spaces being used by the developers at the Swinegate site and also the extra costs of the development. It was stated that the extra costs and the delay in the scheme could not have been foreseen when the site was started. The developers had offered back some of the car parking spaces for the public to use, until planning permission for the site has been considered.

The Chairman congratulated the teams involved with the new developments and the work that this involved. Reference was made to the Wellington Way site where dialogue continued to help support the people living in the area.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning welcomed the new developments which helped to mitigate the sale of Council houses under the Right to Buy scheme where between 40-50 houses were “lost” from the Council’s housing stock a year.

Members noted the update.

66. Mutual Exchange Procedure

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning presented the report which updated the Mutual Exchange Procedure which had been requested by the Chairman of the Committee. Mutual exchanges were made under the legislative framework of the Housing Act 1985, section 92 and were a voluntary procedure between tenants. The procedure updated the technical aspects, where inspections would be done where tenants had applied for an exchange and the process carried out by Officers. The procedure also highlighted where an exchange would not be appropriate and would be refused.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning asked that an amendment to recommendation 2 of the report be considered by the Committee to include the following wording (in italics):

That the Committee:

2. Recommends to Cabinet for approval the updated Mutual Exchange Policy *and delegates to the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to make minor amendments prior to the Policy being presented to Cabinet for approval.*

The Chairman stated that the document had not been easy to read and she had found it “cumbersome”. She was happy with the amendment to the recommendation but also felt that the language used within the document needed to be examined.

Questions were asked in relation to the hoarding and clutter scale mentioned within the document and the reference to the drive where documents could be found. It was stated that the documents referenced on the drive should be background papers linked to the report. The Council did have a Hoarder Policy and this could be circulated to Members.

Further discussion followed and it was agreed that the recommendation on the Mutual Exchange Procedure be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee.

Recommendation

That the Mutual Exchange Procedure be deferred to the next meeting of the Housing OSC.

67. Garage Sites and development

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning presented the report which updated the Committee on garage sites and their potential for housing development. There were approximately 455 garage units across 60 site locations in South Kesteven and these had been assessed in February 2024 with regard to their suitability for development.

When the garages were built in the 1960's, cars were smaller, the new modern cars were bigger and difficult to get into the garages. Some of the garage sites were in poor condition and the variety of the garage buildings presented a number of challenges for the authority in terms of repair, maintenance and management. The sites had been looked at to see whether there was scope for development. Of the sites that had been assessed, 18 were being looked at for further investigation and feasibility for development and these were outlined within the report.

Comments were made in respect of the location of some of the garage sites which often were not near any kind of utilities and therefore the cost of developing these sites were exorbitant. Members were interested in the use of modular buildings with reference being made to the Passivhaus Building System which was a complete low energy self-build system which could be used in some of the locations.

It was highlighted that the reference to Burnside Avenue was in relation to Market Deeping and not Stamford as shown within the report.

Further comments were made in respect of the garage sites on the following:

- Using garages for storage - it was stated that the use of garages for storage would be in breach of the tenancy agreement.
- The use of a garage often affected car insurance quotes
- Had tenants been consulted, and if so, what feedback had been received.
- How many of the sites were currently used as garages.
- The use of open spaces to make sites viable.

It was noted that the assessment of the sites was still in the very early stages and it was about getting the right balance.

The Committee noted the current position and agreed to have a further update in six months' time.

➤ **Action**

That an update on Garage Sites and development be added to the Work Programme for a report in six months' time.

68. Voids Performance and Update

Members received an update on the current position in respect of void properties. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning referred to the first workshop held by the Housing OSC which had been on void properties and the challenges in getting void properties back in to circulation.

Currently the Council categorised voids into two classifications; minor and major as outlined within the report. The report listed the current active void properties as at 11 March 2024. The average time to complete voids currently stood at 171.23 days. Void properties caused a loss in rent revenue of £1m a year so bringing voids back into circulation as quick as possible was paramount. Some of the long term void properties were especially challenging and the costs of bringing them up to standard was prohibitive, therefore, work was being done to sell these properties on the open market and then reinvest the capital back into new builds. Comparisons would be in place for next year to enable figures to be compared side by side.

