

Minutes of the Housing and Safer Communities Select Committee

**Wednesday 13th March, 2024 at 6.00 pm
In Committee Room 2
At the Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor A Davies (Chair)
Councillor S Bothul (Vice-Chair)
Councillors D Bevan, J Cowell, T Creed, P Drake, I Kettle, J Martin, C Reid,
D Stanley and M Webb
Councillor L Taylor-Childs – Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer
Communities

Officers:

K Jones – Director of Housing and Communities, A Maqsood – Head of Housing
Strategy, H Rowley – Head of Community Strategy, I Wallace – Interim Lead for
Property Maintenance, M Lyons – Interim Lead for Compliance and Building
Safety and S Murphy – Private Sector Housing Manager (Directorate of Housing
and Communities) and K Malpass – Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of
Finance and Legal)

Also in attendance:

M Smith – Local Democracy Reporting Service

39. Apology for Absence

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of
Councillor K Lewis.

40. **Appointment of Substitute Member**

It was reported that Councillor D Stanley had been appointed as a substitute Member for Councillor K Lewis, for this meeting of the Committee only.

41. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor J Cowell declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to items on the agenda, as a Council tenant.

Councillor C Reid declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to Agenda Item No. 6 – Review of Private Rented Sector as a Manager and owner of a support unit in Netherpton.

42. **Minutes**

Resolved

Councillor J Cowell referred to Minute number 33(e) – Annual update on the Safe and Sound Partnership priorities and update on improvements to managing neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour, line two stating that the words “and Leisure” be deleted to read Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities.

That subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd January, 2024, be approved as a correct record and signed.

43. **Public Forum**

The Chair outlined the purpose of the Public Forum item in which members of the public were allowed to ask questions, make comments/presentations on any matter falling within the terms of reference of the Committee. The Chair reminded members of public to be mindful not to discuss any personal circumstances or individual cases which should be dealt with by Officers or relevant agencies under appropriate procedures. It was also not appropriate to comment on any ongoing proceedings which might be prejudicial.

Presentation on Homophobia in Dudley

A member of the public delivered a presentation around the general experiences of Dudley residents who identify as LGBTQ+, Disabled, Muslim etc, which was circulated to Members prior to the meeting as requested by the member of public.

The Chair thanked the member of the public for the presentation provided and indicated that specific comments made would be referred to appropriate officers for consideration.

Resolved

That the comments made by the member of public be circulated to appropriate officers for consideration.

44. **Review of Private Rented Sector**

A report of the Director of Housing and Communities was submitted on the roles and responsibilities of the Private Sector Housing Team working in the Private Rented Sector, including the statutory duties of the team which determined key roles and responsibilities, enforcement options available and challenges faced in operations.

The Private Sector Housing Manager indicated that The Housing Act 2004 had introduced a risk-based evaluation system for assessing housing conditions, known as the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), supported by the Housing and Planning Act 2016 which introduced additional powers for local authorities to tackle rogue landlords and improve standards in the private rented sector.

In providing an overview, it was highlighted that in 2021, 13.8% of Dudley households were attributed to private rented sector and it was estimated that 15% of homes nationally presented a risk to its occupants' health and safety by containing a statutory category one hazard reported by the Building Research Establishment (BRE).

Rent comparisons between tenures as of September 2023 were outlined in the report submitted.

The statutory and non-statutory responsibilities of the Private Rented Sector Housing Team, including current operations were outlined which ensured that those living within the Borough had access to safe and decent housing that was well managed and maintained to a good standard.

Statistical information, including Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), mandatory licensing requirements, pros and cons of implementing licensing schemes, fees and charges associated with HMO licensing, together with current licensing schemes within neighbouring authorities were outlined in the report and appendices submitted to the meeting.

Challenges impacting the work of the private sector housing teams and housing enforcement included, funding constraints, changes in Government Policy and emerging challenges in the housing sector.

The growth of the private rented housing section coupled with legislative changes and evolving complexity of cases required a robust and proactive approach to housing enforcement and improved effective enforcement in maintaining housing standards and protecting public health.

Responding to changes in the private rented sector, targeting and managing resources had been challenging. With no clear direction from Central Government and the legislative changes that had been implied in recent years, it had been made difficult to plan ahead. It was noted that without robust legislation and penalties when work was not undertaken by landlords or budgets for work in default to be completed, private rented tenants continued to live in properties where high risk, category one hazards existed.

