

Minutes of a meeting of the Housing and Homelessness Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Thursday 5 October 2023

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Committee members present:

Councillor Diggins (Chair)

Councillor Rawle

Councillor Sandelson

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services

Ossi Mosley, Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager

Brendan Lewis, Senior Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Project Officer

Helen Denyer, Service Director for West of England, Mental Health and Substance Use (St Mungo's)

Emma Sage, Housing First Coordinator (St Mungo's)

Benn Kiley, Operations Manager (A2Dominion)

Rachael Torrance, Housing First Support Officer (A2Dominion)

Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Dunne and Fouweather sent apologies.

19. Declarations of Interest

None.

20. Chair's Announcements

None.

21. Notes of the previous meeting

The Panel agreed the notes of the meeting held on 02 August 2023 as a true and accurate record.

In relation to the actions at minute 17 from the meeting on 02 August 2023, the Chair highlighted that an All Member briefing on the Housing Revenue Budget had taken place on 26 September 2023, with the slides and recording being circulated to All Members afterwards, and the video on the same topic had been circulated to All Members in August 2023; both actions were therefore complete.

22. Housing and Homelessness Panel Work Plan

The Panel considered the Work Plan.

The Scrutiny Officer provided the following updates on Scrutiny-commissioned items:

- Operation of Housing Associations Within the City – a scope had been drafted in consultation with officers and the Chair, which was included in the agenda pack for the Panel's approval; due to the resources available and in order to ensure a focused piece of work, the scope had been narrowed and it was proposed that the item title be amended to 'Housing Associations' Approach to Tenant Engagement'.
- Implementation of Selective Licensing – this item had been scheduled in to the Work Plan for the March 2024 meeting.
- Financial Viability training/briefing – the Scrutiny Officer had been exploring the possibility of an All Member briefing, however there were potential budget implications for the delivery of a session and there was a need to gain a more detailed understanding of what Panel Members envisaged the scope of a session would include so that the availability of any budget and wider Member demand for a session could be explored to gauge the feasibility of running one. The Panel agreed to feed back to the Scrutiny Officer.

During discussion, it was queried whether the rough sleeper count formed the basis of a report to the Panel each year and if not, whether it could be included within the Work Plan. Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services confirmed that there was an annual rough sleeper count which took place in winter; the result was embargoed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) until later in the municipal year so the Council was unable to release the number until the embargo was lifted. It was explained that officers carried out intelligence-based data gathering throughout the year, which probably provided a more accurate figure overall in terms of who was actually sleeping rough locally, whereas the rough sleeper count was more of a national trend tracker. The intelligence-based data gathered was reported to the Panel as part of the biannual Housing Performance Monitoring item, therefore already formed part of the Work Plan.

The Panel noted the update from the Scrutiny Officer and:

- **Agreed** the Work Plan as set out in the agenda pack.
- **Approved** the scope for the Scrutiny-commissioned item on Housing Associations' Approach to Tenant Engagement and delegated authority to the Scrutiny Officer to schedule the item into the Work Plan in discussion with relevant officers.

23. Report back on recommendations

The Panel noted the following Cabinet responses to its recommendations:

- Expansion of the Housing First Programme
- Update on Customer Complaints and Feedback

24. Update on the Housing First Programme in Oxford

Brendan Lewis, Senior Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Project Officer introduced the report, which had been commissioned by the Panel to set out progress

