

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

15th March 2023

Present: Councillor Jabbar Riaz in the Chair

Councillors Ali, Cleary (Vice-Chair),
Desayrah, Ditta, S. Hodgson, Lamb, Lewing,
Mackay, Piotrowski and Stanley

Officers: Ismene Broad, Private Sector Team
Manager
Lloyd Griffiths, Corporate Director –
Operations, Homes and Communities
Emma Jordan, Housing Welfare and Options
Team Manager
Tom Mountford, Head of Homes and
Communities

47 Appointment of Substitutes

Councillor Lewing for Councillor Laurenson, Councillor Stanley for Councillor Mrs Lucy Hodgson.

48 Declarations of Interest

None.

49 Public Participation

Mr Frances Lankester spoke regarding the Proposed Additional HMO Licensing Scheme and the Housing Enabling Strategy (Items 53 and 55). He made reference in particular to anti-social behaviour and the practicality of delivering the Scheme without a plan to tackle it and a means of assessing how effective measures put in place are. With regard to the Strategy, he made reference to the loss of experienced staff and the proposal to make a new appointment for a two year period. He was concerned that the postholder will be starting from scratch, too much will be expected of one person and the skills, knowledge and expertise of existing staff and Members should be used if the Council is to maximise opportunities to deliver more affordable housing.

The Chair thanked Mr Lankester for his comments. He explained that the Council does not currently possess the specialist knowledge required. The Existing staff will be able to share knowledge, grow and upskill. He will raise the points raised with the relevant Officers.

50 Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th January 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

51 Proposed Committee Performance Scorecard for 2023/24

The Committee considered the proposed content of the Policy and Resources Performance Scorecard for 2023/24.

The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities presented the report and highlighted the main points, including details of 2022/23 scorecard content which will be removed and new projects and activities to be included for 2023/24.

Officers responded to questions from Committee Members. Members were advised that Officers will look to provide some commentary and information on the following aspects in quarterly performance reports:

- A glossary to explain what various numbers represent.
- Commentary on the reasons why households are on the housing waiting list.
- Whether children in temporary accommodation have had to move school.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree the proposed content of the Communities Performance Scorecard for 2023/24.

52 Homes for Ukraine Scheme - Update Report

The Committee received an update on activity in support of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, which was launched by the Government in March 2022 to allow people to sponsor Ukrainian households to live in the UK. The Head of Homes and Communities presented the report and summarised the main points, including the number of guests in Worcester, support, guidance, help and advice given to guests and next steps. It was highlighted that access to accommodation is a significant pressure. The Council had received over £1m in grants through the Local Authority Housing Fund, which is sufficient to provide 11 units of affordable accommodation.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:

- 1. note the contents of this report and in particular the ongoing support and activity being delivered via the Homes for Ukraine Scheme;**
- 2. approve receipt of the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) grant of £1,110,282 to provide 11 units of affordable accommodation to households requiring accommodation through Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS), Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP), Ukraine Family Scheme, the Homes for Ukraine and the Ukraine Extension Scheme (collectively referred to as Ukraine schemes); and**
- 3. delegate authority to the Corporate Director (Operations, Homes & Communities) in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Communities Committee, to conclude contractual and grant agreement arrangements with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.**

53 Proposal to Designate an Additional Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Scheme

The Committee considered a report on the approval of an Additional Licensing Scheme for the 10 Wards that are not covered by the current Scheme.

The Private Sector Team Manager presented the report and explained the work that has been undertaken to progress the Motion to extend the Scheme which was approved at the Council meeting on 29th November 2022. The report set out the outcome of the public consultation and evidence review.

The findings from the consultation exercise confirmed that the majority of respondents supported the implementation of extending the Scheme. The report recommended the designation of a new Additional HMO Licensing Scheme for all the remaining Wards, to run from 1st September 2023 to 31st August 2025. This approach would be less disruptive to landlords currently licensed. The additional Scheme will be reviewed alongside the current Scheme in 2024 with the option to re-declare in 2025, should the evidence and consultation support this.

Officers responded to questions and comments from Committee Members on detailed aspects of the scheme. Officers advised that the Council will work with landlords to ensure good quality compliant private sector accommodation is being provided.

Members concluded that a two year scheme would be less disruptive to landlords currently licenced.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:

- 1. note the contents of the report and in particular the findings of the recent Additional HMO Licensing Scheme consultation exercise at Appendix 1, and the supporting designation report at Appendix 2; and**
- 2. approve designation of a 2 Year Additional HMO Licensing Scheme covering the 10 Council Wards as specified at Section 6 of this report, that will take effect from 1st September 2023.**

54 Private Sector Housing - Update Report

The Committee considered a report on ongoing work being undertaken to improve standards within the private rented sector. The Private Sector Team Manager presented the report and summarised the main points. The report included a full update on the action plan presented to the Committee in November 2022.

