

Meeting	Health, Housing and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee
Date	27 March 2024
Present	Councillors D Myers (Chair), Vassie (Vice-Chair), Baxter, Rose, Smalley, Steels-Walshaw, Wann, Wilson, Waller (Substitute) and Whitcroft (Substitute)
Apologies	Councillors Kelly and Runciman
In Attendance	Councillor Pavlovic, Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Safer Communities
Officers Present	Tracey Carter, Director of Economy, Regeneration and Housing Michael Jones, Head of Housing Delivery and Asset Management

33. Declarations of Interest (17:33)

Members were asked to declare at this point in the meeting any disclosable pecuniary interests or other registerable interests they might have in respect of the business on the agenda, if they had not already done so in advance on the Register of Interests. None were declared.

34. Minutes (17:33)

The committee considered the accuracy of the minutes of the meetings held on 13 December 2023 and 30 January 2024.

In respect of the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2023, an amendment was suggested under item 21 (Oral Health) to incorporate an acknowledgement of the visiting dentists' support for new forms of primary care centre to transform care in small communities around York.

In respect of the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2024, an amendment was suggested under item 29 (2023/24 Finance and Performance Monitor 3) to incorporate a request for more detailed benchmarking information in future reports.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meetings held on 13 December 2023 and 30 January 2024 be agreed as correct records subject to

the above amendments made respectively to incorporate the additional points raised.

35. Public Participation (17:38)

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

36. Housing Asset Management and Repairs Update (17:39)

The committee considered a report introduced by the Director of Economy, Regeneration and Housing and the Head of Housing Delivery and Asset Management which provided an update on the council's Housing Asset Management Plan and Repairs Policy. It was confirmed that the former was a live document, while the latter was due to be refreshed following engagement with residents.

Members discussed communications around disrepair claims. It was acknowledged that it was a challenge to counter misinformation around the repairs process, including from no-win no-fee legal practices targeting council tenants. While statistics demonstrated improvement in the repairs service, this was not always reflected in tenant feedback. The Building Services team was developing its outreach work, including more regular social media updates and a repairs roadshow. Members suggested expanding peer to peer-to-peer communications including through tenants' organisations could also be useful. Trading Standards were investigating practices supplying inaccurate information, and it was suggested that it would be useful if ward councillors received the same information as was already being supplied to tenants through residents' newsletters on this issue.

The committee considered the repair process for damp and mould. It was noted that a backlog of council properties with structural damp issues was being worked through, and that a dedicated surveyor from the Building Services team was now undertaking most assessments for damp and mould complaints, with external contractors providing additional expertise in cases with significant structural issues. In around 90% of assessments, no structural issues were identified; behavioural factors were often related to overcrowding or fuel poverty issues. Surveyor advice was generally welcomed by tenants and fuel vouchers were offered in certain cases. Awaab's Law would introduce statutory timescales to investigate complaints and require that vulnerabilities were considered. A condition

survey was being carried out on all council homes to gain a better understanding of the state of stock and inform future investment; this would also help identify damp and mould issues before they became significant.

Members enquired about asset management objectives and the impact of new Regulator of Social Housing standards. There was already an improving picture on key measures of achievement, with two-thirds of council homes having EPC ratings of C or higher and more repairs being resolved on the first visit. Ambitions to ensure all council homes had a valid Electrical Inspection Certificate by 2028 and to improve the speed at which calls to the repairs service were answered were confirmed. Online repairs notifications were expected to reduce call volume and improve call waiting times from the present average of four minutes. In response to members' questions about insulation officers agreed to provide more detail on the variance in recommendations referred to in Annex A to the report.

The committee discussed staffing and the use of contractors. It was noted that there was an ambition to be less reliant on these; while most repairs were done in-house, home modernisation and specialist work such as asbestos removal was carried out externally. Contractors were also used to cover areas of high demand or where there were recruitment challenges. It was noted that council staff performed the majority of out-of-hours repairs, although the standby policy presented an ongoing challenge as it was not included in staff contracts.

Members also enquired about funding for decarbonisation and retrofit work. It was confirmed that the council had generally been successful with grant funding applications. Different types of non-traditional housing stock, which was the most challenging to retrofit, were being targeted each time funding was secured; this would improve knowledge and allow work to be rolled out to similar houses to meet needs when funding was available. The Retrofit One-Stop-Shop York project had secured funding to develop a digital platform to provide retrofit advice, including green finance and incentives for private owners, and work was being done on green skills training bids to upskill staff and assist the regional market. The York and North Yorkshire Housing Partnership presented a significant opportunity to work together in bringing all social housing in the area up to EPC C rating by 2030.

The Executive Member for Housing, Planning and Safer Communities was in attendance and emphasised that the council was seeking to drive the move to net zero with as many properties as possible. His focus was on bringing homes that were in the worst condition up to a decent standard. He noted that retrofitting council homes crossed portfolio areas and invited the committee to consider the issue of retrofit priorities.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was indicated that the Homelessness Resettlement Pathway report was likely to be ready in April and suggested that members consider under the Work Plan item whether to add this report to the committee's agenda for its next meeting.

