

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
TOWNS & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY SUB- COMMITTEE
Virtual via Zoom
31 January 2022 (7.20 - 9.14 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Ray Best (Chairman), Robby Misir (Vice-Chair), Carol Smith, Timothy Ryan, Paul Middleton, Gerry O'Sullivan, Keith Darvill, and Christopher Wilkins

42 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no apologies for absence.

43 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

44 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

45 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

46 PERFORMANCE INFORMATION UPDATE Q2

The Sub-Committee was updated on the Quarter 2 performance. The report set out the Council's performance against indicators within the remit of the Towns and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Quarter 2 (July - September 2021).

The report and presentation provided an overview of the Council's performance against the performance indicators selected for monitoring by the Sub-Committee. The presentation highlighted areas of strong performance and potential areas for improvement. Council performance was identified using colours that indicated RAG ratings for 2021/22. Red meant that more than the 'target tolerance' off the quarterly target was achieved; amber meant that within the 'target tolerance' of the quarterly target was achieved; and green meant that on or better than the quarterly target was achieved.

Where the performance was off track against the quarterly target and the rating was read 'Improvements required' were included in the presentation.

This highlighted what action the Council would take to address poor performance.

Also included in the presentation (where relevant) were Direction of Travel (DoT) columns, which compared:

- Short-term direction of travel – with performance the previous quarter (Quarter 1 2021/22)
- Long-term direction of travel – with performance during the same time the previous year (Quarter 2 2020/21)

It was explained that a green arrow meant performance was better and a red arrow meant performance was worse. An amber arrow meant that performance had remained the same.

It was noted that though service delivery was returning to business as usual, performance due to COVID-19 would still be impacted. In total, eleven performance indicators had been included in the Quarter 2 2021/22 report and presentation. Of those, ten have been assigned a RAG status. Two were currently rated 'red' (off track), two are rated 'amber' and six are rated 'green' (on track).

Discussion occurred around the aging construction trade and employment supports for a local labour force. Officers confirmed that they recognised these challenges and were liaising with local trade colleges and schools and companies that could offer apprenticeship programs. It was explained that the Joint Venture within the Council worked closely on the idea of social value practice and based recruitment around it.

Furthermore, the main risk factors had occurred from those experiencing delays in payment when moving from work to benefits. Advice had been offered proactively. Performance was also affected by the end of contract and a requirement to procure staff.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the contents of the report and presentation.

47 **HOUSING WHITE PAPER**

The Sub-Committee was updated on the Housing White Paper. The report set out the Government's 'Charter for Social Housing Residents' (White Paper) in November 2020. There were seven key priorities for providers of social housing and new powers for the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) and Housing Ombudsman, to hold social landlords to account.

The Grenfell Tower fire in June 2017, and the subsequent public enquiry, prompted the Government's green paper, '*A New Deal for Social Housing*', and their '*Fixing our broken housing market*' consultation, which took place in 2018. This led to the November 2020 publication of a new '**Charter for Social Housing Residents White Paper**'. The document set out seven key

priorities for providers of social housing and new powers for the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) and Housing Ombudsman to hold social landlords to account. They were listed as follows:

- To be safe in your home.
- To know how your landlord is performing.
- To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly.
- To be treated with respect.
- To have your voice heard by your landlord.
- To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in.
- To be supported to take your first step to ownership.

Discussion took place around the financial commitment of this and requirement of a higher standard of delivery. It was noted that tenant engagement and complaints should also form part of the review, with further evidence given from officers to form a redesigned engagement leaseholder forum. Mystery shopping could also be introduced as a way of ensuring service standards.

Officers explained that the safety bill legislation was nearing completion as it was still being debated. The housing consumer relations bill was another one to watch and these bills were particularly important for governance and scrutiny. The Housing White Paper report would go onto Cabinet on 16 February for further scrutiny and information.

Members also commented on the fact that there were more complaints from housing association residents generally regarding anti-social behaviour because their residents were not monitored in the same way as Council tenants. Therefore all social landlords need to address this issue across the board. Officers explained that housing association tenants didn't have access to Councillors. However, with this new legislation housing associations will be pushed to publish performance.

Members queried what the cost of compliance would be and officers suggested it would be around £18m initially.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

48 **HOUSING DECARBONISATION TARGET**

The Sub-Committee was updated on the Housing Decarbonisation Target. The report set out to provide an update on the decarbonisation activity and forward plan for the HRA housing stock.

It was explained that that in order to significantly reduce the Council's carbon footprint and in turn minimise the climate, economic and social impacts which would flow from increased temperatures, the Council aimed to make direct changes in its HRA Housing stock.

