

CABINET COMMITTEE: HOUSING

Monday, 3 February 2025

Attendance:

Councillors
Westwood (Chairperson)

Becker
Cutler
Clear

Horrill
Power
Lee

Apologies for Absence:

Councillors White

Deputy Members:

Councillor Lee

Members in attendance who spoke at the meeting

Councillor Pett

[Video recording of this meeting](#)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor White for whom Councillor Lee deputised as noted above.

2. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest made.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Councillor Westwood welcomed to the meeting Lin Mellish who was a member of the TACT Board (which also included himself and Councillor Horrill). He would invite Mrs Mellish to comment on any reports relevant to the Board's remit.

Councillor Tait also spoke under public participation regarding the update on the New Homes programme and reports CAB3491(H) and CAB3482(H) and his comments are summarised under the relevant minutes below.

4. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 5 November 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

5. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Councillor Westwood announced that the refurbishment of 59 Colebrook Street, Winchester was now complete and the property had been handed over to the Housing Team to prepare for occupation by the first new tenants. It was further intended to refurbish the stable block at the rear of the property to enable it to become a self-contained unit of accommodation with the cost of this work to be met by the existing agreed budget. He thanked both Hampshire County Council (HCC) and Winchester City Council officers involved in the project.

Councillor Westwood also announced that the council had received approximately £1million in grants to support homelessness since the committee's previous meeting. He thanked the Service Lead – Strategic Housing and team for their work in securing the grant. In addition, additional one-off grants had been received from HCC towards work supporting victims of domestic abuse and also provision of homelessness support services.

6. **NEW HOMES PROGRAMME UPDATE (VERBAL UPDATE)**

Ian Tait spoke during public participation as summarised briefly below.

He expressed concern about the change in the council's focus to buying existing affordable homes from developers rather than building new affordable homes. He also queried why the build cost for council built new affordable homes was significantly higher than those built by commercial developers.

Councillor Westwood responded to the comments made including emphasising that the approach of purchasing homes was agreed by Council as an element of the 2024/25 HRA budget. It would be kept under review with the intention that the council would recommence with new builds as soon as it became financially viable to do so.

The Service Lead – New Homes gave a presentation on the new homes programme which was available on the council's website [here](#). She also responded to the comment raised by Mr Tait regarding the comparative cost of council new builds.

The Service Lead – New Homes, Councillor Westwood and other officers present responded to questions and comments raised by councillors on the presentation as follows:

- a) How and when the demand levels were calculated. It was agreed that annotations be added to future presentations to include this information.

- b) A request that ward councillors be involved in the preparation of the Southbrook Cottages lessons learned report. It was agreed that ward and parish councillors could be involved at the appropriate time during the report's preparation.
- c) The intended timeframe for the new rural housing strategy to be approved.
- d) The reasons why the council did not currently employ a rural housing enabler.
- e) Whether there was a potential for future Passivhaus new homes.

RESOLVED:

That the update regarding the new homes programme be noted.

7. **RETROFIT PROGRAMME UPDATE (VERBAL UPDATE)**

The Retrofit Manager gave a presentation on the retrofit programme which was available on the council's website [here](#).

The Retrofit Manager and other officers present responded to questions and comments raised by councillors on the presentation as follows:

- a) Tenant education regarding the need to ensure ventilation outlets remained unblocked.
- b) Measures to ensure heating was maintained in rural properties which could be subject to power cuts, such as use of batteries.
- c) Introducing measures to capture carbon in retrofit properties.
- d) Lessons learned from the retrofit of the Swedish Cottages.
- e) Moving away from a solely fabric first approach to one encompassing technology.

RESOLVED:

That the update regarding the retrofit programme be noted.

8. **HOUSING STRATEGY 23-28 PROGRESS AND UPDATE** (CAB3491(H))

Lin Mellish (TACT Board) noted the significant amount of work ongoing and requested that where any new or updated policies were drafted, the consumer standard groups and tenants involved be consulted in a timely manner when there is an opportunity for them to influence their development.

Councillor Westwood agreed that consultation with tenants was very important and was a core remit of the TACT Board.

Ian Tait spoke during public participation as summarised briefly below.

He queried what measures the council was undertaking to help registered providers to supply affordable housing across the district. He also believed that the build cost for Alfred Homes to deliver 10 new properties in Sparsholt was significantly less than the council's build costs.

Councillor Westwood and Service Lead – New Homes responded to the comments made by Mr Tait.

Councillor Westwood, the Strategic Director, the Corporate Head of Housing and relevant Service Leads responded to questions and comments raised by councillors as follows:

- a) Whether the proposed s106 acquisitions of new homes were in the right place and of the right size to meet established and predicted housing demand.
- b) The potential challenges of ongoing maintenance of the housing stock where homes were widely distributed across the district.
- c) The possible impact on location of new homes because of the eastern part of the district being located within the South Downs National Park.
- d) A query relating to the frequency of visits of community engagement officers and a request that ward councillors be informed when visits were undertaken in response to a ward councillor's report of anti-social behaviour issues.
- e) Future engagement with registered providers and also future proposals to assist tenants within the private sector.
- f) Future proposals and likely timetable for the review of the disabled facilities grant.

The Cabinet Committee agreed the following for the reasons set out above and outlined in the report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress of the objectives against the Housing Strategy 2023-28 Delivery Plan be noted as outlined in the report.
2. That the emerging challenges that have arisen since November 2023 be noted.
3. That the amended delivery action plan for 2023-2028 be approved.

9. **SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION**
(CAB3479(H))

Councillor Westwood introduced the report which had been discussed at a meeting of the TACT Board on 27 January. In summary, the Board believed the council's position was not uncommon. The Board requested that the action plan recommended in the report should be implemented without delay to improve stock condition data and safety, evidencing compliance information and also to implement the safety and quality action plan with a focus on fire safety.