Following the presentation, Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- (a) Councillor C Reid referred to the ongoing poor conditions of Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) and queried the inspection requirements involved in ensuring appropriate licences were obtained by landlords, the measures in place to identify rogue landlords and whether tenant housing needs were being met. The number of HMOs in the Borough were unknown which was concerning. It was considered that rent associated with HMOs were high with some tenants turning to criminality or to sexual exploitation to support with payments.

Whilst acknowledging that some HMO properties within the Borough were not at the standard expected, the Private Sector Housing Manager indicated that it was difficult to identify all properties of poor quality. Members were urged to inform the Private Rented Housing Team of properties categorised as poor quality for investigation and appropriate action. Exploitation of tenants was a concern and discussed frequently at the Rouge Landlords Forum, which was attended by various agencies including Housing Officers, Police, and the Fire Service to tackle and address any concerns. Members were advised of the challenges the team faced where tenants prevented officers from contacting landlords to address property condition issues, due to the fear of reprisals or being evicted in view of their limited understanding of their rights as tenants, as the legislation required the Local Authority to provide notification of the intention to inspect a property. Members were advised on the enforcement powers and options available to the Local Authority to tackle rogue landlords, however, whilst Banning Orders were an option, the legislation did not prevent offending landlords appointing a person to manage HMOs on their behalf. In cases where enforcement was not an option, advice and support would be provided to tenants to ensure they had access to safe and good quality housing.

- (b) In referring to a specific matter involving a rogue landlord, Councillor C Reid expressed concern that families were being let down by having to live in very poor and unsafe conditions with some vulnerable tenants being exploited and turning to criminal activity. Whilst the matter had been reported on numerous occasions, no action had been taken against the landlord, which was disappointing. It was considered that there was a significant number of people that were living in extremely poor conditions because HMO accommodation was the only option available to them financially. In responding, the Private Sector Housing Manager requested that the details be forwarded to the team for further investigation and appropriate action.

- (c) Councillor D Stanley referred to issues caused by inconsiderate and illegal parking and the level of rubbish created by residents in Priory Street and New Street which was creating a poor impression of Dudley Town Centre, and queried whether the accommodation were licensed HMOs or flats. In responding, the Private Sector Housing Manager indicated that without specific addresses, a definitive response could not be provided, however, whilst it was reported that the number of conventional HMOs within the Borough were low, there were a number of Section 257 HMOs, which were buildings converted into self-contained flats. The legislation around licenced HMOs was referred to which enabled conditions to be imposed on licences to ensure landlords adhered to appropriate requirements and standards, included conditions related to rubbish and inconsiderate parking. Work was being carried out to review the HMO licencing process, including collaborative working with Planning following the introduction of Article 4 Direction. Non-compliance with obligations with Section 257 HMOs were dealt with under the Housing Disrepair legislation and supported by colleagues in Waste Management and Highways.
- (d) Re-iterating the concerns raised above, Councillor A Davies queried the advantages of selective licensing for Section 257 HMOs. In responding, the Private Sector Housing Manager indicated that the selective licencing scheme applied to any privately rented accommodation and was the most useful scheme for properties within the Borough. The scheme was specific to designated problematic areas and aimed to improve the private rented market, reduce, or eliminate specific housing problems and provide tenants with confidence that accommodation was healthy and safe to live in. Information on the licencing schemes and fees adopted by neighbouring authorities were outlined in Appendix 3 to the report submitted.
- (e) Councillor J Cowell sought clarification on the responsibility around Housing Health Switch. In responding, the Private Sector Housing Manager indicated that Housing Health Switch had initially been developed within the adult social care sector. The initiative had been developed to share intelligence on vulnerable tenants living in appalling conditions, including those associated with damp and mould to enable intervention from the Local Authority to address issues that had not been reported. Promoting awareness around obligations and rights, together with improved communication was essential to tackle the issue more effectively.

