

## MINUTES

### HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

6 DECEMBER 2022

**Present:**

**Members:**

**Councillors:** Imarni (Chairman)  
Pringle  
Johnson  
Dhyani  
C Wyatt-Lowe

**Councillors:**

**Officers:** Natasha Beresford Assistant Director - Strategic Housing  
Fiona Jump Head of Financial Services (Deputy S151)  
Oliver Jackson Head of Housing Management  
Jon Maxwell Assistant Director Housing Operations  
Joe Guitton Team Leader Community Safety &  
Children's Services  
David Barrett Head of Development  
Kayley Johnston Corporate & Democratic Support Officer  
(minutes)

**Also Attendance:**

Councillor Griffiths Portfolio Holder – Housing  
Councillor Banks Portfolio Holder - Communities

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

**57** **MINUTES**

The minutes from 2 November 2022 were agreed by the committee and signed by the Chair.

**58** **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllr Adeleke, Cllr Barry-Mears.  
It was noted that Cllr Hollinghurst and Cllr Suqlain Mahmood were at the Finance and Resources meeting, and that Cllr Harden was chairing another meeting.

**59** **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**60**                    **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

**61**                    **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

None

**62**                    **JOINT BUDGET REPORT**

NBeresford presented the report, noting that the Housing Service operates under the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account. The Housing Transformation Improvement Programme ("HTIP") has identified a number of areas that are required to build capacity in 2023-24, including an end-to-end process review of sustainment activity across residents in temporary accommodation, supported housing and the alternative portfolio. The team will be working with Finance to refine the service charge position. Throughout the transformation, there has also been close work with Digital and ICT to identify the infrastructure needed to support the new customer centric approach. There is a full review of the new target operating model for the Housing Service, and there is also a strong focus on commissioning and contracting.

There is a removal of £75k to the General Fund Strategic Housing budget, which relates to cessation of fixed term contracts in the service that are no longer required. On growth items in the HRA, there is £260k of growth that has been identified through HTIP, specifically £86k for a tenancy sustainment officer and a triage officer, £150k for 2 FTE tenancy management officers and a lead officer focusing on implementing improved management arrangements across stock and ensuring an end-to-end review of how residents are supported. For the £37k for building safety, there will be a focus on improving the asset management function and service to the tenant and leaseholder portfolio. Asbestos management is currently managed externally and the £168k is proposed to bring this in-house and align compliance with other areas of compliance across the stock. The Compliance team will be rebranded in line with this as the Safer Homes Team.

On HRA rents, the proposal is to increase rents by 7% in line with the maximum allowed and this has been benchmarked against other local authorities. The average dwelling rent is proposed to be £118.62 per week in 2023-24.

There are a number of forthcoming challenges across the service and a list of these areas was noted. It was noted that recent communication was issued to all local authorities nationally from the Secretary of State and the regulator for social housing in regard to housing standards, particularly regarding the impact of damp and mould

on health conditions. There will be significant scrutiny on housing services in relation to this area and the service is confident about its current position about how stock is managed and is currently preparing a response to the communication with robust case studies. An initial response was also sent outlining the service's current position.

Asylum dispersal is being experienced by local authorities, and as of 2023, all local authority areas will become nationwide disposal areas. Whilst the review of tenancy sustainment is underway, the potential impact of this dispersal on resources needs to be considered to ensure that they can respond appropriately.

The approach to reviewing void performance and ensuring a positive outcome for residents may see further changes in relation to income and forthcoming costs. Given the rising cost of living, NBeresford advised that they are working with colleagues and partners to ensure they can alleviate any pressures for residents in relation to rising costs, which may impact their approach to income collection.

On aids and adaptations, this is an increasingly challenging area with an increase in existing and new tenants presenting with complex needs and multiple disadvantages, which is resulting in an increased spend. Budgets to date have been exceeded and the approach to aids and adaptations will therefore need to be reviewed, such as how to repair ongoing stock and meet these needs through new builds.

