

MINUTES OF MEETING OF THE HOUSING SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2020 AT 6.30 P.M. VIA VIDEO LINK.

ACTION

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| Present: | Ms D. Smith Mr J. Calderwood Mrs K. Tennant Cllr M. McNair Mrs. G. Daily | Elected Member (Chairperson) Elected Member Elected Member Co-Opted Member Casual Vacancy |
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Quorum required: 4 members (excluding co-opted)
Quorum achieved: Yes

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| In Attendance: | Mr J. Farrell Mr J. Devlin | Head of Housing Services Acting Housing Services Manager |
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1. **Apologies**
Apologies were received from Ms L. Breeze and Mr J O'Donnell.
2. **Chairperson's Remarks**
There were no remarks from the Chairperson.
3. **Declaration of interest**
There was no business carried forward.
4. **Business Carried Over from last meeting**
There was no correspondence.
5. **Correspondence**
There were no declarations of interest made.
6. **Q1 2020/21 Void & Lettings Report**

Prior to commencing the report, the Head of Housing Services gave a brief overview of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown on the Housing Service and performance during quarter 1. The main impact has been on letting times, void loss and rent arrears management. It was highlighted that where applicable, details of the Covid impact on performance or service were included in reports.

The Head of Housing Services and the Housing Services Manager ran over the report circulated prior to the meeting, with the following points raised or noted:

 - The Head of Housing Services highlighted the significant increase in letting times and void loss, which was as a direct result of no lettings being possible due to the pandemic lockdown in the month of April and very limited lettings during May and June. The position has however improved as lockdown measures have eased. The Quarter 2 report, which will be presented in October, should demonstrate this.

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| <u>ACTION</u> | |
| JF | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A discussion took place about the possibility of days being excluded for the ARC return where the pandemic lockdown was responsible for longer void and letting times. Although there has been no guidance on this from the Scottish Government or Scottish Housing Regulator on this, it was agreed that a report be compiled for the Sub-Committee to highlight the number of days that this may be and that contact be made with the Regulator to ask the question. The report will be presented before the end of the calendar year.• A discussion took place regarding the measures that had been put in place to help combat the situation. It was specifically asked whether virtual viewings had been put in place. It was confirmed that these were introduced in May and that they had worked really well. It was highlighted that CHA had been one of the first organisations to use this method and that it had been complimented by contactless sign ups and a greater use of digital means to provide allocations and lettings information. <p>No further points were raised or noted.</p> <p>7. Q1 2020/21 Annual Allocations Report</p> <p>The Head of Housing Services covered the report issued prior to the meeting, with the following points raised or noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It was asked whether or not we were able to carry out home visits following the Scottish Governments latest Corona Virus measures. It was confirmed that only social gatherings within households were banned and that our contractors and staff were still able to visit tenants. All staff and contractors have appropriate PPE and strict procedures in place to allow this to happen safely.• It was noted that new tenant visit performance was notably down on the previous year at 50% (down from 96%). It was confirmed that the Pandemic lockdown had again inhibited our performance in this area, however the statistic related to 5 out of 10 possible visits and there is plenty of scope to regain the lost performance in the coming months. Use of telephone and virtual visits had been used where possible, with staff now carrying out the missed visits. <p>No further questions or points were raised.</p> <p>8. Q1 2020/21 Anti-social Behaviour & Estate Management Report</p> <p>The Head of Housing Services ran through the report issued prior to the meeting, with the following points raised or noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It was noted that a total of 9 antisocial behaviour complaints were received during the first quarter, with 3 of these in the serious category. As well as these complaints a large number of informal telephone contacts have been received during the lockdown period |

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| <u>ACTION</u> | <p>where staff offered advice and assistance. These types of contact have reduced as lockdown has eased and were symptomatic of tenants living in continuous close proximity for long periods of time because of lockdown. It was confirmed that no formal recording of these types of calls had taken place as they did constitute antisocial behaviour by definition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Our Estate caretaker is in the process of completing all internal close inspections. During lockdown, no enforcement of close cleaning was possible due to required social distancing measures. A lot of follow up work will be required by the Housing Management section where closes have not been cleaned and tenants are failing to carry out this duty. Any issues in this regard will be noted in future reports. <p>No further questions or points were raised.</p> <p>9. Q1 2020/21 Arrears Management Report</p> <p>The Head of Housing Services ran over the report issued prior to the meeting, with the following points noted or raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion took place regarding the difficulties being experienced with tenants not able or willing to pay during the pandemic. It was highlighted that gross arrears had risen 0.38% since the start of the year (c.£17k) and that a majority of the increase was down to tenants not willing to pay as opposed to unable to pay. The measures which have been put in place to address arrears rising were noted.• Further discussion took place on furloughed workers where it was confirmed that we would still expect tenants to make some payment towards their rent account if furlough applied. It was advised that we did not have a statistic for how many people in arrears were furloughed, although on contact staff will have noted this in the computer system notes. It was agreed that staff would begin recording this and statistics would be included in future reports.• The Universal credit figures were discussed and it was noted that the number of cases as detailed in the report had increased rapidly during the first quarter. Tackling Universal credit increases is a priority and the increased staffing in the section should help deal with this going forward.• It was highlighted that the report for quarter 2, which will be presented next month will give a clearer picture as to whether our additional measures are working or not.• It was highlighted that the Scottish Government's Corona Virus Act had removed our ability to use Notice of Proceedings (NOP's) and take timely court action as it now took 6 months for a notice to become live, versus the one month pre act. We have however recommenced serving NOP's as at the end of August and court actions can now be instructed again/recalled if necessary. |
| JF | |

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The remainder of the report was noted with no further questions asked. The policy was unanimously approved.

