

## HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 13 MARCH 2019

**Present:** Councillor Davies (Chair);

Councillors Emberson (Vice-Chair), Eden, Ennis, Grashoff, Hacker, Hoskin, James, Manghnani, McGonigle, Rowland, Stanford-Beale and R Williams

**Apologies:** Councillors

### 18. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of 14 November 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### 19. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

- Community Safety Partnership - 20 September 2018.

**Resolved - That the Minutes be received.**

### 20. PRESENTATION FROM READING BOROUGH COUNCIL TENANTS ON FIRE SAFETY REVIEW, BUILDING CLEANING AND SOCIAL HOUSING GREEN PAPER

The Committee received a presentation from Chris Matta and Molly Haines, members of the Building Cleaning Tenant Group, who updated the Committee on the work the Group had undertaken since they had last presented to the Committee in November 2017. The Tenant Group had been set up in early 2016, and the group worked on an agreed action plan with support of council officers. The Group was made up of six tenants, and several other tenants help with work such as block inspections. Work in 2018 had included continuing to producing the tenant led newsletter, mystery shops and block inspections, considering feedback from a survey about the work of the group and the newsletter, and working on the new service level agreement for cleaning. Work going forward would include monitoring the new cleaning standards and the new Service Level Agreement; continuing to carry out unannounced block inspections; and considering complaint information from tenants.

The Committee received a presentation from Veronica Klopper and Pat Watson, members of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel TACT (Tenants and Council Together), on the Fire Safety Review they had carried out. TACT is made up of six tenants, who have all received training and had an independent mentor. The Panel aimed to work with Housing Services to provide an independent check and challenge on the services provided. TACT's Fire Safety review had two objectives: the first was to investigate the approach to fire prevention in high rise blocks and the second was to look at the communications between

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housing services and tenants on fire safety and prevention. TACT had carried out a desktop review, received a presentation from the principal building surveyor to explain the Council's current approach to fire safety, they had also carried out a survey with tenants living in high rise and large blocks, interviewed staff from the Council, and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service. TACT had analysed all the data and had prepared a report for Council managers. The report had made five recommendations and overall TACT had been impressed by the approach taken by the Council and the good relationship they had with the Fire Service. The recommendations had been accepted and an action plan was being worked on.

Sue Timmins, a member of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel TACT (Tenants and Council Together) gave a presentation on the Social Housing Green Paper. The Green Paper, realised by the Government in 2018, identified five core themes from the consultation that had taken place, these were: safe and decent homes; effective complaints handling; tenant empowerment and strengthening the regulator; tackling stigma; and expanding the supply of housing. Sue talked through the comments that had been submitted in respect of the consultation on the Green Paper. The government were currently considering the consultation results.

### Resolved -

- (1) That Chris, Molly, Veronica, Pat and Sue be thanked for their presentations;
- (2) That officers coordinate inviting members of the Committee to tenant housing inspections.

### 21. AWARD OF GRANT FUNDING FROM WARM HOMES FUND

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report to inform the Committee of the award of £337,860 of grant funding from Affordable Warmth Solutions (AWS) to support new gas central heating installations in approximately 100 Council tenanted flats and 50 privately owned leasehold flats currently heated by older, less efficient and more expensive electric storage heaters.

The report stated that AWS was a Community Interest Group set up in 2008 by the National Grid with the aim of addressing some of the issues caused by increasing energy prices and the growth of Fuel Poverty in the UK. AWS established a £150m Warm Homes Fund designed to support local authorities, registered social landlords and other organisations in reducing fuel poverty amongst some of the most deprived neighbourhoods.

The report explained that in February 2018 the Council had submitted a bid for £377,860 of grant funding and in November 2018 AWS had confirmed an award for the full amount. The award had been accepted by the Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods in consultation with the Head of Finance and the Lead Councillor for Housing. The Warm Homes Fund

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grant would be matched by £300,000 from other sources, including £40,000 grant funding already offered by Yes Energy Solutions and up to £180,000 from SGN (the gas network provider for South East England). The balance of funding would come from the 2019/20 Housing Revenue Account heating upgrade budget.

The report stated that the funding would be used towards the connection and installation of new efficient gas central heating systems with digital thermostatic controls in 100 Council tenanted flats and 50 privately owned leasehold flats - at no cost to either the tenant or home owner. These systems were easier to use, cheaper, and more flexible than the electric storage heaters they would replace, allowing residents to programme the systems to meet their needs rather than wait for heaters to charge and then release their heat at set times.

In determining the selection of properties that were to be included in the project, the Housing Service would seek to maximise the grant that each property attracted targeting those properties which were least energy efficient and would target properties in areas of greatest deprivation. Specifically, the financial contribution from SGN was maximised where there was no live gas connection currently in place. The final schedule and basis of targeting properties would be agreed with the Head of Service and Lead Councillor for Housing.