- (f) In referring to the requirements following the introduction of Article 4 Direction, Councillor J Cowell queried whether the provision was now operational. In responding, the Private Sector Housing Manager outlined the obligations of the Article 4 Direction which removed the ability for property owners to convert houses to small HMOs without appropriate planning permission. Challenges around the Article 4 Direction were referred to and Members were advised that under the obligations outlined in The Housing Act 2004, the refusal of an Article 4 planning permission did not prevent a HMO licence being issued should a property meet the required amenity standards. However, whilst HMO licences were valid for 5 years, the Housing Act 2004 allowed for a one-year licensing period following a refusal for planning permission to allow property owners to rectify any issues preventing planning permission. A review of HMO processes was currently being undertaken to ensure a consistent approach was adopted.
- (g) In referring to committed development for office space with proposals to convert into residential properties and acknowledging the shortage of resources available, Councillor J Martin queried whether a more collaborative approach could be adopted with Planning to tackle issues such as inadequate rubbish storage and parking problems prior to planning permission being granted. In responding, the Private Sector Housing Manager referred to the challenges faced when proposals were received to convert a property into flats. Whilst Planning was responsible for the requirements around building regulations and planning permission, the private rented housing team dealt with issues related to property disrepair, including new build properties where agents had moved tenants in prior to completion. Mediation was used with agents where category one and two hazards were identified to ensure a property was safe prior to being advertised on the housing market.

- (h) In responding to a query from Councillor J Martin in relation to the possibility of Central Government considering providing additional powers to local authorities to tackle health and safety issues, the Private Sector Housing Manager referred to the Governmental review of the HHSRS and associated legislation currently taking place which would hopefully provide further enforcement tools to tackle the issues. Members were advised that the service was currently working in a reactive capacity rather than on the basis of a proactive service due to capacity within the team, which was highlighted for the majority of local authorities across the UK outlined in a study commissioned by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) (2021).
- (i) Councillor T Creed referred to a specific issue involving a constituent being offered a room at Saltbrook Place, the poor living conditions associated with the building, together with various health and safety issues associated with people that were residing in the building. In responding, the Head of Community Strategy confirmed that Saltbrook Place was managed by Midland Heart and provided a 58-room scheme that offered long-term accommodation, with the aim of preparing people to move into independent accommodation. The facilities offered at Saltbrook were referred to, and whilst it was considered that the building was clean and a high standard of cleanliness was expected, incidents did occur from time to time due to residents having to share amenity areas. The independent living service provided residents with a dedicated Support Worker throughout the duration of their stay, with weekly meetings taking place to assess the individual needs of residents. People were offered accommodation at Saltbrook Place for various reasons, with some residents requiring significant support, however, residents with more complex issues were usually separated from the residents in the main building and on-site security was provided 24 hours daily to monitor the building and to ensure residents were safe. Working with partners and external agencies, including other Midland Heart associations, housing associations and private accommodation was essential to ensure adequate support was provided to tenants.

- (j) Councillor I Kettle referred to the number of empty homes situated in the Borough, many of which were private houses and the difficulty in identifying owners where properties had been left in disrepair for many years. It was queried whether there was any legislation where properties with unidentified owners could be used to support agencies to bring those properties back into use. The Private Sector Housing Manager indicated that matters associated with empty properties was not a statutory function of the service. The legislation around empty homes provided powers for the team to intervene when empty homes became insecure and presented a health and safety risk or a target for criminality. Any associated costs involved in securing a property would be payable from appropriate Housing budgets. Whilst landowners were usually approached in the first instance to secure a property, this was not always possible particularly as there was very little financial incentive for landowners. Reference was made to the Empty Dwelling Management Order outlined in the legislation which allowed local authorities to possess a private, unoccupied property and bring it back into use, however, the Local Authority did not currently employ a designated Empty Homes Officer and with restricted budgets, it would be challenging to manage.
- (k) In responding to a question raised by Councillor I Kettle, the Private Sector Housing Manager reported that whilst actual figures of empty homes associated with the private sector could not be provided at the meeting, a written response would be provided to all Members.
- (l) Councillor A Davies referred to the various licensing schemes operated by neighbouring authorities and queried the differences. In responding, the Private Sector Housing Manager reported that the introduction of licence schemes, other than mandatory licences, was a decision made by each local authority. Members were advised that the maximum length of a scheme would be five years, and it was not uncommon for local authorities to cease schemes when properties had improved, and aspirations had been achieved. Whilst the schemes were considered resource intensive, several local authorities had adequate staff and resources available to operate the schemes. It was reported that whilst each local authority decided on appropriate fees for licensing schemes, the fees did not always cover the costs of the work required.

- (m) Councillor A Davies indicated that to help tackle the blight of bin bags piled in High Streets and inconsiderate parking in town centres caused by a lack of official bin storage and parking provision for commercial to residential conversions, the following recommendation was made.

“That the Private Sector Housing Team work with colleagues in Planning, Regeneration, Environment and other departments, to look into how selective licensing could be used to tackle ongoing issues in hotspot locations, concerning the lack of waste storage and inappropriate parking, particularly in town centres.”

