

MINUTES OF MEETING Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel HELD ON Tuesday, 14th November, 2023, 6.30 pm

PRESENT:

**Councillors: Dawn Barnes, Khaled Moyeed, John Bevan and
Alexandra Worrell (Chair)**

ALSO ATTENDING:

134. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained therein'.

135. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Blake and Cllr Hymas.

136. URGENT BUSINESS

None

137. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

138. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

None

139. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting on 20th September were agreed as a correct record.

140. VOIDS

The Housing Panel received a report that provided an update on key aspects of voids performance, including context on the service's past and recent performance, and also provided an update on the work in progress to improve voids performance under the Housing Improvement Plan. Accompanying the report was a presentation tabled

by officers and set out in the published tabled papers pack, that provided further information around voids performance. The report and presentation were introduced by Jahedur Rahman, Operational Director, Housing Service and Building Safety. Cllr Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Private Renters and Planning was also present for this item, along with the Director of Housing and Placemaking. The following arose during the discussion of this agenda item:

- a. The Panel sought clarification about some of the most common reasons a property became void and the reasons that a particular property might not be re-let after it became void. In response, officers advised that the Neighbourhood Moves scheme often led to chunks of voids becoming available in a particular ward as people were transferred from a regen property to a new property. The Council was looking at how it could make sure that it spent less time doing works and that it could turn properties around quicker. Officers set out that social housing properties often became available because of a death and that some of these could require extensive works as the tenant had either not reported disrepair or had undertaken renovation work themselves. Officers advised that they would like to be able to get into those properties much earlier and to undertake repairs as and when disrepair arose.
- b. The Panel queried whether there was a process in place for vulnerable tenants and their carers to report disrepair and whether this was acted upon. In response, officers advised that the Housing Management team should be aware of vulnerable tenants and that Housing officers should then be undertaking frequent checks on vulnerable residents and picking up repair issues as part of those visits.
- c. The Panel enquired about the extent to which Housing was joined-up with social services. In response, officers advised that the relationship was there and that since coming in-house Housing services had been building the relationship with colleagues in Children's and Adults. Officers advised that they would like to be able to share more of the data held by those services.
- d. The Panel sought clarification around the revised liveable standards. In response, officers advised that they had condensed the liveable standards down from around 12 pages to 4, with the aim of making them easier for residents to understand and also easier to turn around properties. An example noted of where an improvement had been made to those standards was that they now offered a much greater range of paint colours to new tenants of previously void properties. Rubber mats were offered to reduce vibrations from the washing machines of neighbouring properties and new residents were also given the chance to keep the flooring from previous tenants (as the Council did not provide flooring).
- e. In relation to a question about a disproportionate number of properties taking longer to turn around in some wards, officers advised that they would expect more void properties to come through in wards with a higher number of social housing properties. The Team had been tasked with clearing the backlog of voids and this may have an impact on how resources were targeted. In response to a follow-up, officers advised that the contractors did work according to geographic area. In general the contractors were expected to undertake major works, whilst the DLOs would work on void properties.
- f. The Panel queried about instances of squatting and whether there were any delays in turning properties around due to asbestos. In response, officers advised that there had been a number of reports of potential squatting made

