

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Housing Scrutiny Panel

(to be confirmed at the next meeting)

Date: Thursday, 24 October 2024

Venue: Collingwood Room - Civic Offices

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs K Mandry (Chairman)

Councillor Mrs L E Clubley (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors: R N Bird, Mrs P M Bryant, D J Hamilton, S P Ingram and
L J Whittle

Also Present: Councillor Mrs P K Hayre (for item 10)



1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2024 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

3. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairman's announcements.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISCLOSURES OF ADVICE OR DIRECTIONS

There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.

5. DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations made at this meeting.

10. MELVIN JONES HOUSE

This item was brought forward on the agenda and heard directly after item 5.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillors Mrs P Hayre and Mrs J Needham addressed the Panel on this item.

The Panel received a report by the Director of Housing which provided Members with an overview of the Executive report concerning the future of Melvin Jones House (including St Mary's Road flats). Approval was sought to include Melvin Jones House as an Appendix to the Fareham Housing Regeneration Strategy for the redevelopment of the site.

Dissatisfaction was expressed by members that ward Councillors had not been included earlier in the process of bringing forward the plans for Melvin Jones House and felt very strongly that, going forward, they must be included and involved throughout the process so that they can ensure that their residents' needs are accommodated. The Director of Housing apologised and assured Members that the Housing Team is providing extensive support to residents and allocating priority status to them. Personal needs, individual preferences and circumstances will be taken into account and everyone will continue to be involved and informed.

Several Members commented that the building is looking very shabby and in need of maintenance. Officers advised that cleaning and repair services are still being supplied for the building and that this has not been scaled back in anyway. If there are communal area cleaning issues that need to be resolved, these can be taken forward through contract performance management.

It was suggested that Melvin Jones House has been in need of significant improvement works for many years and Members asked why it has taken so long to bring forward plans to address it. The Director of Housing advised that Housing Revenue Account borrowing caps were only relaxed in 2018 which has now enabled regeneration and development plans to be brought forward on various sites.

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel puts forward the comments, as detailed above, to the Executive for consideration.

6. EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

(1) Draft Tenant Engagement Strategy

There were no comments or questions for clarification in respect of this item.

(2) Housing Consumer Standards

There were no comments or questions for clarification in respect of this item.

(3) Voids, Property Repairs, Responsive Repairs and Refurbishment Works to Council Housing

There were no comments or questions for clarification in respect of this item.

(4) Changes to Government Guidance - Shared Ownership

There were no comments or questions for clarification in respect of this item.

(5) Draft Fareham Housing Mutual Exchange Policy

There were no comments or questions for clarification in respect of this item.

(6) Fareham Housing Repairs Policy - Consultation

There were no comments or questions for clarification in respect of this item.

(7) Tenancy Engagement Strategy - Adoption

There were no comments or questions for clarification in respect of this item.

(8) Fareham Housing Development Sites Update

There were no comments or questions for clarification in respect of this item.

(9) The Draft Fareham Housing Mutual Exchange Policy

There were no comments or questions for clarification in respect of this item.

7. FAREHAM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT SITES UPDATE

The Panel received a presentation by the Housing Delivery Manager which informed Members of the progress with the Fareham Housing sites and other relevant strategic housing matters. A copy of the presentation slides is attached to these minutes as Appendix A.

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel notes the content of the presentation.

8. FAREHAM HOUSING PROPERTY TENURE CHANGE AND PROPERTY DISPOSAL REPORT

The Panel considered a report by the Director of Housing which provided Members with an overview of the Executive report concerning the tenure change of 29 Cottles Way, Hill Head to shared ownership and the disposal of 5 Gordon Road, Fareham, including the building freehold.

The Panel enquired whether the leaseholder at Gordon Road has been given notice of the Council's intention to sell the freehold of the building. The Housing Delivery Manager advised that, at this stage, they have been contacted to advise of the intention to sell and to invite them to contact the Council to discuss options.

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel puts forward the comments, as detailed above, to the Executive for consideration.

9. CONSUMER STANDARDS PERFORMANCE

The Panel considered a report by the Director of Housing which provided Members with an annual review of Fareham Housing's progress and performance against specific expectations of the Consumer Standards.

Officers were commended on the work they have done to bring forward and adopt the significant number of policies and strategies that have been put in place since the Consumer Standards came into force.

Members asked whether there was anything that the Panel should be particularly concerned about. The Director of Housing advised that if an inspection was carried out at this point in time, compliance would unlikely be achieved. She advised that improvement in the areas of potential non-compliance (using the example of physical inspection of all stock) could be accelerated but warned that this would bring significant cost implications. Members were also advised that it has become clear from Inspections that have been carried out by the Regulator elsewhere that any inspection of Fareham Housing will most likely involve the Regulator observing a Housing Scrutiny Panel meeting, undertaking interviews with Panel Members (most likely without Officers present) and an overall test of the governance role that the Panel and the Executive Member provide. Members were encouraged to put forward any suggestions, ideas or questions associated with how officers can provide further support or guidance in their governance approach.