The Director of Housing referred the Committee to page 64 of the report and stated that of the 280 voids, 97 were used for temporary accommodation and 20 properties were being used to decamp families whilst the Earlesfield project was being completed. More context was needed around the figures shown to give a clearer view of the void situation.

Members felt that going forward the data could be presented in a more visual format so that trends could be seen clearly and it was stated that alternative formats would be considered to communicate the information going forward.

A discussion followed in respect of those properties being put on the open market and it was stated that currently six properties were being considered for disposal and these would be carried out following the red book valuation and advertised accordingly.

Further discussion on the companies and contractors involved with void properties followed and it was stated that over half of the void properties required major works to bring them up to the Decent Homes' Standard, progress was being made but there was still a long way to go.

Members noted the current position.

69. Corporate Plan 2024-2027: Key Performance Indicators

The Leader introduced the report on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing who had sent his apologies. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Licensing was attending all the Overview and Scrutiny Committees in pursuit of measures for the Corporate Plan which had been approved on 25 January 2024. A copy of the Corporate Plan was appended to the report and detailed lots of actions and promises.

The Leader then quoted Galileo and stated that if you can't measure it, you can't manage it. Somethings were easy to manage such as the number of void properties, the number of council houses owned by the Council where as others were more nebulous and as such information was difficult to pin down. The aim of the report was to consider the draft Key Performance Indicator's (KPIs) and make amendments where necessary to enable the administration to be held to account and have the necessary evidence to see where the contents of the Corporate Plan had been met or exceeded or where more work was required. The Leader also highlighted the difference between a target and a KPI, stating that a target was something that was "hit", and a KPI was more a direction of progress and something that we may not have complete control over to enable a target to be "hit". The Leader asked the Committee to consider whether the draft KPI's were the right ones for the Committee.

The Head of Corporate Projects, Performance and Climate Change stated that after discussions with Housing Officers, she requested that a further KPI be added to those circulated. The additional KPI was in respect of Choice Based Lettings, with three additional metrics in respect of Housing Allocation:

- Number of new applications received for noting each quarter.
- Number of people rehoused for noting each quarter.
- Time taken to assess the housing register application target 15 days.

The Chairman noted that the draft targets were very "sharp" targets and acknowledged that targets needed to be ambitious, but also, they needed to be attainable. The Director of Housing stated that they were aspirational targets and that perhaps interim targets should be considered as part of the draft KPI's.

It was noted that South Kesteven had one of the largest owned housing stock in the East Midlands and it was essential that the Housing KPI's monitored the service to ensure it was being carried out correctly.

The Chairman thanked the Member for his comments and acknowledged the fantastic work being done by Officers in the Housing section. She did query the 15 days in respect of the additional KPI and it was confirmed that this working days.

Discussion followed in respect of some of the targets that had been drafted and it was felt these aspirational targets should be planned over a three year period. The following targets were then amended to cover a three year period:

HOUS5	Satisfaction with the overall service provided by the landlord Year 1 – 75% Year 2 – 77% Year 3 – 80%
HOUS7	Percentage of non-emergency repairs completed within target timescale Year 1 – 75% Year 2 – 77%

Year 3 – 80%
 Satisfaction with the repairs service over the last 12 months
 (perception)
 Year 1 – 70%
 Year 2 – 75%
 Year 3 – 80%

Additional KPI - Choice Based Lettings

Time taken to assess the housing register application
 Year 1 – 25 working days
 Year 2 – 20 working days
 Year 3 – 15 working days

HOUS6 Average Void time (days)
 Year 1 – 100 days
 Year 2 – 80 days
 Year 3 – 60 days

A short discussion on the rent loss due to voids followed and also the void properties that were being used to decamp tenants due to the work being carried out in the Earlesfield project and how this affected the void figures.

The recommendations as contained within the report were proposed, seconded and AGREED with the inclusion of the extra KPI's in relation to Choice Based Lettings and also the alteration to the targets over a three year period.