**Resolved -**

**That the award of £337,860 grant funding from the Warm Homes Fund to help tackle fuel poverty by connecting and installing new gas central heating systems in approximately 100 Council tenanted flats and 50 privately owned flats or houses across Reading, be noted.**

### **22. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING UPDATE**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that updated the Committee on the progress made in delivering the Private Rented Section (PRS) Charter and action plan. The updated focussed on the following four key areas: Rogue Landlord Enforcement Grant awarded by The Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHCLG); Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme; HMO Licensing; and Enforcement

The report explained that the PRS Charter aimed to build a common understanding of values, standards and requirements in the private rented sector. It further demonstrated the Council's and partners' commitment to improving the sector.

The report stated that the Council had been successful in a bid for funding from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government to tackle rogue landlords. The Council had been awarded £100,000, and the funding had to be spent by 31 March 2019. The report provided details of the projects that would be funded with this award of money, which included a stock conditions survey, HMO licensing application system, Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme, raising awareness and a Prevention Fund.

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The report provided an update on the Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme, which following stakeholder consultation had been moved to a property based approval scheme. The report also provided an update on Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing. The extension of Mandatory Licensing had come into force on 1 October 2018 but to date only 8% of the estimated number of properties which should have submitted applications had been received, despite regular and targeted communications.

The report also provided an update on enforcement, stating that the Private Sector Housing Team dealt with in excess of 1500 service requests a year, some of which had required formal enforcement action to be taken. The report detailed the work that had taken place over the past year, including that 68 statutory notices had been served, including two Emergency Prohibition Notices and three Prohibition notices giving a set timescale, four prosecutions had been taken with total fines of £32,152 and two formal cautions had been issued, and five Civil Penalty Notices had been issued, two of which had been Final Notices with fines totalling £1,429 and three Notices of Intention. The report provided case studies that highlighted recent prosecutions.

The report set out the proposed actions for officers over the next 12 months as part of the Council's plan to ensure the safety and quality of the private rented sector.

**Resolved -**

**That the progress made against the action of the Private Rented Sector Charter and the next steps outlined in the report, be noted.**

### **23. READING FESTIVAL 2018**

James Crosbie, Regulatory Services Manager, and Noel Painting, Festival Republic, gave a presentation on the 2018 Reading Festival. The presentation focussed on the issues of safeguarding and welfare and sustainability.

James highlighted the Council's multiple roles in the planning and regulation of the festival. The Council had received 38 complaints about the festival in 2018, which was down 20% on the number received in 2017. 20 of the complaints had been noise-related. The Festival Licence had permitted a capacity of 100,000 in 2018, an increase of 5,000 on the previous year and would be increased to 105,000 for the 2019 Festival.

In respect of safeguarding and welfare, James explained that the following support had been available on site prior to 2018, an onsite hospital with staff trained in mental health, a first aid point in the arena, a first aid point in White Camp, 2 welfare tents with trained drugs counsellors/mental health support staff, 2 street pastor tents offering support, street pastor patrols of campsites, a salvation army tent, a Samaritan tent, anti-drugs messaging and a profiling search policy on wristband exchanges/arena or, entrance. Enhancements for 2018 had included a safeguarding co-ordinator, who had been a trained social worker, communications and reporting had been enhanced, the introduction of safe hubs and a help map and relevant messaging. There had also been back of house

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drugs testing taking place, more information tents and the introduction of rejection tents.

In respect of sustainability, James reported that the Festival had used a number of different methods to communicate the message about sustainability, including ticket wallets, the website, social media, newsletters, programmes, onsite posters and big screen messages and green messenger volunteers. Every campsite had a recycling point which was looked after by green messengers who encouraged campers to separate their waste. The majority of recycling had been separated offsite and had achieved a 68% recycling rate.

Noel gave an overview of Festival Republic's proposals for the 2019 Festival, which included improving the plans and provision for those attendees who arrived on the Thursday evening, including opening the silent arenas that were in the campsites on the Thursday evening, putting the street pastors into the main arena, developing the safe mates campaign with other agencies, more live debriefing with the safeguarding partners on site.

**Resolved -**

**That James Crosbie and Noel Painting be thanked for their presentation.**

### **24. 'READING, PLACE OF CULTURE' (GREAT PLACE SCHEME)**

Further to Minute 13 of the previous meeting, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an updated on the progress in delivering year 1 of 'Reading, place of culture' funded through the 'Great Place Scheme'.

The report, in paragraph 4.1, provided an overview of the significant progress that had been made across all strands of the programme in the first year. The progress had been overseen by a Steering Group of the three core delivery partners, leading on particular aspects of the programme. The report also, in paragraph 4.2, set out the plans for year two of the programme that were already in-train and were seeking to build from the foundations of the first year whilst strengthening connections between the various components and further developing network and collaboration. Across the programme the aim was to develop and deliver sustainable change and impact by the end of the three year period.

Liz Allen, Cultural Development Officer, and Rebecca Lyndsey, National Management Trainee, gave a presentation that provided further details on the delivery of the first full year of the programme and the proposals and plans for year two.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the progress made in delivering 'Reading, Place of Culture' over the first full year of implementation as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the report, be noted;**

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- (2) That the proposals to further develop the programme of work in the second year of delivery as set out in paragraph 4.2 of the report, be endorsed.

(The meeting closed at 9.08 pm)