Members enquired whether it would be helpful if the level of tenant engagement were increased to help the drive towards compliance. Officers advised that the newly adopted Tenant Engagement Strategy has a focus on

increasing the involvement with tenants through focus/working groups to get feedback and assessment on performance and to gain understanding of how it can be improved. Members were also invited to seek further information relating to tenant engagement as part of the Priorities Plan for the Panel (see Item 14).

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel:

- (a) raised questions and points for clarification as part of assurance that the Council is seeking to meet the required standards;
- (b) notes the content of the report, including the current anticipated performance against the Consumer Standards; and
- (c) notes the draft updated Action Plan relating to compliance with the Standards, as attached at Appendix A to the report.

11. HOUSING DISREPAIR CLAIMS: AN UPDATE

The Panel considered a report and presentation by the Director of Housing which provided Members with an overview of what Disrepair Claims are, the number and status of claims received by the Council and how the impact of Disrepair is being mitigated going forward. A copy of the presentation slides is attached to these minutes as Appendix B.

Members discussed legal firms that tout for business, encourage people to make claims and then take a significant proportion of any compensation that is paid out. Members also noted that the greatest cost to the Housing Revenue Account was meeting the legal costs of the claimant, rather than the compensation payment. It was strongly felt that tenants need to be encouraged to report issues directly to the Council as they arise so that they can be resolved in a timely manner, utilising the Council's Complaints Process if needed. The Director of Housing confirmed that this is being taken forward and that the Tenant's newsletter will be used to highlight the need to let the Housing Team know if there are issues that need resolving.

The Panel was interested to know how many open cases the Council is currently dealing with and how long each one takes to resolve. The Director of Housing reported that there are 15 open cases at the moment, and that if claims are settled quickly, it might be dealt with in a few months, if not it could potentially take several years to resolve.

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel notes the content of the report.

12. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2022-25 UPDATE

The Panel received a presentation by the Head of Housing (Pathways and Neighbourhoods) which informed Members of the progress of work in the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-25. A copy of the presentation slides is attached to these minutes as Appendix C.

Members enquired whether work is being done with Two Saints to plan for service provision in 18 months-time when Hampshire County Council

withdraws funding. Officers confirmed that there will be a hand over with Hampshire and that meetings to discuss it are taking place in the coming months. It is expected that partnership arrangements with Gosport Council will continue as this has worked well and the service provided may alter slightly to better meet the needs of the Borough Councils.

The Panel was interested to hear whether consideration has been given to investigating alternative funding that could be secured through Central Government. Officers advised that the October Budget Statement should provide clarity on the impact on homelessness services and that if Central Government funding continues, this could be targeted at services like 101 Gosport Road. It will therefore be important to understand how we want this to work going forward.

Members requested that responses and updates on this matter are brought to future meetings of the Panel.

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel notes the content of the presentation.

13. REVISED VOID STANDARD

The Panel considered a report by the Director of Housing which provided Members with an update on the operational adjustment to the 'void standard' which is intended to reduce costs, whilst still providing safe and compliant housing.

It was suggested that there might be other factors to take into account in implementing a change to the Void standard. There could be a financial impact elsewhere, for example the level of council tax revenue for Fareham Borough Council and Hampshire County Council if void periods are reduced. There could also be a possibility that delayed work now (such as kitchen replacement) is stored up for dealing with in later years. The Director of Housing confirmed that these are genuine risks but the overall spend and budget constraints mean that we must act now to reduce the cost implications to the Housing Revenue Account.

Members enquired whether the change would bring Fareham in line with standards across the market and when the required reduction in costs would be achieved. The Director of Housing advised that the changes would bring Fareham to a position of being much more aligned with what we understand other providers do as void works. She also advised that there was no information available yet on the likely reduction in costs as it will take time for the changes to take effect and that any reduction would be dependent on the number of voids being processed.

RESOLVED that the Housing Scrutiny Panel notes the content of the report.

14. HOUSING SCRUTINY PANEL PRIORITIES

In discussing the Scrutiny Priorities for the Panel it was agreed that the following items be included at meetings when appropriate:

- (i) A report providing an update on tenant engagement following the adoption of the Tenant Engagement Strategy in September 2024.
- (ii) A report to identify several options of how tenants might be further involved in the scrutiny of the Council and its role as social housing landlord.
- (iii) An update on the future of Borough homelessness services (including 101 Gosport Road) following the confirmed withdrawal of County Council funding.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the Scrutiny Priorities for the Panel were reviewed; and
- (b) the items (i) to (iii) as detailed above be included in the Scrutiny Priorities for the Panel.

(The meeting started at 6.01 pm
and ended at 7.28 pm).

..... Chairman

..... Date