

Minutes

Housing, Health & Community Committee Monday, 25th November, 2024

Membership/Attendance

Cllr Dr Barrett (Chair)	Cllr Mayo
Cllr Mrs Davies (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Mrs Pound
Cllr Baldock	Cllr Sankey
Cllr Kendall	Cllr Slade

Apologies

Cllr Reed

Substitute Present

Cllr Barber

Also Present

Cllr Poppy
Cllr Rigby
Cllr Wagland

Officers Present

Angela Abbott	- Corporate Manager - Housing Needs and Delivery
Carol Burton	- Corporate Manager - Property Services
Nicola Marsh	- Corporate Manager - Housing Estates
Lauren Stretch	- Director of Housing
Zoe Borman	- Governance and Member Support Officer

LIVE BROADCAST

[Live stream will commence at 7.00pm and available for repeated viewing.](#)

246. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Reed and Cllr Barber was substituting.

247. Declarations of interest

No declarations at this time.

248. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the previous Housing, Health and Community Committee held on 9th September 2024 were agreed as a true record.

249. Committee Work Programme

The purpose of the work programme is to provide members with an opportunity to consider and identify items for the committee work programme for the current municipal year.

Cllr Dr Barrett **MOVED** and Cllr Davies **SECONDED** the recommendations in the report.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and Members **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY** that:

R1. The committee approves its current work programme as per Appendix 1.

Reasons for Recommendation

This approach ensures the committee has control of its work programme and allows officers to do the necessary preparatory reports to committee.

250. Chair's Update

This report provides an update to Members in relation to the areas covered under the Terms of Reference of the Housing, Health, and Community Committee.

With regard to rough sleepers and to improve communication with Chess and Members, Cllr Barrett recommended Members report rough sleepers directly using the Street Link website. Officers are currently looking into the use of grant funding for a dedicated link officer between Chess and Brentwood to aid communication.

With regard to transfers, the numbers of moves are low due to lack of stock and therefore waiting time are relatively long. A tenancy transfer panel exists to deal with emergency moves.

The Council is aware of some reported incidents of people indicating they are homeless door knocking in the area asking for money. The Council has fulfilled its statutory duties, and residents are advised to notify the Police should any incidents occur.

Members asked for a website update re Ingleton House development and its involvement with Six Streets.

The report was noted.

251. HRA Planned Works Programme 2025/2026

Due to a technical issue, the Chair moved to the next item whilst the presentation equipment was fixed.

This report sets out the HRA planned works programme for 2025/26.

Ms Burton summarised the report.

Members were thankful for the works completed within this programme but sought clarification the pricing from Axis was competitive. Officers explained that value for money benchmarking was carried out periodically and although Axis dealt with the responsive repairs, the planned works was separate and not guaranteed to Axis.

Following a full discussion Cllr Dr Barrett **MOVED** and Cllr Davies **SECONDED** the recommendations in the report.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and Members **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY** that:

- R1. The Committee approves the planned works programme for 2025/26.**
- R2. The Committee gives delegated authority to the Director of Housing to award contracts in accordance with the Contract Procedure Rules for the delivery of the planned works programme.**

Reasons for Recommendation

Due to limited resources for investment and the age of the housing stock, property conditions have deteriorated. This has led to multiple failing building

components, water penetration, damp, and mould, which are placing a significant burden on our repairs service and impacting upon residents' living conditions. The proposed projects are critical to addressing these long-standing issues and improving the quality, safety and energy efficiency of our residents homes.

252. Fees and Charges - Housing

Fees and charges made by the Council for various services are reviewed on an annual basis by the relevant Committees relating to the services provided. Recommended amendments to the fees and charges are incorporated into the budget setting process to take effect from the following financial year.

Following a full discussion Cllr Dr Barrett **MOVED** and Cllr Davies **SECONDED** the recommendations in the report.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and Members **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY** that:

- R1. To approve the proposed fees and charges to be sent for approval at the Finance and Resource committee**

Reasons for Recommendation

The loss to the General fund and the Housing Revenue account if we weren't to increase the fees and charges could mean a diminished or cancelled service.

253. Compliance and Repairs Service Update

Members received a presentation by Ms Burton and Mr Houlihan updating them on the Compliance and Repair Service.

Ms Burton confirmed that Brentwood Borough Council had, in conjunction with the Fire Brigade, adopted a "Stay put Policy" following the Grenfell Enquiry, and this has been communicated to residents.

254. Grounds Maintenance Service Charge

Following a recent review of the Grounds Maintenance contract, it had become prudent to review the service charges passed on to residents.

Historically we have not charged due to lack of sufficient information of works conducted on site and performance reports. However, the recent review has provided us with new key performance measures and detailed works for each site and means we are now in a position to review the charge to residents.

Ms Stretch summarised the report.

The charges would be implemented from April 2025 and the proposal would be to charge 50% for the first year. This would enable the Grounds Team to get resource in place and 12 months monitoring to ensure effective delivery of the service.

Members raised concerns regarding the detrimental effects this may have on the depot service and the general fund. Officers explained the Service Level Agreement which will be put in place will hold the depot service to account with regular monitoring implemented.