- aware to officers and that there was a legal process that had to be followed for removing those squatters. Officers also acknowledged that there was a potential for delays arising from asbestos and other types of compliance works before they could be re-let.
- g. In response to a question, officers confirmed that the lettable standard did conform to the Decent Homes standard.
 - h. The Panel requested a copy of the checklist that tenants received when they moved into a property and also queried whether they were advised of where the stopcock was located. In response, officers agreed to circulate a copy of the check list to members and to clarify whether the location of the stopcock was included on the list. **(Action: Jahedur Rahman)**.
 - i. Officers also agreed to share the next set of feedback from residents about their experiences of moving in, when it was available. **(Action: Jahedur Rahman)**.
 - j. The Panel requested an update on the procurement of more contractors. In response, officers acknowledged that the tendering process took some time but provided assurances that they were hoping to award a contract very shortly.
 - k. In response to a question, officers advised that the Council did incur costs from void properties, including standing charges from utility companies.
 - l. In relation to inspections being carried out of properties when they became void, it was noted that it was possible to undertake these if sufficient notice was provided, but that in cases where a tenant died this would not be possible. Officers acknowledged that some process of pre-inspection could be introduced to speed up the transfer process but that this would not be possible in all circumstances.
 - m. Officers advised that monitoring and inspection of works carried out was done by the team leaders to ensure that repairs were done to the required standard.
 - n. A Panel Member raised a specific property on Waverley Road that had been cant for two years. Officers agreed to look into the issue and provide an update to Cllr Bevan. **(Action: Jahedur Rahman)**.
 - o. In response to a question, officers advised that there was an apprenticeship scheme in place but acknowledged that this needed to be scaled up and that there needed to be a greater focus on succession planning and development of a work force plan for the repairs service going forward.
 - p. The Panel sought assurances around the target to get back to pre-pandemic performance of 150 properties a year and whether there was any scope to be more ambitious. In response, officers advised that they were hoping to achieve void rates of 2% in 2024/45 and 1% in 2025/26. Officers commented that they hoped to achieve 1% in the latter half of 2024/25 but this would depend on when contracts were mobilised and productivity increasing.
 - q. The Panel queried the fact there were out of borough properties and why this was. In response, the Cabinet Member set out that some of these out of borough properties were long term private sector leases, some are HCBS properties and some were Haringey properties that were out of borough, such as those at Imperial Wharf at Hackney.
 - r. In response to a question around data, the Panel was advised that a lot of the issues experienced around repairs related to data integrity and sharing data. Bringing this together in one place was a huge piece of work.
 - s. The Panel questioned whether improvements to performance levels were sustainable long-term given the levels of additional investment that had been

- put in. In response, officers advised that there had been pressures from the Housing repairs service taking on HCBS properties and PSL properties and that discussions were taking place to see what the Housing repairs service should focus on general need properties going forward.
- t. The Panel raised concerns about the number of properties managed by the Council increasing with 3000 new homes being built and additional properties being managed through the HCBS but that there was no additional staff to support this. In response, the Cabinet Member acknowledged that there was a resource issue within the repairs service, particularly in relation to HCBS properties and private sector lease properties. The Housing service were working to address this.

RESOLVED

Noted

141. A NEW HOUSING STRATEGY FOR HARINGEY

The Panel received a report which provided an overview of the proposed new Housing Strategy, its context, and the processes through which it had been developed. The draft Housing Strategy 2024-2029 was attached as an appendix to the report. The report set out the content of the draft Housing Strategy agreed by Cabinet in March 2022, the consultation on that Strategy carried out between September and December 2022, and the changes made to the draft Strategy as a result both of that consultation and of new financial, regulatory, and legislative contexts. The Panel were asked to provide comments on the draft Housing Strategy, in advance of December Cabinet. The report was introduced by Cllr Ruth Gordon, Cabinet Member for Council House Building, Placemaking and Local Economy as set out in the agenda pack at pages 25-138. Also present for this agenda item were David Joyce, Director Housing and Placemaking; Robbie Erbmman, Assistant Director of Housing; Hannah Adler Head of Housing Strategy and Policy; and Marc Lancaster Housing Policy & Strategy Officer. The following arose during the discussion of this agenda item:

- a. The Panel sought clarification around London Affordable Rent versus formula rent. In response, officers advised that that houses build under the previous grant programme 2016-23, would be built using London Affordable Rent. New Housing schemes built under the current 2021-26 scheme were limited to social rents using the formula. This was set by the Mayor of London's office and the Council had no control over it. It was noted that there were some limited exceptions such as building using Right to Buy receipts and possible future changes to supported housing, that may allow the Council to use LAR.
- b. A Panel member commented that he would like to see a holistic approach taken to estate improvements, so that the railings were painted at the same time as major works were undertaken. It was suggested that this approach was cheaper and caused less disruption to residents.
- c. The Panel also commended officers and the Cabinet Member on the quality of the design of schemes being built in Haringey. It was suggested that members would like to see some of the LBH schemes put forward for awards.
- d. A Panel Member commented that by not using LAR, the Council was severely limiting the number of houses that it could build. In response, officers reiterated that the GLA funding for the 2021-26 programme did not allow the Council to