- (n) Councillor C Reid referred to a number of derelict properties in Charlton Street and surrounding areas, indicating that they had been derelict for years and the landowner had passed the management responsibility to a family member. Whilst the landowner was unknown to the Local Authority, the Private Sector Housing Manager requested that information be provided to the team for appropriate investigation and action.

Resolved

- (1) That the content of the report submitted to the meeting and comments made by Members be noted.
- (2) That Councillor C Reid be requested to provide information associated with a specific rogue landlord to the Private Sector Housing Manager for investigation and appropriate action.
- (3) That the Private Sector Housing Manager be requested to provide actual figures of empty homes located within the Borough associated with the private sector to all Members of the Committee.
- (4) That the Private Sector Housing Team work with colleagues in Planning, Regeneration, Environment and other departments, to look into how selective licensing could be used to tackle ongoing issues in hotspot locations concerning the lack of waste storage and inappropriate parking, particularly in town centres.
- (5) That Councillor C Reid be requested to provide information associated with the derelict properties located in Charlton Street and surrounding areas to the Private Sector Housing Manager for appropriate investigation and action.

45. **Quarterly Housing Performance Report –Quarter 3 (1st October – 31st December, 2023)**

A report of the Director of Housing and Communities was submitted on Quarter 3 of the Corporate Quarterly Performance report for the financial year 2023/24 covering the period 1st October to 31st December, 2023, specifically referring to services within the Housing and Communities Directorate and aligned to the refresh of the three-year Council Plan 2022-2025 and the impact following the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer review. Further details relating to directorate service delivery were outlined in the Service Summary Sheets attached as appendices to the report submitted.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that the report provided progress against the delivery of the three-year Council Plan priorities and the Future Council Programme.

Dashboard summaries highlighted five corporate quarterly measures for Housing and Community Services (four quarterly and one annually), two highlighting improved, zero consistent and two worsening trends. Further information was included in the appendix to the report submitted.

In referring to PI 2027 – Satisfaction on how anti-social behaviour complaints were handled, it was reported that performance figures for Quarter 3 were disappointing and further analysis was underway in the team to determine the reasons for continued levels of dissatisfaction and inform any further action that was required to improve customer experience and satisfaction.

A customer satisfaction survey was completed in January 2024 to collate performance data required by the Regulator of Social Housing as part of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures. The survey included satisfaction with the landlord's approach to handling anti-social behaviour and satisfaction was reported at 65%, compared to 46% when the same survey was completed in August 2023. It was hoped that this was indicative that the improvements which were being implemented in the service were starting to have a positive impact upon customer experience, however, continued monitoring of the service would be carried out.

The risks associated with continued dissatisfaction were outlined and a more robust approach was required when collating survey results. The Anti-Social Behaviour Team were now corresponding with customers immediately when cases were closed with a view to improving customer satisfaction moving forward.

In terms of PI 913 – Proportion of homes that did not meet the Decent Homes Standard, it was reported that outturn was 4.87%. Utilising current available Savills Stock Condition Survey (SCS) data for circa 12,164 property surveys, which equated to 57.62% of the stock. Where CAT1 hazards had been identified and were a straightforward decency failure then extrapolating across all the portfolio it had been estimated that 95.13% of the stock was compliant to the decency standard.

Severe CAT1 failures were being dealt with as a repair and issued and completed in line with repair timelines. Programmes were being set for all other failures highlighted by SCS, however, it was perceived that levels would remain constant.

In terms of PI 1191 – Average re-let time for standard re-let, it was reported that the average re-let times for standard re-lets had decreased from 56.74 days in Quarter 2 to 55.46 days in Quarter 3, compared to 66 days for the same period last year. However, the re-let time for standard voids continued to vary between property types. Performance for houses identified an increase from 45.88 days in Quarter 2 to 57.12 days in Quarter 3. For bungalows, there had been a slight increase variation from 48.84 days to 48.69 days, for maisonettes, there had been an increase from 53.31 to 61.27 days, for all flats excluding sheltered there had been an increase from 47.05 to 50.86 days and for bedsits, excluding sheltered housing, there had been an increase from 45.1 days to 52.45 days. There had been a significant decrease across the sheltered housing properties with sheltered flats decreasing from 186 days to 74 days and sheltered bedsits decreasing from 105.8 days to 98.2 days, which was attributed to the ongoing review and refurbishment of the sheltered housing stock.

