

CABINET COMMITTEE: HOUSING

Monday, 5 February 2024

Attendance:

Councillors
Westwood (Chairperson)

Becker

Cutler

Non-voting invited councillors

Councillors Batho, Horrill, Miller and Rutter

Non-voting invited TACT representatives

Mr D Chafe and Mr J Perkins

Apologies for Absence:

Mrs M Gill TACT (Mr J Perkins deputised)

Members in attendance who spoke at the meeting

Councillor Lee

[Video recording of this meeting](#)

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Mrs M Gill (TACT) for whom Mr J Perkins deputised as noted above.

2. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Becker declared a pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 7 - Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget 2024 (report CAB3445 refers) as a property owner with a connection to a council sewage treatment works. She left the room during consideration of this report and took no part in the discussion or decision.

Councillor Horrill declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in respect of agenda item 10 - Homelessness Prevention Grant Allocation - Trinity (report CAB3449(H) refers) as her husband was a Trinity board member.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Ian Tait spoke regarding reports CAB3450(H), CAB3434(H) and CAB3449(H) and Sue McKenna spoke regarding report CAB3449(H). Their comments are summarised under the relevant minute(s) below.

4. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held 14 November 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

5. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements made.

6. **NEW HOMES PROGRAMME AND RETROFIT UPDATES (VERBAL UPDATE)**

At the invitation of the chairperson, Councillor Lee addressed the meeting as summarised briefly below.

He raised several questions and comments including requesting further information regarding the energy efficiency and carbon reduction of new schemes. He suggested that achievements be inputted into the low energy buildings database. He requested the use of low carbon high nature materials for new homes and the retrofit programme. He sought assurance that the business plan required EPC plus standard for all new homes and also queried the apparent lack of schemes to the east of the district.

Councillor Westwood responded to the comments made including drawing attention to the recently approved Housing Strategy (CAB3410(H) refers) and CAB3445 which was being considered later in this meeting.

The Housing Strategy and Development Manager gave a presentation on the new homes programme which was available on the council's website [here](#).

The Housing Strategy and Development Manager and Councillor Westwood responded to questions and comments raised by councillors and TACT representatives on the presentation as follows:

- a) A request that the experience gained from the development of new homes at Winnall be carried forward to future new schemes, in terms of the positive impact of the commitment to enhance surrounding areas. This was agreed.
- b) A request that all councillors be encouraged to seek potential areas for new homes in their wards through the involvement of parish councils where they existed. Councillor Westwood agreed to take this suggestion forward with officers.

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

The Energy Manager and Councillor Westwood responded to questions and comments raised by councillors and TACT representatives on the presentation as follows:

- a) The possible different reasons behind some tenants refusing the opportunity to have improvements to their properties and measures being taken to encourage them.
- b) The measures taken if asbestos was identified.
- c) The reasons for the delays in the upgrade of the “Swedish pilot” properties.
- d) Whether there were possibilities to undertake repairs and improvements to neighbouring properties at the same time.
- e) Ensuring that the various events to encourage tenants to participate were being held at different times of the day and week.
- f) A suggestion that tenants of properties that had undergone retrofit improvements be asked to share specific details regarding reduction in their energy bills. This was agreed.

RESOLVED:

That the updates regarding the new homes programme and the retrofit programme be noted.

7. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET 2024/25**
(CAB3445)

Councillor Becker left the room during consideration of this item and took no part in the discussion or decision.

Councillor Westwood introduced the report and welcomed the support of TACT for the proposals. The report was also being considered at Scrutiny Committee on 6 February, Cabinet on 8 February prior to decision at Council on 22 February 2024.

Councillor Westwood, the Housing Finance Manager and the Service Lead - Strategic Housing responded to questions and comments raised by councillors on the report as follows:

- a) The proposal that rent levels for future new homes be set at 80% of market rent. Councillor Westwood explained that this was because the energy efficiency build of new homes resulted in significantly lower energy usage and the 80% also included service charges. He confirmed that there was no intention to extend the 80% rate across existing homes, including those having retrofit improvements.
- b) A suggestion that evidence of the savings resulting from the increased energy efficiency of new homes compared to the 80% market rent for scheme viability should be brought back to the committee and then, subject to schemes progressing the information, shared with prospective future occupiers. Councillor Westwood agreed to consider this proposal further with officers.
- c) The rationale behind the proposal to dispose of Barnes House at this time.

- d) The current annual levels of “right to buy” properties and the amount of each sale that was retained by the council.
- e) Confirmation that the new homes scheme would consider developments across the whole district, including in rural areas.

Mr Perkins (TACT) confirmed the support of TACT and expressed his gratitude for the additional explanation and information provided by officers at TACT meetings on the proposals.