Recommendation

That the Committee:

1. **Confirms the key performance indicators as appended to the report subject to the inclusion of the metrics under the additional Choice Based Lettings KPI and the alteration to targets over a three year period as associated with the actions in the Corporate Plan 2024-2027.**
2. **Notes that key performance indicators will be monitored throughout the year as determined by the Committee in agreeing its work programme.**
3. **Notes that the KPI suite will be reviewed and if necessary revised as part of the annual review process.**

70. Choice Based Lettings update

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning presented the report which updated Members on the progress of the implementation of the Choice Based Lettings allocation system. The Choice Based Lettings allocation scheme had been launched in October 2023 and the report gave a comparison of the applications received in January 2024 to March 2024. Currently there were 162 pending applications which was down from the 200 referred to when the report was

published. Overall feedback in relation to the new system was positive and the questions received were of a varied nature.

The Chairman made reference to incomplete applications and the need to have some comms in place to reinforce that the onus was now more on the applicant/tenant and that they should keep checking to see if they had received emails in respect of their application.

The Interim Head of Service for Housing Options stated that people were catching on to the new system which was user friendly and a lot of telephone calls had been received, with Officers helping people navigate the system.

A question was asked in respect of backups to the applications and it was confirmed that backups of the system happened every day and this was built into the software used.

A comment was made in respect of those people who did not have internet access and it was stated that there were processes in place which allowed for auto bids to be implemented on their behalf for those without internet access.

Members thanked the Officers for the fantastic work that they were doing in respect of the Choice Base Lettings system.

Members noted the update.

71. Sheltered Housing Workshop update

The Chairman referred to the recent Sheltered Housing Workshop that had been held on Monday 18 March 2024. The Workshop had been well attended and informative. Sheltered Housing or Assisted Housing should be based more on need rather than age. Examples were given and how the aspirations for Assisted Housing had changed over the years.

Work in relation to the Assisted Housing schemes would be done to look at the make up of these schemes and how they could be improved and whether all the facilities within the schemes were still relevant. This would be done on a gradual basis and would take time to complete, it was currently in the very early stages.

The Officers involved in the Workshop were thanked for their contribution.

The Chairman stated that the slides were available for those Members who wished to be sent a copy.

72. Housing Regulatory Compliance Update

Members received an update on the actions to ensure regulatory compliance of the Council's social housing landlord function.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning confirmed the 100% compliance for Legionella, Electrical, Asbestos, Fire Risk Assessment, Life Inspections, Smoke & CO₂ and Damp & Mould. The electrical baseline had been amended to remove lease holder/shared ownership but included 180 communal areas. The Gas compliant was now in the amber with 99.00% complete. It was difficult to get 100% compliant for Gas due to the difficulty in gaining access to all properties. Following letters, emails and telephone calls, 17 properties had been referred for court proceedings and capping due to lack of access, of these 10 had responded immediately to allow access for the checks to be carried out. A further seven had been capped following a vulnerability assessment, four had been in contact and three remained outstanding.

The Committee were informed that there was an error in the figures for Damp & Mould which should be the same as Smoke & CO₂, it should be 5868 not 5858 as shown in the report.

It was stated that that although 100% Gas would be strived for, 99% was a good target.

Members noted the report.

73. Earlesfield Project update

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning referred to the regular update that the Committee received on progress in relation to the Earlesfield Project. The report provided an overview of the project, completed works and timescales. It was confirmed that the Ward Members were now receiving a weekly report notice on the project.

A new contract had been signed with the current contractors, United Living, for a further year from 01 April 2024. It was envisioned that the project would be completed by the end of March 2025. 42 properties would be completed by the end of March 2024. Monthly meetings were continuing to be held with the Housing Team and United Living to ensure that the quality of work was high and that the project would be completed on time.

The Vice-Chairman stated that the project was amazing for the estate and he thanked everyone involved with the project.

A Member of the Committee asked if would be possible to have a tour of the project and it was confirmed that this could be arranged with small groups.

74. Work Programme 2023/24

Items to be included on the Work Programme were:

- Mutual Exchange Policy to be moved to June 2024
- Garage sites update – September 2024

- KPI monitoring every 6 months

Items down for the June meeting of the Housing OSC:

- Regulatory Compliance Monitoring update
- Earlesfield Project update
- Build and Acquisitions update
- Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy
- Rent and Service Charge Policy
- Empty Homes Strategy
- Integrated Housing Management System
- C4L update
- Stock Condition update
- Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) update

75. Any other business which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, decides is urgent

None.

76. Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 3:47pm.