

# **Minutes of a meeting of the HOUSING PANEL (PANEL OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE) on Thursday 3 October 2019**

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## **Committee members:**

Councillor Bely-Summers (Chair)	Councillor Gotch
Councillor Howlett	Councillor Taylor
Councillor Wade	Councillor Wolff

## **Officers:**

Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing Services / Director Housing Companies  
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer

## **Also present:**

Tony Buchanan, Housing Panel (tenant co-optee)  
Wendy Hind, Tenant Involvement Officer  
Six members of the public

## **200. Apologies**

Invited Cabinet members Councillors Linda Smith and Mike Rowley tendered apologies due to a meeting conflict.

## **201. Declarations of interest**

None

The Panel agreed with the Chair's proposal to re-order the agenda for the benefit of the Panel's guests.

## **202. Housing performance 2019/20 Quarter 1**

Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing Services, presented a report on the Council's Housing Performance 2019/20 Q1 to the Panel.

The Panel was informed that some performance data was missing from the report presented to it due to an IT glitch. As such, a table containing the missing information was tabled and is included as an appendix to the minutes.

In considering BV063 – Average SAP rating of local authority owned dwellings - the Panel was informed that whilst the measure was reported on annually, due to the recent declaration of a Climate Emergency a significant amount of work had been undertaken to model efficiency improvements in the Council's housing stock for proposals to be made to the budget. The Panel sought to understand the size of the task of carbon reduction for houses. For new builds developed by the Council's

Housing Company, 70% carbon reductions could be achieved whilst maintaining a 50% affordable homes levels on new developments. However, the task for the Council's existing stock was huge; due to the age of the stock 50% of the Council's homes would never be able to become carbon neutral without being completely knocked down and rebuilt.

Under HC003 and HC004 – Homelessness Acceptances and Homelessness Cases Prevented - the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act was highlighted to the Panel. Due to the increased duties placed on Councils the Council's target for homelessness acceptances had been increased from 74 last year to 110. The Council had had its implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act audited by MHCLG and Crisis and had received praise for its implementation, which was showing in the way the Council was exceeding both targets despite the greater range of duties.

Regarding HC016 – Number of affordable homes for rent delivered, the red target was explained to be a timing issue, and that a significant number of homes had been delivered shortly after the end of the quarter.

The Panel discussed at length the current situation of HP003 – the number of people estimated to be sleeping rough - despite the measure being an annual one. Although an annual count was required for MHCLG figures, monthly counts and quarterly estimates were taking place. The figure of 45 people sleeping rough showed a reduction from the 2017 high of 61. However, it was impressed upon the Panel that 20 new homeless people were estimated to arrive in Oxford as homeless each month, showing the importance of preventative work, not all of which was within the Council's control.

The red-rated indicator HP004 – the number of successful interventions with rough sleepers – was discussed in relation to plans for Floyds Row. The vital of importance of having a space off the streets to contemplate and implement interventions with rough sleepers was recognised and the facilities proposed were welcomed by the Panel.

The total number of affordable homes completed in the year, red-rated indicator HP006 was explained to be a timetabling issue, and that handovers had been scheduled for after the quarter end. Further, a number of the homes did not lie within the Council's control, and some Housing Association programmes, such as those at Gibbs Crescent and Williams Close, had slipped which further weighed on the numbers.

The Panel expressed particular interest in the quality of accommodation referenced in NI156 – limitation of the Council's use of temporary accommodation to 2015 levels. It was made clear that bed and breakfast accommodation was not used, but that the Council had been proactive in investing £15m in property to use as temporary accommodation since 2016 which ensured more suitable accommodation for those needing the service.

The Panel welcomed the news that the Council's performance on HP009 – Total standard re-let time - was within the top quartile of councils nationally and had achieved a significant turnaround within the past two years.

The Panel expressed encouragement for the work done and made no recommendations.