use LAR for the current scheme. Officers sought to reassure members that the Mayor was giving Haringey a very large grant settlement, one that was double the previous allocation. The AD for Housing advised that he was happy with the viability of the scheme and that there were around 500 homes in the programme.

- e. The Cabinet Member advised that part of the reason that the Mayor's Office had agreed to give Haringey a substantial settlement was due to the trust that had been built up with them, particularly in terms of the fact that LBH has started 2000 homes on site. The Cabinet Member commented that that the 3k Council homes would be a sizeable proportion of the 15k homes of all tenures needed across the borough.
- f. The Chair sought clarification around the new strategic shift on achieving the Decent Homes standard and how this would impact the capacity of the service to undertake a holistic approach to improving existing housing estates. In response, the Panel was advised that the date was being put back and that the key focus was around ensuring that the Council was able to bring all of its homes up to Decent Homes standards. Officers set out that this reflected a recognition about what it was possible to deliver, particularly in the current financial climate, with borrowing costs having effectively doubled. The Panel agreed to put forward a recommendation that it would like the Council to return to undertaking holistic works when circumstances allowed. The Chair commented that she understood that this may take some time.
- g. The Panel sought clarification over the fact that the report set out that there were 3641 tenants who were living in overcrowded accommodation and 3820 tenants who lived in homes that were too big for them. The Panel queried the extent to which these two groups could be switched in order to solve the problem. In response, the Cabinet Member advised that there was a programme in place to provide mentors and financial incentives to get people into smaller properties. The Cabinet Member acknowledged the importance of getting existing tenants who had a larger home that they needed to downsize but commented that it was not easy to do. Officers commented that cash incentives were offered to people to move and that there were officers who worked on supporting those with under-occupation to move on. Officers advised that an under-occupation strategy and an older persons housing strategy would be brought to Cabinet in due course.
- h. The Panel sought clarification about whether a secure tenancy was specific to a particular property and the extent to which the Council could oblige people move home. In response, officers advised that a secure tenancy was linked to a particular property and that the residents had the right to continue living there indefinitely. All of Haringey's tenancies were secure tenancies as that was the policy of the Council. Any move to a fixed term tenancies for new tenants would require a policy change.
- i. In relation to the 15k homes needed in the borough, the Panel sought clarification as to where the other 12k was going to come from. In response, the Cabinet Member responded that the Council had a particular focus on prioritising affordable homes, but that the figure of 15k related to homes of all tenures. Officers set out that there had been a number of large scale developments in the borough built by the private sector, such as those at Tottenham Hale. The Council's planning service processed a record number of planning schemes in the last financial year including permission for 4000