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

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations set out in the report be supported and the Cabinet Member for Housing forward the comments outlined above for consideration at the Cabinet meeting on 8 February 2024.

8. **SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION INSPECTION REGIME**
(CAB3450(H))

Councillor Westwood introduced the report which provided some context for the following item on the agenda regarding the changes proposed. He requested a further report be brought back later in the year to provide a further assessment of the new regime. The Corporate Head of Housing advised that TACT had received regular briefings on the new regime and Economy and Housing Policy Committee (formerly Business and Housing) had received a presentation on 28 February 2023.

Ian Tait spoke during public participation as summarised briefly below. He queried what powers the new regime offered to local authorities and whether it relied on tenants to raise the initial complaints. He welcomed the suggestion for a future report providing a further assessment.

Councillor Westwood responded to the comments made.

The Corporate Head of Housing responded to questions and comments from members, noting that some of the detail regarding proposals for tenant consultation would be considered under report CAB3434(H) below.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That a report be brought back later in the year with an assessment of the service including changes proposed to meet the regulatory standards.

9. **HOUSING ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION PLAN**
(CAB3434(H))

Councillor Westwood introduced the report highlighting that ensuring tenants views were heard and acted upon was a key element of the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 that had been discussed under the previous item. He confirmed that the report had been prepared in collaboration with TACT and expressed his thanks to members of TACT for all their work over previous years. A report had been considered by the Economy and Housing Policy Committee on 28 February 2023 (report BHP40 refers) and the comments from that meeting had been take into consideration in drafting the plan.

Ian Tait spoke during public participation as summarised briefly below. He recognised the ongoing discussions regarding the best way to engage with tenants and believed that using an independent body had worked well as part of the previous housing options process. In relation to the proposed TACT board, he highlighted the benefits of appointing housing specialists to the two independent positions rather than councillors.

Councillor Westwood responded to the comments made including confirming that the “two independents” referred to in the proposed make-up of the TACT board would be two independent people with relevant housing experience, not councillors.

Councillor Westwood, the Strategic Director and the Corporate Head of Housing responded to questions and comments from members on the following:

- a) Confirming that the intention would be that the TACT board would evolve over time with a review structure built into the proposed model. There would also be an annual report from the board to this committee.
- b) Noting that there would need to be some consistency between the different consumer service groups.
- c) The opportunity to broaden the engagement with tenants was welcomed, particularly with younger tenants.
- d) A suggestion that the engagement strategy should focus less on old mechanisms of engagement and place greater priority on informal methods of engagement. It should also emphasise the specific responsibility to listen.
- e) How the success of the new proposals would be measured in terms of tenant satisfaction from different groups of tenants and areas and how this could be developed over time.

Mr Perkins (TACT) suggested that more tenants could be encouraged to participate by demonstrating how their comments could make a difference and providing a response when tenant satisfaction surveys were completed. Other methods he suggested to encourage participation included TACT promoting the reform of residents’ associations, having a welcome pack for new tenants and also utilising tenant support funds to help a greater number of tenants.

Councillor Westwood and the Corporate Head of Housing welcomed the suggestions made which would be incorporated into the plan as it was developed further.

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

RESOLVED

1. That the TACT Board be established.
2. That the terms of reference for the TACT Board be agreed as set out in Appendix 6 of report CAB3434(H).
3. That non-councillor TACT board members will receive compensation for attendance at the TACT board.
4. That the draft Housing Engagement and Communication Plan be approved.

10. **HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT ALLOCATION - TRINITY**
(CAB3449(H))

Councillor Westwood introduced the report and emphasised the importance of the council working in partnership to achieve its commitment to prevent homelessness.

Ian Tait and Sue McKenna spoke during public participation as summarised briefly below.

Ian Tait

He requested clarification of the support priorities provided by the Trinity and expressed concern that their work might duplicate that already undertaken by the Beacon. In particular, he highlighted the ongoing support required to enable some vulnerable people to ensure their tenancies continued. He queried why the council owned flat at 88 Sussex Street remained empty.

Sue McKenna (Chief Executive Officer – Trinity)

She confirmed that the Trinity worked in partnership with the Beacon and that the long-term focus was to prevent homelessness. The proposed grant would help to provide additional support to vulnerable people to enable them to stay in existing housing. Their proposals also included creating an additional eight homes in 2024 with a possible further 12 in future years.

Councillor Westwood responded to the comments made, including emphasising the valuable work undertaken by Trinity. The Service Lead – Strategic Housing also highlighted that paragraph 13 of the report set out the impact of not awarding the grant.

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

RESOLVED:

That the grant of £60,000 to Trinity from the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) be approved to fund Trinity's Housing Manager and the Move on Development Coach.

11. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the dates of the future meetings of the Committee be noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.50 pm

Chairperson