and outcomes of the Housing First programme in Oxford. He highlighted that the programme utilised funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and had been operational in Oxford since late 2021. In Oxford, 24 individuals were currently accommodated within the Housing First provision, which would rise to 26 individuals in the next week and an estimated 35 individuals by the end of March 2024. The Panel was informed that the ultimate goal of Housing First was tenancy sustainment and preventing rough sleeping, which was largely being achieved through excellent multi-agency working.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- Fortnightly meetings took place with the Council's Allocations Team to discuss one-bedroom void properties which may be suitable for Housing First stock.
- Officers were fairly confident that the Council would acquire the required number of Housing First properties in order to meet its targets.
- Housing First was a very limited resource within a large system; it operated on a Panel basis where referrals were taken which set out how individuals met the criteria for Housing First. The Council had rejected some referrals to Housing First where those individuals would be better supported by other services (e.g. if individuals did not need the intensive support element that Housing First provided; or if individuals' support needs meant they were not best supported by a standalone tenancy via Housing First).
- The only pre-requisites for Housing First were that individuals wanted to be accommodated in the provision and were aware of the Housing First principles and their obligations as a tenant.
- Housing First demonstrated a real person-centred approach, where the individual and their needs were at the centre of everything. The introduction of numerous key performance indicators (KPIs) could lead to additional conditionality being placed on the service and service-users which would likely detract from the person-centred nature of the provision. Officers believed that Housing First was more effective by virtue of not leading with KPIs.
- The key measure of Housing First's success was tenancy sustainment, as this indicated whether the service was delivering the right support. Measures such as known hospital and/or A&E presentations, remand in custody, offence charges and incidences of rough sleeping were also monitored to understand the wider societal benefit of Housing First.
- Evictions only occurred in very limited situations, such as if an individual was remanded in custody and expected to remain so for a prolonged period of time.
- Individuals were supported in relation to issues around rent arrears if they arose.
- St Mungo's and A2Dominion had regular meetings together each week with the Council, but also separate from the Council; support workers from the two organisations worked very closely together, including problem-solving meetings, joint welfare meetings and sharing information and contacts. The two providers operated as one big team working closely together to support clients and achieve the best outcomes.
- St Mungo's and A2Dominion also worked closely with other organisations such as Turning Point (drug and alcohol treatment service).

During discussion, that Panel requested that:

- Housing Services officers explore how the additional 'societal benefit' measures which were monitored as part of Housing First (e.g. hospital and/or A&E

presentations, remand in custody etc.) could be anonymised and reported to the Panel alongside the biannual Housing Performance Monitoring.

- A KPI relating to the demand and waiting time for Housing First be included in future Housing Performance Monitoring, including an indicator which set out the timeliness of move-in dates compared to the initial move-in date stated.

The Panel noted the contents of the report; no recommendations were agreed.

Ossi Mosley, Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager, Brendan Lewis, Senior Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Project Officer, Helen Denyer, Service Director for West of England, Mental Health and Substance Use (St Mungo's), Emma Sage, Housing First Coordinator (St Mungo's), Benn Kiley, Operations Manager (A2Dominion) and Rachael Torrance, Housing First Support Officer (A2Dominion) left the meeting and did not return.

25. Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment

Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager introduced the report, which set out a brief history in relation to the Housing Ombudsman and the Complaint Handling Code, which was strengthened in April 2022. As part of the strengthened Complaint Handling Code, the Council was required to undertake a Self-Assessment. Following the Panel discussion, the Council would be compliant with all mandatory elements of the Code.

In response to questions, the Panel was advised that:

- The Customer Care and Complaints Manager post had not yet been recruited to; the job advert was expected to be published within the next month. The intention was that this post would assist with identifying emergent themes and learning points from complaints.
- In relation to the two mandatory elements which were not yet complied with as per the report, the Housing Annual Report 2022/23 had been published earlier in the week and as such that criteria had now been complied with; the remaining criteria would be complied with as a result of the Panel considering the report and would be updated to reflect that after the meeting.
- A number of the criteria did not apply to the Council, as it did not have a three stage complaints process.

The Panel requested that the Scrutiny Officer forward the list of minor typos or inconsistencies which had been identified in the Self-Assessment to the Landlord Services Manager for implementation into the final document; this included a response being added for criteria 4.16, where the response appeared to be missing.

The Panel noted the contents of the report; no recommendations were agreed.

26. Dates of future meetings

The Panel noted the dates and times of future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.01 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 5 December 2023

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

*Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal
decision notice is issued*

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.