Lin Mellish (TACT Board) expressed concern about the length of time since the previous stock condition survey had been undertaken and requested clarification of the likely timescale for the work to be completed to bring it up to date.

The Housing Project and Policy Manager responded to Mrs Mellish's query including advising that an external partner would be engaged and it was anticipated that half of the stock could be surveyed in 2025.

Councillor Westwood, the Strategic Director, Service Lead – Housing Landlord Services and other relevant officers responded to questions and comments raised by councillors as follows:

- a) The requirement for good communication with tenants to ensure access to enable the stock condition survey to take place.
- b) The possibility for the surveyors to consider opportunities for wider environmental benefits to be introduced, such as water butts or swift boxes.
- c) The possible outcomes following the council's self-referral to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) and whether sufficient budget had been allocated to deal with these.
- d) Whether there was any potential for the work on the stock condition survey to be accelerated.
- e) Whether there was current verification of third party works.
- f) Incorporation of the regulator's key performance indicators (KPIs) into the Council's own future performance indicators.
- g) The availability of a more detailed action plan.

The Cabinet Committee agreed the following for the reasons set out above and outlined in the report.

RESOLVED:

1. That it be noted that the self-assessment has been undertaken against the consumer standards.
2. That the action plan at Appendix A of the report be agreed.

10. **TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES**
(CAB3497(H))

Councillor Westwood introduced the report which had been discussed at a meeting of the TACT Board on 27 January where Board members welcomed that the majority of results were at or above median. The Board had proposed a number of specific proposals as follows:

- a) To consider analysing feedback in the context of seasonal trends to convert the data into meaningful information to act upon.
- b) To review the TSMs in respect of communal cleaning dissatisfaction rates in general needs blocks.
- c) To celebrate success and focus on good news via all available communication channels.
- d) To create an action plan for areas of the district with low satisfaction indicators.
- e) To introduce the housing team to residents via the residents' newsletter and other communication channels.

Councillor Westwood invited the other two members of the TACT Board present to make any further comments and Councillor Horrill endorsed the action list and hoped it would be acted upon by relevant Housing officers.

Councillor Westwood, the Corporate Head of Housing, the Service Lead – Housing Landlord Services and other relevant officers responded to questions and comments raised by councillors as follows:

- a) Further information was requested regarding the number of missed appointments by contractors and proposals for contract penalties to help mitigate against this issue.
- b) Possible reasons for low response levels in some areas of the district and using councillors to help increase these levels.
- c) Whether the survey was weighted to take account of different sizes of area.
- d) What was considered and counted as a “complaint”.
- e) A correction was noted that the survey indicated three indicators that were below the median level (not four as set in out in the report’s recommendations). It was suggested that the responses received from sheltered housing residents also be considered further.
- f) Whether there was any correlation between the heating and energy responses and the property age?
- g) Assisting all ages of tenants in being able to make complaints efficiently and effectively.
- h) Improvements in the numbers of anti-social behaviour issues being reported.
- i) The importance of engaging with councillors to enable them to assist both officers and tenants.

The Cabinet Committee agreed the following for the reasons set out above and outlined in the report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the survey results be noted.
2. That the work that is underway or proposed to address the three indicators that are below median benchmark be noted.

11. **VENTA LIVING LTD - BUSINESS PLAN 25/26 (LESS EXEMPT APPENDICES)**
(CAB3482(H))

At the invitation of Councillor Westwood, Councillor Pett provided an introduction to the report as one of the four non-executive Venta Living Ltd directors. He highlighted that two other directors were also present - Tim Sharp and Dawn Adey. Councillor Pett reported that the initial project to lease 41 flats in Winnall (Foxglove House) had overrun with the first tenancy taken up in June 2024. However, good progress was being made and currently all but five of the flats had been let and of these, four were awaiting references and one awaiting an offer.

Ian Tait spoke during public participation as summarised briefly below.

He believed that with the information supplied in the report (less exempt appendices) he was not able to ascertain any good commercial reason for the establishment of the housing company. He suggested that the Winnall flats could have been let instead through another affordable housing provider such as Winchester Housing Trust.

The Strategic Director responded to the comments made by Mr Tait including confirming that the financial viability of Venta Living has been established at the time of its incorporation.

The Strategic Director and Councillor Pett responded to questions and comments raised by councillors as follows:

- a) The possible reasons for the slow uptake of tenancies.
- b) Whether there would be further opportunities for future housing provision through Venta Living?
- c) Had the developer paid any compensation to the council because of the delays?
- d) How tenant satisfaction with the new flats would be assessed.

The Cabinet Committee moved into exempt session to consider the contents of the exempt appendices before returning to open session to consider the report's recommendations as set out below.

The Cabinet Committee agreed the following for the reasons set out above and outlined in the report.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

That the updated financial business plan as included in exempt Appendices A and B of the report be recommended for approval to Cabinet.

12. **EXEMPT BUSINESS:**

RESOLVED:

1. That in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

2. That the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business because it is likely that, if members of the public were present, there would be disclosure to them of 'exempt information' as defined by Section 100I and Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

<u>Minute Number</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Description of Exempt Information</u>
13	Venta Living ltd business plan (exempt appendices)) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). (Para 3 Schedule 12A refers)

13. **VENTA LIVING LTD BUSINESS PLAN (EXEMPT APPENDICES)**
(CAB3482(H))

The Committee considered the contents of the exempt appendices.

The Strategic Director and Councillor Pett responded to questions and comments raised by councillors as follows:

- a) Provision of monies for repairs and maintenance.
- b) The potential impact if flats remained unoccupied.
- c) The defined responsibilities of both Venta Living ltd and the council.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the exempt appendices be noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.55 pm

Chairperson