- homes in a matter of months, so there was a pipeline of schemes ready to be taken forward. Officers cautioned that the market was responding to rising borrowing costs and that this would inevitably lead to a period of lower output in terms of the number of properties being built going forward.
- j. The Panel sought assurances around the extent that these houses were addressing local need, given that an estimated 100k to 300k people moved to London each year. In response, it was acknowledged that there had been a large population increase in London since the 1980s and that had a significant impact on house prices and demand for housing. The Cabinet Member emphasised that need for the Council to build family homes in order to encourage families to move to Haringey as it directly impacted school funding formulas.
 - k. In relation to Strategic Objective three – Improving the quality of private rented sector housing, the Panel sought assurances about broadening the licensing scheme for private rented sector housing and the extent to which the Council was enforcing against bad landlords. In response, officers advised that Selective Licensing required certain conditions to be met in each ward in order for the scheme to be approved by the Secretary Of State. A lot of work was done in Haringey to build an evidence base and the evidence base showed that Haringey would not get government approval for a Selective Licensing scheme across the whole borough.
 - l. The Panel queried what could be done to support private owners to retro-fit their homes to make them more energy efficient, particularly in terms of those in conservations areas and whether there was any capacity to amend conservation area regulations. In response, officers advised that there was a legal duty on councils to preserve and enhance the character of conservation areas and that this was an issue that needed to be dealt with at the national level, particularly as the UK had some of the least energy efficient housing stock in Europe. The Council could provide information and advice to homeowners in terms of what they could do within the rules. In response to a follow up, officers advised that there was a degree of leeway in how it interpreted preserving and enhancing the character, but that external cladding on a brick built conservation area, for example, was clearly a breach of planning regulations.
 - m. In response to a question, the Cabinet Member advised that the provision of social housing was fundamental to the strategy and how the administration sought to build 15k new homes across all tenures. The extent to which the number of new social housing developments could be increased, beyond 3000, was an ongoing conversation.
 - n. The Panel sought assurances around the fact that the new homes the Council was building would be properly maintained. In response, officers advised that the homes were being built to a very high standard that no major works should be required for at least ten years. As the new homes were being built budgets were being made available to maintain the properties in the future. It was anticipated that the Council would be looking at a period of 20-30 years before significant maintenance was required. The Director added that it was also anticipated that the planned investment in existing homes would lead to reduction in maintenance costs and the example of the Noel Park pods was given, as this had seen a dramatic improvement on repair costs for those units that had been completed.

- o. The Panel sought assurances around what levers were available to the Council to support people from being pushed out of the local housing market. In response, officers advised that the Housing Strategy gives a clear view of what the required mix of housing needed in the borough was, in addition to that which the Council was building itself. The strategy set out the need for housing for rent and housing for low cost rent, especially in terms of family homes. The strategy set a clear tone around what the Council expected from developers in the borough for building low cost housing. Officers also emphasised the role the Council played in relation to acquisition of existing stock through the HCBS. The Council also had one of the best homelessness prevention teams in London. Officers also set out that there was a financial inclusion in Housing Management who work with residents who may be in financial arrears and signposted them to a range of support services.
- p. The Panel commented on the fact that the Council had not had a cyclical maintenance programme for its estates for 20 years and suggested that this was something they would like to see reinstated.
- q. In relation to Panel members expressing a degree of scepticism about repairs being carried out in future, officers provided reassurance that there was a financial model in place, through the 30 year HRA plan, that was capable of delivering what was needed. Officers acknowledged that in the past capacity and capability had been an issue, but that just as the Council had not built any new homes for 30 years and was now doing so, repairs and maintenance would become something that the Council did well. The work being done to make these improvements was set out in the Housing Improvement Plan.
- r. The Panel commented that they would like to put forward a recommendation to Cabinet around giving leaseholders 6 months' notice of payments before any major works was carried out, rather than the current 30 days' notice. Officers clarified that the 30 day notice for leaseholders on Noel Park estate was a section 20 notice, rather than a bill. This was required so that the Council could begin contracting for works. It was suggested that leaseholders had not received a bill for one to two years after the notice. Officers acknowledged that part of the problems with the works at Noel Park was that the letters were unhelpfully worded and it made the notices seem like a bill. The Panel suggested that putting forward a recommendation on this would provide additional assurances to leaseholders.

RESOLVED

- I. That the update was noted.
- II. That the above recommendations in relation the draft Housing Strategy be put forward to Cabinet.