Following a full discussion, Cllr Dr Barrett **MOVED** and Cllr Davies **SECONDED** the recommendations in the report.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and it was **RESOLVED**:

- R1. To approve the implementation of a Grounds Maintenance Service Charge to all residents in flatted accommodation.**
- R2. To approve the implementation of 50% of the actual charge from April 2025.**
- R3. To approve 100% implementation of the actual charge from April 2026.**
- R4. To agree the Service Level Agreement be implemented from April 2025 with the frequencies as defined below for each element of works defined within the SLA.**

Reasons for Recommendation

For many years, the housing revenue account has been subsidising the cost of Grounds Maintenance to residents by not implementing a charge within the service charge of both Tenants and Leaseholders alike.

This has created an annual deficit of £330,000 which the Housing Revenue Account can no longer sustain.

255. Housing Revenue Garage Sites

In the last 12 months there has been work carried out to review the HRA Garage Sites. A comprehensive review of each site has taken place and have

been split into several categories. This report gives an overview of the work to date for review and comment. It also sets out the next steps for each of the categories, including any financial constraints and requirements for taking this forward.

Members welcomed this report.

Members wished to be kept engaged throughout the process.

Following a full discussion Cllr Dr Barrett **MOVED** and Cllr Davies **SECONDED** the recommendation in the report.

A vote was taken by a vote of hands and Members **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY** to:

- R1.** Approve a budget of £40,000 plus on costs for a 12-month part time resource to be funded from reserves, to manage the work on this project and develop relevant business cases for those in the 'redevelopment' category and options appraisal sites to feed into the overall Housing Asset Strategy and disposal plan and to bring forward for individual decision to this committee.
- R2.** Agree the list of retained sites, and that the maintenance budget be allocated to these areas to maximise lettings.

Reasons for Recommendation

In the last 12 months a comprehensive review of each HRA owned garage site has taken place and sites been split into 3 categories; Those that should remain as garage sites, those that have already been determined as being suitable for development (although currently outside of the SHDP) and those where there are no clear option for the site, and these have formed part of an options appraisal.

For many of these sites there are no easy options, as many of the solutions would be at significant cost to the HRA and any funding would need to come from the planned maintenance Capital Budget which is currently earmarked for the upkeep of the residential stock. Aside from this there is no resource within the existing Housing Department with the time or expertise to be able to move each site forward including liaising with residents and ward members and develop business cases.

256. Rent Setting 2025/2026

This report sought the recommendations of the Committee on the proposed rent and service charge levels for 2025/2026.

The recommendations will be considered by Finance and Resource Committee when the final recommendation will be made as part of the budget setting process. The final decision will be made by Ordinary Council on 19th February 2025.

Ms Stretch advised that the full business model will be taken to Council's budget meeting. Increasing the rent to full cap makes the biggest difference to modelling and ensures the HRA is viable for many years to come.

Some Members raised concerns regarding rent increases taken place over the last 3 years at a time when other service charges were being implemented and the effect on residents.

However, Members were also minded that to increase the rents in line with Government guidelines is needed to support planned maintenance.

Cllr Dr Barrett **MOVED** the recommendations in the report. These was **SECONDED** by Cllr Davies.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and it was **RESOLVED**:

R1. To apply a 2.7% (CPI+1%) increase to all Social and Affordable Housing Properties

R2. To apply a 2.7 (CPI+1%) increase to Shared Ownership and General Fund Property Rents

R3. To apply formula rent to all new tenancies from April 2025

R4. To apply a 2.7% (CPI+1%) increase to all non-council tenant garage rents

R5. To apply a 2.7% increase to all council tenant garage rents

R6. To note that service charges have been reconciled and charges have been increased or decreased so they are brought in line with actual costs and that no increase will exceed CPI plus 1%.

R6. To introduce a service charge for Grounds Maintenance at 50% of the actual cost.

Reasons for Recommendation

The recommendation is to follow government guidelines which proposes to increase rents by 2.7%, for 2025/26. This figure is CPI from September 2024 which was 1.7% +1%.

The proposed increase will contribute to funding the current services provided as well supporting the development of the capital programme and housing development plans.

When considering the rent setting the following assumptions have been considered:

- The financial viability of the HRA business plan
- Provision for the repairs & maintenance capital programme
- Development for new homes in the borough
- Affordability for tenants
- Investing in services to the tenant receives the best service delivery.

It is also important to note that during the Autumn budget, the government announced that the local authority housing allowance for the rent element of benefits would be increasing. Whilst this amount is not yet set, this will benefit Tenants who are entitled to that particular benefit and assist with their rent payments.

257. Housing Performance Report

The Housing Ombudsman requires social housing landlords to publish its annual complaints performance and service improvement report annually.

Alongside this, in response to the introduction of the Housing Consumer Standards by the Regulator for Social Housing, the Housing Department has set up a Housing Improvement Board and it was agreed that performance from this board would be reported bi-annually to this committee. Learning from complaints is important to us as a department and therefore actions and recommendations arising from complaints will be fed into the Improvement board.

Finally, as part our resident engagement improvements, we have produced a Tenants Annual Report which has been published and circulated to our tenants, to inform them of our performance over the past year as well as other information that may be of interest to them.

Members noted the report and acknowledged the journey of improvement the Housing Department was on, in particular around its handling of complaints.

258. Strategic Housing Delivery Programme Update

The public were excluded from the meeting for the item of business on the grounds that the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 was involved.

The recommendation was **MOVED** by Cllr Dr Barrett and **SECONDED** by Cllr Davies .

A vote was taken by a show of hands and was **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY**.

259. Urgent business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting concluded at 21:00