### **203.Appointment of Housing Panel Co-optee**

A member of the public, Thomas Britton, had requested to address the Panel in regards to this item on behalf of the Oxford Influencers Group and was invited to address the Panel. Oxford Influencers were introduced as a voluntary group whose members had used either the Oxford Citizens Advice Bureau or another advice centre in Oxford. The group's goal was explained to be influencing progressive change through the promotion of co-production in regards to the design and delivery of services. Mr Britton and the Oxford Influencers group recognised the steps taken towards co-production through the co-option of a Council tenant co-optee, and discussion of further widening participation to those representing housing associations and the private rented sector. It was suggested to the Panel that it might consider co-opting a member of Oxford Influencers as housing association representatives.

Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer, presented a report which recommended the Panel i) thank the outgoing tenant co-optee, Geno Humphrey, for his contribution, ii) appoint Tony Buchanan as tenant co-optee until the end of the civic year and iii) agree how suggestions from alternative stakeholders to the Panel might be managed.

It was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer would draft a letter of thanks to Geno Humphrey from the Chair, Councillor Bely-Summers, to thank him for his work on behalf of the Panel. Following an introduction of Tony Buchanan's background, it was also agreed that Mr Buchanan be co-opted as a member of the Panel until the end of the civic year.

The Panel held significant discussion around how best to approach increasing representation from non-Council stakeholder groups. There was strong agreement across members that the Panel should seek to involve additional stakeholders. Issues it considered in relation to this included the challenge of the Panel retaining its identity of a Panel to scrutinise the Council's housing activities rather than a general housing forum. The further challenge of choosing a representative from the multiplicity of possible alternatives without excluding anybody was also discussed.

In regards to extending involvement the Panel agreed the following, that the Scrutiny Officer would:

- i) Contact Oxford Influencers, Oxford Tenants Union, and the Lived Experience Forum to raise awareness of the Housing Panel's existence, its current work plan, and its desire to seek the views and perspectives of external groups on relevant items
- ii) On items of particular interest to a specific group, to highlight beforehand that the meeting would be taking place and inviting the organisation to nominate somebody who would be able to contribute meaningfully to the item under discussion
- iii) Invite suggestions of topics from the nominated groups for consideration by the Panel for future inclusion in the Panel's work plan.

### **204. Notes of previous meeting**

The notes of the previous meeting were not included on the agenda pack nor tabled at the meeting. It was agreed to consider them at the next meeting of the Housing Panel.

## **205. Housing Panel Work Plan**

The Scrutiny Officer provided an update on the current work plan and the following was agreed by the Panel:

- To consider the Housing and Homelessness Strategy mid-point review in November
- To devote the entire April meeting to Tenancy Management Standards
- To remove Tenant Satisfaction from this year's work plan in light of the delays caused by changing the approach to data collection and baselining of the data
- To consider Private Rented Sector Housing in March 2020
- To consider the report originally due in October on the Housing Revenue Account as part of the Housing element of the Budget Review Group meetings on 08 January.

Further, it was discussed whether to request a report on the success of the Council in securing 50% affordable housing on developments within the city. It was felt that it would be worth considering whether to pursue this after the headline figures were presented to the Scrutiny Committee in December.

## **206. Date of next meeting**

The Panel noted the dates of the next meetings.

It was requested that a member briefing be organised to consider the relationship between the Council and Housing Associations (both tenants and landlords) and the Council and the private rented sector, with a particular view to the opportunities for the Council to improve standards.

**The meeting started at 6.30 pm and ended at 7.38 pm**

**Chair .....**

**Date: Thursday 7 November 2019**

## Information Tabled Regarding Item 202 – Housing Performance Q1

The following data were submitted to provide figures for the Year End Targets 2019/20 which had not been included within the original report.

BV063: Average SAP rating of L.A. owned dwellings	67.9
BV064: Empty homes returned to use	18
HC003: Homeless Acceptances	110
HC004: Homelessness cases prevented	1100
HC016: Number of affordable homes for rent delivered	102
HC020: Percentage of properties failing to meet Decent Homes standard	1.1
HP003: The number of people estimated to be sleeping rough	45
HP004: The number of successful interventions with rough sleepers	350
Total number of affordable homes completed in year	138
HP009: Total standard re-let time (HouseMark definition)	21
NI 156: Limit our use of temporary accommodation at 2015 levels	110

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