[Cllr Whitcroft left the meeting from 18:55-18:59; Cllr Rose left the meeting at 19:11; and Cllr Steels-Walshaw left the meeting from 19:23-19:25].

Resolved:

- i. To note the Asset Management Plan, its ambitions and the challenges of balancing priorities and investment opportunities.
- ii. To add the 2024/25 investment plan to the committee's Work Plan, following the receipt of stock condition information later this year, to enable discussion around investment priorities, including a breakdown of budget forecast spending on contractors, apprenticeships, and an update on training to up-skill and cross-skill existing staff.

Reason: To support a shared understanding around the challenges of maintaining and improving council homes and to inform a joined-up discussion around investment priorities in future years.

- iii. To note the existing Repairs Policy.
- iv. To request that the final draft Repairs Policy is brought back before Scrutiny before being considered by Executive.

Reason: To ensure we develop a repairs policy which balances resource capacity with meeting the needs of our customers.

- v. To note the updates regarding the stock condition survey work, disrepair claims, and updated damp and mould approach.
- vi. To request that peer-to-peer communications be explored to help alleviate the issue of legal practices proactively contacting residents and encouraging them to make legal claims of disrepair.

Reason: To ensure our council homes are safe, sustainable, affordable, and good quality.

- vii. That members be provided with the information on no-win no-fee legal practices which was already being circulated to council tenants.

Reason: To ensure that members remain informed on this issue and are able to provide accurate advice to residents.

- viii. To request further information on the variance in loft insulation recommendations referred to in Annex A to the report.

Reason: To keep members informed on this issue.

- ix. That the Chair write to the Chair of the Corporate Services, Climate Change and Scrutiny Management Committee to enquire about the appropriate forum for scrutiny of the status of the standby policy.

Reason: To ensure the standby policy is considered by Scrutiny in the appropriate forum.

[The meeting was adjourned from 19:30-19:41 for a comfort break and to give members time to read the Task and Finish Review Proposal Form which had been circulated by the Chair; Cllr Pavlovic left the meeting at this point].

37. Task and Finish Review Proposal - Home Care Commissioning (19:42)

Members considered a proposal from the Chair for a Task and Finish Group Review of Home Care Commissioning. In line with the new interim process for Task and Finish Groups, which was outlined to members for information, a proposal form had been completed identifying the suggested aims and objectives, methodology, impact on resources and timescale for the proposed review.

This proposal was tabled by the Chair at the meeting. It was suggested that a draft report be completed by the end of July 2024 and shared for review, before being considered by the committee at an appropriate date in the autumn. Councillors Vassie and Baxter volunteered to participate in the review alongside the Chair.

Resolved: To endorse the proposed remit, objectives, and timeframe for a Task and Finish scrutiny review of Home Care Commissioning, with Councillors Myers, Baxter and Vassie as group members.

Reason: To enable the Task and Finish Group to proceed with work on the review in line with scrutiny procedures.

38. Work Plan (19:49)

The committee considered its work plan for the 2023/24 municipal year, including the Housing items (Homelessness Resettlement Pathway, 2024/25 Asset Management Investment Plan, and revised final draft Repairs Policy) discussed earlier in the meeting. With reference to the Investment Plan, it was suggested that the committee might consider inviting other comparable local authorities to provide examples of best practice.

As a result of discussions between the Chair and officers, it was suggested that the item on Pharmacies scheduled for April be held over until a later Public Health-focused meeting. A suggestion to split the Autism and Neurodivergence Strategy item provisionally scheduled for May, with the committee receiving a report from the ICB in May and from the Public Health team in the autumn, was also considered; it was suggested that Public Health officers be requested to attend for the ICB item.

Members considered an invitation received from the Rough Sleeper Housing Navigators Team to visit and observe its work. It was noted that several members had already done so and that virtual sessions were available for any interested members who wished to take them up, and it was suggested the committee place on record its thanks to the Navigators for their work.

It was also noted that work planning for the 2024/25 municipal year was due to be considered by an upcoming meeting of the Chairs of all four Scrutiny Committees.

Resolved:

- i. To hold over the proposed item on Pharmacies scheduled for the April meeting until a later date to be confirmed.
- ii. To request that the Homelessness Resettlement Pathway report be brought to the April meeting.
- iii. To approve the suggestion to receive reports on Autism and Neurodivergence Strategy from the ICB in May and from the

Public Health Team in the autumn, with a request that the relevant Public Officers attend the May meeting.

- iv. To add the 2024/25 Asset Management Investment Plan, including a breakdown of budget forecast spending on contractors, apprenticeships, and an update on training to up-skill and cross-skill existing staff to the committee's Work Plan, with the date to be confirmed following the receipt of stock condition information later this year.
- v. To add the revised final draft Repairs Policy to the committee's Work Plan, with the date to be confirmed.

Reason: To keep the committee's Work Plan updated.

Cllr D Myers, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.32 pm and finished at 7.59 pm].