

MEMBER COMMITTEE

Meeting: 9 October 2023

At: 2.00 pm

PRESENT

Councillor Mark Roberts (Chair) in the chair; Councillors Asa Caton, Anna Charles-Jones, James Frizzell, Colin MacAlister, John Taylor and Rachel Wise.

1. MINUTES

The minutes (copies of which had been circulated) of the meeting held on 3 July 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors and officers were invited to declare any interests which they had in any of the items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations were made.

3. URGENT DECISIONS

No urgent decisions were reported.

4. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Members of the public were invited to put questions to the Chair on any matters within the powers and duties of the Committee, subject to the exclusions set out in the Code of Practice.

No public questions were submitted.

5. HOUSING DEMAND AND SUPPLY

A representative of the Director of Skylight & Customer Service (Stockport Homes) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) and made a presentation providing an update on issues of housing supply and demand in Stockport and the role of the Stockport Homes Group in addressing and meeting this challenge.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- There was a challenge nationally with regard to housing supply and the continued and sustained demand for social and affordable housing that far exceeded existing and planned capacity.
- Government policy for many years had focussed on home ownership that had exacerbated this issue.

- It was noted that the number of homeless presentations had doubled over a two-year period, and it was confirmed that work was ongoing to try and prevent homelessness in the first place through a comprehensive multi-agency approach.
- It was commented that it would be useful for figures to be provided by Stockport Homes on the average waiting time for particular property types so that expectations could be managed amongst those on the housing waiting list.
- It was suggested that appropriate promotion of properties with additional reception rooms should be considered, as prospective tenants may consider using such rooms as additional sleeping accommodation to supplement those rooms designated as bedrooms.
- The council previously held engagement sessions with private landlords, and it may be useful for these to recommence.
- A discussion took place in relation to the impact of the 'bedroom tax' and in response it was stated that most residents have either been supported into alternative accommodation or have been able to absorb the additional cost.
- There was a link between the high occupancy of properties and incidences of mould due to moisture.
- It had always been more difficult in Stockport to get rehoused than it was in other Greater Manchester boroughs, however, as the level of demand has increased those residents who may previously have been able to secure housing through Stockport Homes were now finding themselves unable to do so. This has had a consequent impact on the number of enquiries that were being received from councillors and MPs.
- Consideration needed to be given to the reallocation of sites from employment use to housing where this was appropriate.
- Stockport Homes had delivered a number of induction sessions for local councillors to give them a broad understanding of the pressures being faced in the housing sector.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

6. UPDATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY PRESENTATION

Joe Keating (Head of Assets, Stockport Homes) attended the meeting and made a presentation providing an update on Stockport Homes' Climate Change Strategy.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Councillors and political parties represented on the council were unified in their approach towards the pressing need to address the issue of climate change.
- The work already undertaken by Stockport Homes was welcomed.
- It was increasingly difficult to access funding to make further changes and adaptations to the housing stock given the interventions that have already been made.
- It was commented that the criteria for the installation of solar panels was now less stringent than it was in the past, with particular regard to the orientation of properties as it was still possible for homes to receive a significant benefit from solar panels even where they were not at an optimal south-facing direction.
- There were difficulties in securing new heating technology, such as air source heat pumps, with long lead times and increasing costs.
- Consideration was actively being given to district heating systems in the town centre.

- The biomass boilers at York Street were fuelled from sustainable sources, topped up by natural gas at periods of peak demand on a roughly 80/20 basis.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

7. SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS SERVICE UPDATE PRESENTATION

Liz Smith (Head of Safer Neighbourhoods, Stockport Homes) attended the meeting and made a presentation providing an update on the Safer Neighbourhoods Service.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- The work undertaken to address issues of cuckooing was considered to be exceptional.
- The use of mediation as a means of resolving neighbour disputes was welcomed.
- It was noted that there had not been a reduction in the number of complaints since covid. It was stated that the number of reports did not necessarily mean that Stockport had more incidents of anti-social behaviour than other districts, but there had been high levels of promotion of the services and publicity around positive outcomes that may mean residents are more inclined to report such behaviour.
- Anti-Social Behaviour orders had been abolished in 2015 and replaced with civil injunctions.
- It was suggested that there needed to be even further levels of promotion of how issues of anti-social behaviour were being addressed.
- It was commented that anecdotally, it appeared that complaints raised by councillors on behalf of tenants seemed to be dealt with more efficiently than those raised directly by the residents themselves.
- The number of active cases was relatively static.
- The work on issues of noise transfer identified in the presentation was welcomed.

RESOLVED – That the presentation be noted.

8. REPAIRS 'WORK IN PROGRESS' UPDATE

The Executive Director of Operations (Stockport Homes) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on the current repairs service within the Stockport Homes Group including the current backlog of repairs known as 'Work in Progress' alongside the actions being taken to address this.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- It was noted that there were some circumstances where tenants had refused entry to Stockport Homes' staff or contractors to allow them to undertake repairs where there was an ongoing disrepair claim.
- While most repairs were undertaken during standard working hours, in a small number of cases the emergency repair team was used to undertake routine repairs out of hours where this was the only means by which access to the property could be secured.
- The action being undertaken to address the repairs backlog was welcomed.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

9. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Executive Director of Resources (Stockport Homes) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update on performance and tenant satisfaction against key performance indicators and measures.

The report also contains details of Stockport Homes' performance against the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenant Satisfaction Measures including benchmarking against Housemark pilot exercises.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- There had been no reported issues of carbon monoxide poisoning, however a programme of monitor installations was taking place to reflect new guidance that a monitor should be fitted in any room with a gas appliance.
- There were a number of measures that didn't have a target associated with them, and while some of these were understandable it was suggested that others may benefit from having an identifiable target within the report. In response it was stated that often there were a number of internal targets that Stockport Homes were working towards, and in other cases work was ongoing to establish benchmarks within the sector against which performance could be measured.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

10. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Executive Director of Resources (Stockport Homes) submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing an update in relation to Stockport Homes' financial performance to August 2023.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Stockport Homes had an appetite to maximise development schemes, however due to rising construction costs this was becoming increasingly difficult.
- Stockport Homes had been in discussion with the Council in relation to the provision of extended loan terms that would increase the viability of development, however such approvals would only be made on a case-by-case basis rather than being the standard position.
- The prioritisation of social rented homes over shared ownership developments was a matter of discussion between the Council and Stockport Homes in the light of the circumstances of each development.
- It was unsurprising that the Council retained a cautious approach to its finances in the context of the wider pressures on local government.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

11. MEMBER COMMITTEE UPDATE REPORT

The Chief Executive of Stockport Homes submitted a report (copies of which had been circulated) providing a general update on matters not otherwise included in reports elsewhere on the agenda, but which were likely to be of interest to the Committee.

The following comments were made/ issues raised:-

- Properties that fit the criteria laid out by the Housing Regulator as being at risk of containing Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) were being surveyed by Stockport Homes and it was anticipated that this would be complete within 4-5 weeks.
- It was suggested that it would be useful to remind tenants of the risks around the charging of lithium-ion batteries in the light of recent high-profile cases where devices such as electric bikes had combusted in residential properties.
- Detailed stock condition surveys were due to commence in September 2023.
- Discussions were ongoing with United Utilities in relation to the extension of the existing agreement for Stockport Homes to continue to collect water charged on their behalf. Any extension would be subject to appropriate agreements by the Council.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 4.25 pm