In terms of PI 1899 – Rent loss, it was reported that the cumulative rent loss in Quarter 3 equated to £1,744,261.40. The cumulative rent loss due to voids had shown an increase from 2.28% in Quarter 2 to 2.36% in Quarter 3 which was an increase from 1.94% compared to the same period last year. A breakdown of rent loss for various property types was outlined in the report submitted to the meeting.

As a result of delivering the Asset Management Strategy, rent loss associated with strategic voids would continue and managed through efficient decision making and project management. It was recognised that routine voids accounted for over 58% of rent loss, which was an increase from 54% in Quarter 2, however, there was significant opportunity to increase income by improving processes and performance.

The end-to-end review on voids continued and current focus within the services was on stock condition, which could potentially see an impact on void loss in the short term as additional checks were undertaken at void stage. Investment decisions would continue to be made.

Directorate Service Plans featured service improvement actions and were updated each quarter and presented to Members. Directorate Service Summary documents provided a detailed account of services delivered and were highlighted in paragraph 9 and Appendix 2 of the report submitted.

Following the presentation, Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- (a) Councillor D Stanley expressed concern in relation to void turnaround times and considered that the Local Authority would not be in its current position should Community Housing Officers previously undertaken home inspections and identified concerns/repair work and maintenance issues from the onset which would have prevented issues escalating into more serious conditions. Reference was made to a four-bedroom property planned for disposal and it was queried why properties in high demand were being left to deteriorate and subsequently disposed of.

The Director of Housing and Communities confirmed that Community Housing Officers were now involved in property inspections, home visits and home checks with a view to identifying repair/maintenance issues. A more robust approach to tackling the issue was being considered which would promote clear expectations of tenant responsibilities moving forward, particularly around tenant transfers. Members were advised that the housing stock in the Borough was aging, and particular properties would require additional void turnaround times. Members were advised that whilst a property may appear empty, in some cases, a legal tenancy agreement was still in place which must be ended by mutual agreement or through the Court process before it could be turned around and relet. The Director of Housing and Communities reported that she was unaware of any four-bedroom properties in the Borough identified for disposal, however, she would investigate the matter outside of the meeting.

The Interim Lead for Property Maintenance referred to a number of ongoing improvement projects within the maintenance service, particularly around managing voids moving forward and how internal staff were utilised more effectively instead of using external contractors. The Maintenance department had now been restructured and an additional thirty operatives had been assigned to improve void turnaround times. Whilst improvements to the service had been made, it was envisaged that improvement would not be observed immediately.

- (b) In responding to a question raised by Councillor J Cowell, the Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Safety confirmed that Savills carried out validation check on all empty properties to ensure that original assessment of viability was correct.

- (c) In referring to PI 1899, rent loss, Councillor J Cowell expressed concern that properties awaiting investment decisions had increased each quarter and queried the reason for increasing numbers. The Interim Lead for Compliance and Building Safety referred to the robust viability assessment carried out in terms of the physical structure of a property. The assessment considered the investment requirements, current energy performance and the social economic impact of the surrounding area and would only make the decision of disposal when satisfied that the asset was not financially viable or fit for purpose. The Director of Housing and Communities referred to a framework agreement now in place with Savills for disposals which would allow the Local Authority to dispose of properties in a more strategic and structured way moving forward.
- (d) Councillor J Cowell referred to the 53-week rent cycle and expressed concern in relation to tenants receiving housing benefit and Universal Credit as payments were provided on a 52-week cycle and queried how the 53-week payment would be made. Confusion was raised over the reporting process to Universal Credit which could cause problems in relation to rent arrears. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that due to the complexities involved in relation to the 53-week rent cycle, a briefing note would be circulated to all Members.
- (e) Councillor J Cowell referred to the lack of information provided on rent statements relating to service charges, when the charge would be introduced and would it impact on tenants receiving housing benefits if introduced mid-year. In responding, the Director of Housing and Communities indicated that a structured plan had been developed for the introduction of service charges that included a notice period to customers providing adequate time for them to notify Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. For those tenants not entitled to any financial support, the notice period would allow adequate time to make any necessary arrangements to ensure payments were affordable. Members were advised that visits were being made to every property in the Borough that was eligible for service charges to be implemented to ensure that the services being charged for were being carried out.

