

MINUTE of MEETING of the HOUSING SERVICES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL held within COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEST LoTHIAN CIVIC CENTRE, LIVINGSTON, on 26 JANUARY 2023.

Present – Councillors George Paul (Chair), Andrew McGuire, Alison Adamson, Robert De Bold, Jim Dickson, Cathy Muldoon and Tony Pearson

Apologies – Jessie Duncan (Tenant's Panel) and Donald Stavert (Joint Forum of West Lothian Community Councils)

In attendance

Julie Whitelaw - Lead Officer, Interim Head of Housing, Customer & Building Services, West Lothian Council

Graeme Struthers - Depute Chief Executive, West Lothian Council

Marjory Mackie - Housing Strategy Manager, West Lothian Council

Sarah Kelly - Customer Service Manager (Housing Needs), West Lothian Council

Pamela Bell - Senior Service Accountant, West Lothian Council

Grant Taylor - Building Services Manager, West Lothian Council

Pat Tedford – Unite

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. MINUTES

The panel confirmed the Minutes of its meeting held on 15 November 2022 as a correct record. The Minute was thereafter signed by the Chair.

3. HOMELESSNESS UPDATE

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services providing an update on the current challenges faced by the council in meeting its statutory homeless function, the subsequent impacts on the availability of emergency and temporary accommodation and the areas of budget pressure in the Housing Need service.

The largest increase in reasons for applications, noted in D2 of the report, was highlighted and a breakdown was requested, in particular, to attribute the figures to the following; the cost of living crisis, mortgage interest rate increases and/or landlord portfolio reduction. Officers advised the information would be obtained and circulated to members on completion.

It was recommended that the panel note:

1. the progress to date in preventing homelessness, the current challenges faced in meeting the council's statutory homeless function and the delivery of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan; and

2. the current improvement actions and suggestions for transformative change to further shift the balance to embed the prevention approach which the RRTP had delivered to date for the remainder of the 5-year plan.

#### Decision

1. To note the contents of the report; and
2. To request that members were provided with a breakdown of the homelessness data provided in section D2 to detail whether applications were attributed to; the cost of living crisis, mortgage interest rate increases and/or landlord portfolio reduction.

#### 4. 2022/23 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE - MONTH 6 MONITORING REPORT

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Finance and Property Services providing an update on the financial performance of the Housing Services portfolio for the General Fund revenue budget.

It was recommended that the panel note:

1. the financial performance of the Housing Services portfolio as at month 6;
2. that the Housing Services portfolio position at month 6 was part of the overall council budget position reported to Council Executive on 15 November 2022; and
3. the actions to be taken by Heads of Service and budget holders to manage spend within available resources.

#### Decision

To note the contents of the report.

#### 5. DAMPNESS, VENTILATION AND AIR QUALITY IN COUNCIL HOUSING - REPORT

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services advising of the council procedures in relation to the applicable legislation regarding dampness, ventilation and air quality in council housing.

Discussion took place concerning the environmental sensors, which measured temperature, humidity and CO2 emissions and their installation in a pilot of 100 properties. Officers advised that the outcome of this pilot could be included in a future report to the panel on dampness, ventilation and air quality in council housing.

It was recommended that the panel note and consider:

1. the Scottish Housing Quality Standards (SHQS) included a number of criteria in relation to dampness and ventilation;
2. the council had a proactive approach in responding to tenant enquiries or requests for inspections regarding dampness or condensation;
3. the council had an ongoing stock condition survey programme, and initial findings did not indicate a systemic issue with dampness within any particular type of house,
4. and note the key findings from the Coroner's report into the death of Awaab Ishakand; and
5. the future housing capital investment programme would include air quality and ventilation measures along with other energy efficiency measures.

#### Decision

1. To note the contents of the report; and
2. To note it was intended to provide further reports to the panel on this subject in which the findings of the environmental sensor pilot could be included.

#### 6. QUICK BUILD TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Interim Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services providing an update on concepts and funding regarding quick build solutions, including the use of cabins and containers to assist with the homeless situation and as an alternative to B&B/Hotel accommodation.

Following discussion, a short-life working group was suggested to address this subject which would comprise both councillors and officers. It was the intention that a proposal would be submitted to Council Executive for approval.

It was recommended that the panel note the:

1. council's proactive approach to reducing homelessness;
2. current temporary accommodation provision;
3. position on funding of temporary accommodation;
4. key findings of a review of quick build concepts and the work being undertaken to reduce the use of B&B/Hotel accommodation; and

5. next steps.

Decision

1. To note the contents of the report; and.
2. To note the panel suggestion that a short life working group was proposed to the Council Executive to address this subject.

7. RENT CONSULTATION 2023/24 TO 2027/28

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Housing, Customer and Building Services providing the outcome of the rent consultation conducted with West Lothian Council tenants from 27 October 2022 to 12 December 2022.

It was recommended that the panel note the outcome of the rent consultation.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2023/24 TO 2027/28 AND RENT LEVEL 2023/24

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Depute Chief Executive advising of the updated Housing Revenue Account (HRA) financial plan for 2023/24 to 2027/28, as well as the proposed HRA budget, rent and service charges for 2023/24.

It was recommended that the panel note the proposed:

1. 3.5% per annum rent strategy and financial plan for 2023/24 to 2027/28, which would fund service needs and a five year housing capital investment programme;
2. rent increase of 3.5% for 2023/24 and the associated HRA budgets for 2023/24, as set out in the report; and
3. 3.5% rent strategy for Sheltered Housing and Homelessness properties, as well as related service and support charges, for 2023/24.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

9. HOUSING CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2023/24 TO 2027/28

The panel considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Depute Chief Executive advising of the proposed Housing Capital Investment Programme for 2023/24 to 2027/28 and the proposed exemption for works under the terms of the Best Value Framework.

It was recommended that the panel note the proposed 2023/24 to 2027/28 Housing Capital Investment Programme and related funding as detailed in the report.

Decision

To note the contents of the report.

10. WORKPLAN

A copy of the workplan had been circulated for information.

Decision

To note the workplan.