10. Q1 2020/21 Universal Credit Report

The Head of Housing Services ran over the report issued prior to the meeting, with the following points noted or raised:

- It was noted that the UC figures in the report had already been discussed during the arrears management report.
- Discussion took place regarding the removal of the Government's furlough scheme and how this could impact rent arrears and Universal Credit. It was agreed that this could have significant impact on arrears and UC as more people would claim benefit. It was highlighted that the extra staffing resources in place were designed to enable CHA to cope with such a scenario, but that this would be closely monitored going forward through monthly arrears analysis, which is already in place.
- It was highlighted that our estimate of an additional c.£50k as budgeted for under bad debt provision was under threat if arrears continued to rise at their current rate. The predicted figure is currently c.£48k, however it was highlighted that this was a worst case scenario should the increase not level out and almost no action be taken. Again, the additional staffing resources in place are designed to combat this.
- It was asked whether we had the ability to identify tenants with disabilities who may require greater help during these times. During discussion, it was confirmed that our IT systems allow this identification and further more support issues are gone over as part of every rent arrears interview.
- A discussion took place regarding managed payments from the DWP and our ability to increase these. It was confirmed that in all cases, managed payments were being applied for where possible, but we were at the mercy of the DWP's timescales and the impact of the Pandemic on their service. It was noted that more managed payments are starting to come through.

The remainder of the report was noted with no further questions asked.

11. Antisocial Behaviour Policy Review

The Head of Housing Services ran over the policy issued prior to the meeting, with the following points noted or raised:

- It was noted that although no major changes in legislation had occurred, a thorough review of the policy had taken place. The revised policy provided a greater detail of what CHA does during a complaint as well as providing more detailed timescales for the benefit of both staff and customers.

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| <u>ACTION</u> | |
| JF | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Following discussion about how it is not always possible to resolve complaints, it was agreed to amend the wording on page 9 of the policy at the heading 'Complaint Investigation Protocol' to 'Complaint Investigation Protocol Aims'. This was to ensure that the wrong message was not being given to customers as it would not always be possible to meet all the points. <p>The Policy was unanimously approved.</p> <p>12. CIRC Annual Report 2019/20 (For information only)</p> <p>The contents of this for information only report were noted with no questions asked or points raised.</p> <p>13. Section 5 Agreement Revision and WDC Homeless Support Statement</p> <p>The Head of Housing Services ran over the reports issued prior to the meeting, with the following points noted or raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">It was highlighted that the Section 5 agreement and associated Homeless support statement were tools to enable us to assist the Council in alleviating homelessness through letting part of our available housing stock to homeless persons.Discussion took place on the proposed letting percentages, i.e. 48% of all lets in year one and 46% in year two. It was agreed that unless any future legislation dictates, we should not commit anything over 50% of lets in future years in order to ensure that our own waiting list receives a fair number of offers.It was unanimously agreed that we adopt the new agreement and authorisation was given to the Head of Housing Services to confirm this to the Council and sign and send off both the agreement and support statement. <p>14. Tenancy Sustainment Policy Review</p> <p>The Head of Housing Services ran over the policy issued prior to the meeting, with the following points noted or raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">It was noted that this was a minor policy review with only one change to the version approved in March 2020.It was confirmed that the change related to the inclusion of tenants who have CHA Power accounts but have their supply cut off or are at risk of being cut off. <p>The changes were noted and the policy was unanimously approved.</p> |

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| <p>JD</p> <p>JD</p> | <p>[REDACTED]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First time central heating at Dumbarton Road – discussion took place in line with the report. Following question, it was clarified by [REDACTED] that the district heating system will be operational shortly. It was agreed that we pursue the district heating option in view of the fact that gas installations will become obsolete in the coming years. It was also agreed that a new survey of tenants be conducted taking cognisance of up to date information and provision of this to tenants. • CHP service agreement – following discussion and in line with the advice from our consultant, it was agreed that this service agreement be awarded to Veolia. [REDACTED] |
| | <p>The remainder of the report was noted, with no further points raised.</p> <p>16. ARC Statistical Reports</p> <p>The Acting Housing Services Manager ran over the reports circulated prior to the meeting, with all information noted and no questions or points raised.</p> <p>It was highlighted that due to Covid-19 restrictions, works to achieve SHQS and EESSH compliance had been halted. These works will recommence as soon as practically possible.</p> <p>17. Cyclical & Major Repairs Reports</p> <p>The Acting Housing Services Manager ran over the reports circulated prior to the meeting, with the following points raised or noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was noted that the report presented indicated a change in format to the existing reports as previously agreed. This was welcomed by the sub-committee and all agreed that it offered greater clarification and detail than the previous report format. • It was highlighted that due to Covid-19 restrictions, major repair works had been largely affected. This has meant that most programmed works were halted. Works have now recommenced and every effort is being made to ensure that work re-commences or commences during the current financial year. This is subject to any further disruptions as a result of the Government's Pandemic response measures. • It was noted that cyclical works remain on target, with the exception of the gas safety check failures noted in the report caused by the Covis-19 pandemic and associated lockdown. |

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ACTION**18. Training Session – rent arrears**

The Head of Housing Services provided a short training session to the sub-committee on what to look out for in the arrears management report. This included:

- Questioning where arrears have increased and where no information as to why included in the report.
- Explanation of the different types of arrears reported – non technical, technical, former tenant and gross arrears.
- An overview of the arrears details broken down by monthly bracket and how this gives an indication of the movement of arrears from period to period.

19. Agree Next Training Session

A further training topic will be agreed in advance of the next meeting.

20. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 20 October 2021 at 6.30pm.

Meeting closed

APPROVED

PROPOSED

SECONDED

JF 24/09/2020