Councillor J Cowell expressed concern that benefit payments would not be made should a claim be made mid-year following the introduction of service charges. The Director of Housing and Communities indicated that alterations to claims resulting in the introduction of the service charge mid-year should not affect what the claimant was eligible for, however, the matter would be clarified with the Department for Work and Pensions and a written response would be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

- (f) In responding to questions raised by Councillor I Kettle around PI 2027 – satisfaction, the way anti-social complaints were handled, the Head of Community Strategy referred to the staffing issues affecting the service. Following the review of the Anti-Social Behaviour service in 2022/23, initial issues relating to staffing levels and processes within the service had been addressed leading to improvement in customer satisfaction. However, following reduced staff resources due to successful promotion, development opportunities and sickness absence, the service had again been impacted negatively on by customer satisfaction. A review of policies and processes had been carried out to identify efficiencies and were now engaging more effectively with customers as soon as cases closed. A process for case management was being developed with appropriate training provided to staff and recruitment exercises were taking place to address staffing issues. Community Housing Officers were now dealing with less significant anti-social behaviour and neighbour issues with the more complex cases being referred to the Anti-Social Behaviour Team to address. The mediation service was now being used more effectively and Members should observe improvements moving forward.
- (g) Councillor D Stanley referred to the sheltered accommodation at Church View and reported that the building had become a “eyesore”. Numerous queries had been raised by residents and Ward Members had been unable to provide an update because no information in relation to the building had been provided. It was requested that Ward Members be informed of any future programmed events associated with the building.

Resolved

- (1) That the Quarter 3 Corporate Quarterly Performance report covering the period 1st October to 31st December, 2023, and the comments made by Members, be noted.

- (2) That the Director of Housing and Communities be requested to circulate a briefing note regarding the complexities involved in relation to the 53-week rent cycle to all Members of the Committee.
 - (3) That the Director of Housing and Communities clarify the position in relation to mid-year alterations to Housing Benefit and Universal Credit claims as a result of the introduction of service charges with the Department for Work and Pensions and provide a written response to all Members of the Committee.
 - (4) That the Ward Members for Gornal be informed of any updates in relation to the sheltered accommodation at Church View.
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46. **Progress Tracker and Future Business**

In providing an update on the Action Tracker, the Chair expressed his appreciation to all officers for the work carried out.

Resolved

That the information contained in the Action Tracker and Future Business for the Committee, be noted.

47. **Contractor Management**

A report of the Director of Housing and Communities was submitted on the work currently being undertaken to review contracts and contractor management within the Housing and Communities Directorate.

The Director of Housing and Communities indicated the Interim Strategic Lead for Property Maintenance had been reviewing the contract and contractor arrangements within the Housing and Communities Directorate to ensure robust and effective measures and arrangements were adopted moving forward. In referring to the scope of the review, which was outlined in the report submitted, it was reported that the review was ongoing and would conclude with the implementation and commencement of a new procurement strategy for Place contractors, which would be supported by the necessary and associated management and budget controls. It was anticipated that the new arrangements would commence in April 2025.

Members were advised that the decision had been taken for an independent procurement specialist to carry out soft market testing in the Midlands area to assess what solutions and resources were available. Whilst historically, the management of all contracts within Housing and Communities Directorate had been managed by one Head of Service, it was envisaged that the responsibility for management of the contracts, budget and associated contractors would be split and assigned to relevant Heads of Service moving forward, which would enable a greater level of focus and be led by staff with a greater understanding of the particular area of work.

The Head of Service had introduced a number of measures to strengthen the current approach to Contractor Management, which were outlined in the report submitted.

The Corporate Procurement team had recently recruited a Procurement Business Partner (PBP) to support Housing Procurement, including leading on the delivery of the recommended strategy for the procurement of future maintenance and asset management services and support Contract Management across the Directorate.

Resolved

- (1) That the content of the report submitted to the meeting be noted.
- (2) That the review of contractor management was still underway with an expected outcome due in April 2025, with the implementation of a new approach and strategy to the procurement and management of contractors, be noted.
- (3) That a further report be submitted to the Committee towards to end of the 2024 municipal year setting out the final outcomes of the project.

48. **Questions Under Council Procedure Rule 11.8**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

49. **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to an the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as defined under Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

50. **Contractor Management**

A report of the Director of Housing and Communities was submitted on the work currently being undertaken to review contracts and contractor management within the Housing and Communities Directorate.

The Director of Housing and Communities presented the report referring to specific paragraphs of importance.

Following the presentation, Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and responses were provided where necessary.

Resolved

That the recommendations outlined in the report submitted to the meeting and comments made by Members be noted.

51. **Comments by the Chair**

As the meeting was the last scheduled meeting of the 2023/24 municipal year, the Chair thanked Members and Officers for their valued contribution.

The meeting ended at 8.20pm

CHAIR