Decarbonisation and stock condition work will also be considered to ensure the service is meeting growing demands, and the modelling implemented in the HRA business plan reflects current market conditions and other external pressures, including inflation.

Cllr Pringle commented on damp and mould and asked if there would be any public education around this. NBeresford confirmed that information was recently circulated to all members via member news to raise awareness for residents on damp and mould. This information is also provided at sign up for new tenancies with advice on how to manage damp, mould and condensation. The portfolio also has a newsletter that goes out to private sector landlords and the website has also been updated on the subject with useful information on how to manage the situation. The information is also being disseminated to all housing staff and additional training is being provided to ensure staff can identify instances that require additional attention. The team is also working to identify a communication plan to provide further information to residents and contact DBC if they have any concerns. Registered providers have also been contacted to ensure they are being proactive and are taking the same steps. NBeresford asked members to inform them if they feel there is any other information that residents require.

Cllr Pringle stated that not all residents will be able to purchase mould cleaner and asked if they can be provided resources to use themselves. NBeresford confirmed

that there currently isn't the budget to support this, though there are other ways to wash down mould without using specialist cleaners. In serious damp and mould situations, officers can respond quickly to undertake a visit with representatives of the property teams to identify the situation, and toxic mould washing can be undertaken by the service if required. There may also be requirements to provide dehumidifiers or additional vents in a property. It was advised that residents with concerns and financial difficulties should contact the team to provide the appropriate advice and support.

Cllr Pringle noted that some residents may be vulnerable or have young children and asked if the team can reach out to them as they may be unable to contact the team themselves. NBeresford agreed that they need to consider the diverse ways that they can engage with residents and be mindful of these factors, and through their engagement with stakeholders, they are ensuring they are able to identify issues. It was confirmed that this will be considered when developing the communications plan and all communication will be shared with members.

The Chair commented on the damp roadshow that Dacorum used to run and asked if residents are receiving education on how to prevent damp and mould. NBeresford confirmed that they are not currently doing the roadshow, though the information is provided in sign-up packs. It was noted that overcrowding and pets can also cause damp or mould. OJackson commented that they are looking to take a more proactive approach, such as through tenancy review visits to assess household needs, and they have also started carrying out state inspections to help check for issues that may be occurring within the property. Roles and responsibilities are also covered in the training for housing applicants, including what to look out for, and the Tenancy Sustainment team are also focusing on younger tenants who may be taking on a tenancy for a first time and may require additional support.

Cllr Dhyani noted that council tax increased by 2.9% and asked if there is any consideration of creating another tax band for higher end properties to gain greater revenue. FJump advised that the council tax banding system is set by central government and that they are unable to change these. Cllr Dhyani asked if there would be a possibility to propose this to central government. FJump agreed that local authorities can put it forward and that they can look to have this idea taken forward, though it would be the decision of central government to implement.

Cllr Pringle commented on inflationary pressures and noted that families spending all their disposable income on essentials will be affected more than those with spare income and that this was not helped by unprogressive tax bands, adding that it would be useful to see percentage contributions to council services. FJump stated that the flaws in the system are well acknowledged, noting that they do provide information on where council tax money is spent alongside bills. FJump agreed that whilst it would be helpful to see the percentage of outgoings spent on council tax, she was unsure how this could be captured. FJump agreed to look into this further.

NBeresford added that they are working with partners to provide additional support to residents as a result of the cost of living and agreed to liaise with FJump on this.

**ACTION: FJump to look into how to present percentage of personal spending on council tax.**

**ACTION: Councillor Griffith to as Member Support to send out the link for the 'Support Website'.**

**63                    ACTION POINTS**

The action points were agreed and those that are green can be removed.

**64                    WORK PROGRAMME**

The work programme was agreed.

N Beresford informed the committee of members briefing on 19<sup>th</sup> Jan. The asset Management date is still pending.

2 New Domestic Abuse policies coming in January, also a Revised policy on Decants (FEB OSC) and Tenants policy (date TBC)

The Meeting ended at 9.05 pm