

Minutes of the meeting of the COMMUNITY AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on THURSDAY 8 SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 19:00 HRS

- Present:** Councillors Balazs (Vice-Chair), Bowyer (via Teams), Exon (substituting for Montague) Ferrans (Chair), Fuller (substituting for Hume), Hearnshaw, M Khan, Long (Vice-Chair), Nazir and Wallis
- Apologies:** Councillors Hume (Councillor Fuller substituting), Montague (Councillor Exon substituting) and K Bradburn
- Officers:** V Collins (Director Adult Services), T Ricketts (Neighbourhood Services Manager), S Gonsalves (Director Customer and Community Services), E Richardson (Overview & Scrutiny Officer)
- Witnesses:** Superintendent M Tarbit (Thames Valley Police Local Area Commander Milton Keynes)
- Also present:** 1 member of the public

CH08 ADJOURNMENT

The Chair opened the meeting and advised that the Council had just received the official announcement of the death of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth. Under these circumstances the Council considered it inappropriate to continue with the meeting. As a mark of respect, the Committee would hold a minute's silence in remembrance of Her Majesty and then the meeting would be adjourned to a later date.

The Chair adjourned the meeting to a future date to be agreed, at 19:05.

The meeting was reconvened at 19:30 hours on 20 September:

- Present:** Councillors Balazs (Vice-Chair), Bowyer, Ferrans (Chair), Hearnshaw, M Khan, Long (Vice-Chair), Montague, Nazir and Wallis
- Apologies:** Councillors Hume and K Bradburn
- Officers:** V Collins (Director Adult Services), T Ricketts (Neighbourhood Services Manager) and E Richardson (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

CH09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In the interests of transparency, Councillor Wallis advised that she was a tenant of Milton Keynes City Council.

CH10 MINUTES

It was noted that on page 4 of the draft minutes (page 8 of the agenda pack), bullet point (e) referred to “100 households in temporary accommodation”. This was a transcription error during the preparation of the minutes and should read “700 households”. The error had been corrected in the set of minutes which had been prepared for the Chair’s signature.

RESOLVED –

That the amended minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2022 be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

CH11 COMMUNITY SAFETY IN MILTON KEYNES

As Superintendent Tarbit was unable to attend the meeting due to ongoing operational duties in the aftermath of the State Funeral of the late Queen, the Committee considered how to proceed with this item. Rather than reconvene this meeting again, the Committee’s Planning Group was tasked with reviewing the remaining Work Programme for 2022/23 to see how it could be fitted in.

RESOLVED –

That as Superintendent Tarbit, Thames Valley Police Area Commander for Milton Keynes, was unable to attend the meeting, due to operational duties associated with the State Funeral of Queen Elizabeth, the item on Community Safety be deferred to a future meeting.

CH12 HOUSING TENANCY POLICY AND HOUSING TENANCY STRATEGY

Witnesses: T Ricketts (Neighbourhood Services Manager) and V Collins (Director Adult Services)

The Council’s Neighbourhood Services Manager introduced the item, explaining that the new Housing Tenancy Policy and Strategy codified what the Council already did to manage its housing tenancies, explained the different types of tenancies and brought procedures up to date. Once approved by Cabinet, which would now be by Delegated Decision rather than at full Cabinet, the documents would be published on the Council’s website and a copy sent to all council tenancy households.

During scrutiny of these documents the Committee noted that:

- a) Although the Council had consulted tenants during the development of the new policy and strategy, there had been very little engagement from tenants in the process;
- b) It was Council policy to maintain secure, long-term tenancies wherever possible in order to provide housing security for its tenants;
- c) The Council did have a small number of fixed-term, flexible tenancies but where possible, the housing team worked with these tenants to move them on to the next stager of longer term, more permanent tenancies;
- d) The Council checked 20% of its stock year on year as it was impossible to check every house every year, to ensure that homes were being properly maintained by tenants. These checks also included tenancy audits to make sure no-one was using the property fraudulently by sub-letting etc;
- e) There was an incentive scheme to encourage tenants to downsize in order to free up family houses, but the Council couldn't force people to move to smaller properties if they were maintaining the tenancy properly and paying their rent. There was a separate budget to facilitate downsizing moves;
- f) Where a tenant did downsize, the type of tenancy they held transferred with them to the new property. This was also the case if a tenancy holder died and a succession tenancy was agreed with the Council, although it might not be in the same property if the housing needs of the remaining tenant(s) had changed;
- g) There was a big gap in Milton Keynes between the level of social rents and affordable rents which was also impacted by whether or not people were in receipt of benefits;
- h) The licensing of temporary accommodation was not covered as the policy and strategy were dealing with the operation of secure tenancies;
- i) Both the policy and strategy would be reviewed at least every 5 years, with the proviso that if the situation changed affecting the content of either the policy or the strategy, then they would be reviewed as and when necessary, even if that was earlier than 5 years.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager went on to explain in more detail how those on fixed term tenancies could progress to secure

council tenancies. It was a good programme with a 90% success rate locally, whereas the average drop-out from similar programmes nationally was as much as 50%.

In discussing the presentation of the two documents, the Committee suggested that clearer introductory comments about their purpose would be helpful and that it would like to see both the policy and strategy tied into the ambitions for social housing set out in the Council Plan.

The Committee then discussed with the housing officers present a number of specific clauses in both the policy and strategy where it considered more clarity was required in order to make the documents more user-friendly and easily understood by tenants. The Chair agreed to liaise directly with the Neighbourhood Services Manager to assist with the updating of the documents with Committee's amendments.

Finally, the Committee confirmed its agreement with the intentions set out in the documents and raised no objections to them being approved by the Cabinet Member for Adults, Housing and Healthy Communities at Delegated Decisions on 27 September 2022 once they had been amended as set out above.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Director of Adult Services and the Neighbourhood Services Manager be thanked for their attendance at the meeting and for their contributions to the Committee's scrutiny of these documents.
2. That the Committee endorses both the Housing Tenancy Policy and Housing Tenancy Strategy prior to approval by the Cabinet Member for Adults, Housing and Healthy Communities at the Delegated Decision Meeting scheduled for 27 September 2022.
3. That both documents are reviewed for clarity of meaning and presentation prior to final publication and distribution to tenants.
4. That the Chair of the Committee works with the Director Adult Services and Neighbourhood Services Manager to improve the clarity and layout of both the Policy and Strategy documents to ensure that they will be properly understood by tenants.

CH13 2022/23 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED –

That the Committee’s Work Programme for the remaining two meetings be noted.

CH14 INFORMATION AND MONITORING ITEMS

RESOLVED –

That the Information and Monitoring Items be received and noted.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 20:33

The documents referred to in these minutes can be found on the Council’s Committee Management Information System (CMIS) at: [CMIS: Community & Housing Scrutiny Committee - 8 September 2022](#)

The recording of this meeting is available to view on the Council’s YouTube Channel at: [MKCC YouTube: Community & Housing Scrutiny Committee - 20 September 2022](#) and will be available to view for 6 months.