142. STRATEGIC ASSET MANAGEMENT AND PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

The Panel received a report which provided an update on the progress of the Strategic Asset Management and Property Improvement Plan 2023-28 and the associated action plans, set out in appendix one of the report, which captured the recommendations from previous internal and external audit reports. The report was introduced by Cllr Ruth Gordon, Cabinet Member for Council House Building,

Placemaking and Local Economy as set out in the agenda pack at pages 139 to 202. Also present for this agenda item were David Joyce, Director of Housing and Placemaking; Jonathan Kirby, AD for Capital Projects and Property; Amanda Grosse, Head of Strategic Asset & Accommodation Management; and Sarah Lavery, Head of Property Change. The following arose during the discussion of this report:

- a. The Panel queried whether the Council would be seeking to acquire additional property/assets, rather than divesting them, and also sought clarification about whether the Council would be seeking to acquire assets outside of Haringey. In response, the Cabinet Member gave the example of Pendarren House as an asset that Haringey had outside of the borough and explained that the reason for this was that it served a strategic objective of the Council. The Council would acquire additional assets if in doing so it was serving a strategic objective. Examples of recent acquisitions were 46 homes at the Gourlay Triangle and the acquisition of property from Grainger on the Wards Corner site. Officers advised that the Council had to demonstrate a direct strategic link to its needs in order to acquire properties outside of the borough.
- b. The Panel noted that the report set out that the value of the Council's assets was £2.8 billion and queried how this compared with neighbouring authorities. In response, officers advised that this figure included everything, including school estates, not just the commercial portfolio. Officers agreed to come back with a written response to members about how the value of Haringey's assets compared to neighbouring boroughs. Officers suggested that Haringey had held on to a lot of stock, but that also came with challenges due to the age of some of the stock. **(Action: Jonathan Kirby).**
- c. The Chair sought clarification about the scope of assets captured in the Plan and whether this related to the General Fund. In response, officers emphasised the fact that the plan set up a firm structure so that any decision on acquiring or divesting an asset would go through the governance structure set out in the report. Officers advised that the assets referred to everything that was non-residential and included any acquisition or disposal of assets regardless of the category of property. This excluded council housing tenancies.
- d. The Panel queried the use of flexible capital receipts, referring to paragraphs 7.2.4 & 7.2.5 of the report, which stated that the Council intended to continue with the current stipulation that capital money could only be used on a project that delivered cost reductions or transformation, after the government loosened the rules around this. The Panel commented that it would like to see capital receipts being used on capital projects, the example given was around building an additional floor on some of the industrial units to generate more commercial income. In response, officers set out that the budgetary process determined how this money was spent and that it was ultimately the Section 151 officer who determined this. Officers clarified that there was a property review process which determined how capital receipts would be spent. Officers could submit a bid as part of the budgetary process and that this would be determined in the usual way.
- e. The Panel sought assurances about whether the Capital Projects and Property service would be able to recruit staff with the requisite skill set, given challenges in the jobs markets and the fact that roles such as surveyors were highly sought after. In response, officers acknowledged that recruitment was a challenge, but that they had been able to recruit to a number of key posts. Officers advised that they were looking at bringing through more apprentices,

- growing their own staff, and use of acting-up opportunities. The Panel was advised that managers were working with HR to make the roles as attractive as possible, particularly in terms of flexible working arrangements. A number of different approaches were being taken to recruit the right skills within the team. However, the skills required did not always match up with salary expectations.
- f. The Panel raised concerns about shops on estates and the fact that the shops were often neglected when estates were refurbished, as they were managed by a different part of the Council. In response, officers acknowledged that this had been a problem in the past, but that work was being done to make property and housing more joined up, so that offices and commercial spaces were picked up when refurbishment works took place. Officers advised that work was also underway to bring hard and soft facilities management together in one place.
 - g. A panel member raised an issue relating the Lindens, and the fact that the wardens office was not being renovated at the same time as the rest of the unit. In response, officers agreed to get a written response from colleagues.
(Action: Jonathan Kirby).
 - h. The Chair sought clarification about what was meant by changing the shape of the property model long-term. In response, officers advised that this was about ensuring that the asset portfolio met the needs of the community and that it was fit for purpose. The example given was around large leisure centres that were purchased in the 1970s and the extent to which these still reflected the needs of residents, given people tended to use more outdoor space.

RESOLVED

Noted

143. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

RESOLVED

That the work programme was noted.

144. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

N/A

145. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

- 18 December 2023
- 26 February 2024

CHAIR: Councillor Alexandra Worrell

Signed by Chair

Date