Domestic heating and hot water production was estimated to contribute 21% of the UK total carbon emissions. Fuel poverty regulations also imposed an obligation on landlords to bring all properties up to EPC band C by 2030. The Council's current domestic property portfolio was largely 1940s, 50s and 60s built properties which were not designed to meet the modern insulation and ventilation standards, and therefore needed considerable work to bring up to the levels required.

Currently due the Decent Homes programme, the average SAP rating was circa 70 (EPC C). However there were circa 2,600 properties currently below a band C. (there were not EPCs for every property and therefore some information was estimated. Undertaking full EPCs of all properties was ongoing). A high level assessment of the possible measures required to bring all properties up to an EPC C initially and ultimately zero carbon has been undertaken by Savills.

The assessment identified spending of £23k per property which would achieve an 87% carbon reduction. Officers explained this would include insulation and windows, and was classified as a fabric first approach. A total spend of £276m would be required across the entire stock and when costs were removed for Decent Homes type programmes (already in the business plan) there would be a need to identify circa £200m.

The remaining 13% carbon reduction would require significant additional investment in deep retrofitting properties, however it was felt that the decarbonisation of the electrical grid and improving technology would close the gap.

The new Housing Asset management Strategy (attached Appendix 1) has embedded a zero carbon approach across all future work streams, and this would be a key consideration as the design programmes would maximise the investment benefit. For example a de-gassing of high and medium rise building is being investigated. This would remove a significant fire risk in terms of a building safety approach, and would be a zero carbon alternative solution.

A full road map for each property to ensure that a clear programme of activities to achieve the 2030 and 2040 targets and ensure the HRA business plan includes sufficient monies would be developed. This would ensure that the most appropriate investment decisions were made across the portfolio.

Furthermore, external funding streams were also being investigated to see if there could be a reduction on the impact on the HRA. There was a bill submitted for £1.0m through the Social Housing Decarbonising Fund (SHDF) which would allow a number of the poorest performing properties to be brought up to a C Band and a delivery vehicle has been planned should the bid be successful.

Discussion occurred around insulation in external walls as then it would require less heating within PSIF buildings. Officers explained that insulating floors was likely the best approach but was the most difficult and that making buildings too air tight caused damp and therefore a balance approach was required that used a holistic methodology and was monitored when specific funding was granted. Further challenges were found in finding certified tradesman to do the work.

It was confirmed that the Council would find out whether the bid for funds was successful in February 2022. There was a total of £80m available but lots of competition. However, regardless of whether the Council were successful they would continue works as planned because there would be further future bids available. Future updates on all bidding would be provided at future meetings on a 6 monthly basis period and added onto the work programme.

Members raised further concern over costs and where the money would come from especially as costs would likely rise further as time went on. Officers explained that if they did everything that was on the plan now it would cost £200m. However, since the plan would be continuous, developing and evolving over time with new technologies. etc, officers believed costs would possibly decrease with a wait and see strategy to maximise value for money.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

49 **REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE**

The Sub-Committee was updated on the repairs and maintenance service. The report provided an update on the procurement of the new contract.

It was explained that LBH had a legislative duty to undertake repairs and maintenance works to its properties owned and managed by the HRA. The report was produced in December so may be slightly out of date. Breyer Group who were awarded the contract several years ago have experienced significant challenges throughout the term. Mainly due to poor specification, contract management and poor performance by the contractor.

However, through a proactive approach by both Breyer the Council officers, LBH performance had significantly improved and has now been operating at or around the required KPIs in regards to repairs completed on time and those completed "right first time". There have been more issues over the last few months for various reasons and officers are managing Breyer closely during the full demobilisation of the contract. As a contingency, the Council has a number of smaller contractors that can be relied on should there be a need in the coming months.

There had been a complete undertaking of a fully compliant procurement exercise to secure a new contractor on a 10 year contract that would provide a better continuity of service and allow for ongoing improvement and investment in service delivery. Mears have been appointed and a significant amount of time was invested in understanding customer's views and preferences for the new service and this has considerably improved the specification and KPIs within the new contract.

Gas services would remain the same and all properties had been serviced and were safe.

It was further explained that Mears and Council staff (call handlers) would be working out of the same site and this integrated model approach would enable better service through communication and technology. An incentive would be given to the contractor for setting targets and KPIs to allow extra benefits to them. An online portal would also be available to residents to book and review appointments. Members would prefer progress reports sent directly to them if they wished to view if Mears were meeting the objectives and would like to see those vital linkages between the Council CRM systems. Members suggested the report come back at the next meeting to see how Mears were performing.

The Sub-Committee **noted** the contents of the report.

Chairman