Appended to the report were the Council's response to the Government, setting out how Worcester City is intending to prioritise addressing the issues of mould and damp for privately rented properties in the City including the required statistical return; the amended property standards investigation procedure, updated and strengthened to assist Officers with an appropriate enforcement procedure; and the strategy document and updated action plan.

Officers responded to questions and comments from Committee Members on detailed aspects of the scheme. With regard to Energy Efficiency Standards, Members were advised that more information about F&G rated properties and a list of exemptions can be provided in writing.

Members supported the recommendation that the current strategy and action plan should be updated and extended until 2025, to coincide with the undertaking of a stock condition survey in 2023/24.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:

- 1. note the contents of this report and in particular the ongoing work being undertaken to improve standards within the private rented sector outlined at Appendix 1;**
- 2. note the submission provided by this Council to Government (January 2023) following a request for information in respect of prioritisation of damp and mould enforcement, attached at Appendix 2;**
- 3. note the review undertaken and the amendments made to the 'Housing Standards Complaints Process' attached at Appendix 3;**
- 4. approve a 2-year extension of the Private Sector Housing Strategy and Action Plan, to end in March 2025, attached at Appendix 4;**
- 5. approve the procurement of a contract for the carrying out of a 'Worcestershire' stock condition survey during 2023/24, with Worcester City Council acting as Lead Authority on behalf Worcestershire District Councils, with a total contract value of £180,000;**
- 6. approve funding of £34,000 to be taken from identified housing reserves as Worcester City Council's contribution towards the 'Worcestershire' stock condition survey; and**
- 7. delegate authority to the Corporate Director (Operations, Homes & Communities) in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of Communities Committee to award a contract to the successful tenderer on behalf of Worcester City Council.**

55 Worcester City Housing Enabling Strategy 2023-2026

The Committee considered a report on the adoption of a Housing Enabling Strategy. The Head of Homes and Communities presented the report and summarised the work undertaken since October 2022, when Ark consultancy were further engaged to work with Officers to develop the Strategy and Delivery Plan.

To deliver the Strategic Goals of the Strategy, it was considered necessary to invest in a new dedicated and specialist resource to increase the capacity and expertise of the Strategic Housing Service. Therefore, it was proposed to utilise £150,000 from Reserves to recruit a new post of Principal Strategic Housing & Enabling Officer with significant experience and knowledge of housing enabling. It was clarified that it is proposed to utilise the Affordable Housing Reserve and Vulnerable Tenants' Reserve.

The Corporate Director – Operations, Homes and Communities commented on an additional paper which had been circulated to Committee Members, setting out the anticipated number of affordable housing completions in Worcester in 2022/23 as well as the forecast for 2023/24 and 2024/25. The paper also summarised affordable housing units for the City of Worcester within Wychavon and Malvern Hills Districts on urban extension sites and forecasts for development to 2024/25.

Members expressed support for adoption of the Strategy, which will give the Council further opportunity to affect the development of affordable house building in Worcester City.

RESOLVED: That the Committee agree to:

- 1. approve the adoption of the Worcester City Housing Enabling Strategy and Delivery Plan 2023-2026, attached at Appendix 1; and**
- 2. recommend to Policy and Resources Committee, the approval of £150,000 from the Affordable Housing Reserve and Vulnerable Tenants' Reserve to recruit a Principal Strategic Housing & Enabling Officer to a 2-year fixed term post.**

56 Review of the Worcester City Council Housing Allocation Scheme - Housing for You

The Committee considered a report on a review of the Housing allocation Scheme which had been undertaken by Officers. The Housing Welfare and Options Team Manager presented the report and summarised the main findings. Four areas for improvement had been identified and an action plan had been prepared to address these aspects.

In conclusion, the review had identified that, whilst the current allocation policy and banding structure prioritised those with the highest need for rehousing, those households with a recognisable need for rehousing but not in the most urgent band were unlikely to be rehoused in the City, with the exception of sheltered housing. It was therefore recommended that no changes are made to the allocations policy or banding structure at this time, but that a further review is undertaken in 12 months' time to consider whether a recommendation for proposed changes is required and brought to this Committee for consideration.

In the ensuing discussion, the Council's Armed Forces Champion, Councillor Agar, was permitted to speak. She offered her support in reviewing the policy to ensure that it is compliant with the provisions of the Armed Forces Act 2021.

Committee Members supported the proposed actions with a further review in 12 months' time.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note:

- 1. the contents of this report and in particular the 4 areas for improvement that have been identified following a review of the Housing Allocation Scheme;**
- 2. the action plan attached at Appendix 1, that seeks to address the 4 identified areas for improvement outlined at Section 7 of the report; and**
- 3. that a further review of the scheme will be undertaken within 12 months and reported to this Committee in June 2024.**

57 Any Other Business

None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00p.m. – 9.06p.m.

Chair at the meeting on
7th June 2023