

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 27 January 2021

Present: Councillor A Brame (Vice-Chair in the Chair)

Councillors J Bird I Lewis
G Davies J Robinson
P Hayes M Sullivan
J Johnson S Whittingham
A Jones

Apologies Councillor J McManus

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed Members of the Housing Committee, Officers and viewing members of the public to the online meeting.

2 APOLOGIES

The Chair announced that apologies had been received by Councillor Julie McManus, and Councillor Adrian Jones was deputising for her.

3 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Committee were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests, in connection with any item on the agenda, and to state the nature of the interest.

No such declarations were made.

4 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the Housing Committee held on 27 January 2021 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

5 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

The Chair reported that no questions or statements from members of the public had been submitted.

6 **PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING AND REGENERATION ASSISTANCE POLICY**

Lisa Newman, Head of Operational Housing Services, introduced a report which briefed Members on the proposed revisions to the Council's Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy.

Members commented on the report and thanked Lisa Newman and her team for the work they have done.

Resolved – The Housing Committee considered and agreed the proposed changes to the Private Sector Housing and Regeneration Assistance Policy, with immediate effect.

7 **BUDGET CONSULTATION**

Alan Evans, Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report of the Director of Resources and outlined that the report formed part of the Council's formal budget setting process and gave the Housing Committee opportunity to comment on the proposal that falls within its remit, this would enable those comments to be presented for consideration by policy and Resources Committee at its meeting in February 2021.

The report included a savings proposal to Cease support for Community Alarms with a potential saving of £500,000.

The Chair commented that further information had been requested regarding this budget proposal at the workshop on 26 November 2020.

The Director of Regeneration and Place stated that further information had been sought from service providers who were given questionnaires at the same time the public consultation began. He stated it had been hard to get a full response due to staffing issues associated with Covid-19. He also clarified that while this saving was being considered for the Housing Service, Adult Social Care was looking into digital devices that would perform a similar function at a much lower cost.

Members stated that without further information on the impact that this budget proposal might have on those that currently benefit from it, it was not possible to make informed comments at this meeting.

Members expressed concerns on the effect it would have on vulnerable people.

Lisa Newman, Head of Operational Housing Services clarified that the budget proposal wouldn't remove the ability of residents to have a community alarm; but it would remove the council's contribution to their funding. The service

would still be available with responsibility for full payment going to the provider or the resident.

The Director of Regeneration and Housing stated that further information from service providers would be received shortly and would be fed back to Committee Members for comment.

Resolved - That Housing Committee notes the report and would like to communicate all concerns raised with the Policy and Resources Committee, and; if information is forthcoming within the relevant timeframe, a workshop be arranged of this committee in the interim.

8 HOMELESSNESS IN WIRRAL AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Sheila Jacobs, Supported Housing and Homelessness Senior Manager, introduced a report that gave the committee an overview of homelessness within the borough, and the measures in place to prevent and respond to it. The report described the significant impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the Council's housing team and its commissioned services that respond to homelessness and sets out proposed actions to respond moving forward. Members thanked Sheila for the report and endorsed the work her team are doing.

Following further discussion of the work being carried out by the Homelessness Team, it was then moved by Councillor Jo Bird and seconded by Councillor Michael Sullivan, that:

'In addition to recommendations on homelessness, Wirral Council Housing Committee notes that the [most common cause](#) of homelessness is being evicted at the end of a private rented tenancy contract.

We urge the government to:

- Extend its ban on eviction orders until all regions are in Tier One
- Uphold their promise to end the use of Section 21 'no-fault' eviction orders
- Provide financial support for private renters
- Provide sustainable funding for the successful Housing First programme.

We would like to thank all housing officers on the Wirral for their particularly excellent work during this pandemic. We note that it was possible to get Everyone In during the pandemic.'

The motion was agreed unanimously.

Resolved – That Housing Committee:

1. Note the content of the report and the excellent work undertaken on partnership between the Council, local communities, voluntary and charitable agencies and Housing Providers that have responded to homelessness throughout the pandemic.
2. Endorse the Wirral Triage Assessment process and the Next Steps Programme to provide longer-term response to the pressures arising from covid.
3. Wirral Council Housing Committee notes that the [most common cause](#) of homelessness is being evicted at the end of a private rented tenancy contract.

We urge the government to:

- Extend its ban on eviction orders until all regions are in Tier One
- Uphold their promise to end the use of Section 21 ‘no-fault’ eviction orders
- Provide financial support for private renters
- Provide sustainable funding for the successful Housing First programme.

We would like to thank all housing officers on the Wirral for their particularly excellent work during this pandemic. We note that it was possible to get Everyone In during the pandemic

9 EMPTY PROPERTY UPDATE REPORT

Emma Foley, Strategic Housing Services Senior Manager, introduced a report which updated Members on the implications and negative effects on housing markets that high levels of empty properties can have and the work the Housing Standards Team have done to get empty homes back into use.

The Chair and other Members thanked Emma for her teams’ work on bringing empty properties back into use.

Resolved – That Housing Committee

- a) note the content of the report and;
- b) approved the approach to interventions in this report to continue to tackle private sector empty homes in the Borough

10 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Members gave consideration to a report of the Director Regeneration and Place that set out the proposed Housing Committee Work Programme 2020/21 as detailed in the appendix to the report.

The report advised that the Housing Committee, in co-operation with the other Policy and Service Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which were within the remit of the Committee.

The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year.

Resolved – That the Housing Committee Work Programme for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year be noted.