

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting held on Thursday, 30th March, 2023 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr M.D. Smith (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs. D.B. Bedford (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr K. Dibble (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr A. Adeola
Cllr Gaynor Austin
Cllr L. Jeffers
Cllr Prabesh KC
Cllr Mara Makunura
Cllr Sophie Porter
Cllr S. Trussler

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr Marina Munro

26. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th February, 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

The Chairman reported on the absence of Cllr Prabesh KC from three consecutive meetings of the Committee held on 20th October, 1st December 2022 and 9th February 2023. Under the Council's Constitution, Standing Order 4 (5) stated that 'if any Member shall be absent from three consecutive meetings of a committee, he or she shall cease to be a Member thereof, unless he or she shall in the opinion of the Committee show reasonable grounds for their absence.'

It was noted that the Chairman had been in contact with Cllr KC and had accepted the reasons for his absence at these meetings, and it was agreed that Cllr KC should be allowed to participate in the meeting.

27. MANAGEMENT OF DAMP AND MOULD WITHIN THE LOCAL HOUSING SECTOR

The Committee welcomed James Duggin, (Executive Head of Operations), Suzannah Hellicar (Service Manager – Housing) and Hilary Smith (Private Sector Housing Manager) who were in attendance to provide a presentation on the management of damp and mould in the local housing sector. Cllr Maurice Sheehan, Operational Services Portfolio Holder, was also in attendance.

The presentation covered the following:

- Legislation – the Council followed the Housing Act 2004 Part 1 Legislation, which incorporated the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The HHSRS provided operating guidance and enforcement guidance.
- Managing disrepair in Rushmoor – It was noted that complaints were received by email, phone or via the website from both social and private tenants. Each case was allocated to an officer with the expectation of a response to the claimant in three working days. Urgent cases were expedited. The process recommended that tenants contacted landlords directly, prior to contacting the Council. The Council offered advice, information and inspection, assessment and action where appropriate. It was advised that damp and mould could be caused by a number of factors, examples of which were shared with the Committee. These included:
 - Penetrating/rising damp
 - Lack of ventilation
 - Lack of heating
 - Overcrowding
 - Poor energy efficiency
 - Tenant behaviour
- The Rochdale case and the Government response – the Committee was apprised of the case in Rochdale where a two year old had passed away. His death had been attributed to living in a flat that had damp and mould present. The Government had responded by issuing a directive under Section 3 (3) Housing Act 2004, followed by a request for and overview of, how local authorities dealt with damp and mould complaints in the Private Sector.
- Rushmoor’s response – It was noted that all complaints of damp and mould were now inspected and assessed under the HHSRS. It was noted that there had been an increase in complaints since the Rochdale case, although the numbers of complaints had now evened out. The Committee noted that larger Housing Associations were establishing damp and mould teams within their organisations to deal with complaints.
- Data – the Committee reviewed Council data on disrepair issues and it was noted that numbers had increased in the first quarter of 2023. It was also noted that the number of complaints from both the private and social housing sectors had evened out, whereas in the previous year, complaints had mainly come from the social housing sector.
- HHSRS – Government Consultation – it was noted that questions within the consultation had centred around the condition of housing stock (as far as the authority was aware). The Committee noted that the team had concerns that the existing legislation, which was complex and time consuming, was not fit for purpose. This had been raised as a concern in the Council’s response. It was also noted that damp and mould scored low in the HHSRS outcomes, making formal enforcement challenging, this had also been raised in the response.

The Committee noted a number of proposed changes which were being considered, these included:

- Social Housing –
 - The Social Housing Regulation Bill
 - Tighter restrictions and timescales
 - More power to Housing Regulators
 - Ofsted type inspections of Housing providers
 - Quicker process through the Ombudsman

- Private Sector –
 - Review of guidance on health impacts of damp and mould
 - New guidance on dealing with damp and mould – Summer 2023
 - Potential review of HHSRS as a system for assessing disrepair

The Chairman thanked Mr Duggin, Ms Hellicar and Ms Smith for their presentation.

The Committee discussed the presentation and **ENDORSED** the process, working arrangements and way forward. However, a number of actions were raised and agreed, as follows:

ACTION	BY WHOM	WHEN
Provision of a shared spreadsheet to allow Members to note complaints made directly to them that don't have Council involvement	Hilary Smith – Private Sector Housing Manager	May 2023
Repairs and living conditions to be added to the questions used by the Registered Providers Task and Finish Group	Cllr Diane Bedford and Zoe Paine – Strategy and Enabling Manager	June 2023
Arrange a visit for the Housing Team to attend the Community Hub “Meet and Greet” Network Session at the Garrison to meet local military families to discuss the situation with the condition of military housing (held every third Thursday of the Month)	Hilary Smith – Private Sector Housing Manager	June 2023
Consideration be given to establishing a Group for Private Landlords similar to the Registered Providers Group	Hilary Smith – Private Sector Housing Manager	June 2023

Note:

The following interests were noted during the meeting Cllr Prabesh KC (private landlord in the Borough) and Cllr Keith Dibble (Director of Rushmoor Homes Limited). Both were permitted to remain in the meeting.

28. **CABINET CHAMPIONS**

The Committee welcomed the three Cabinet Champions, Cllr Steve Masterson (Climate Change), Cllr Nem Thapa (Armed Forces) and Cllr Mara Makunura (Equality and Diversity) who were in attendance to provide a review of the work undertaken during the 2022/23 Municipal Year. Rachel Barker, Assistant Chief Executive was also in attendance with Cllr Sue Carter, Democracy, Strategy and Partnerships Portfolio Holder and Jill Shuttleworth, Corporate Manager – Democracy joining the meeting remotely.

(1) Climate Change

The Committee noted the report from the Climate Change Cabinet Champion and in particular the work undertaken by the Climate Change Working Group (CCWG). The Group had heard from a number of external speakers, this had allowed the Council to align its plans with those of key stakeholders who also had a significant role to play in reducing emissions across Rushmoor. Progress monitoring on the Council's Carbon Footprint had also been a key piece of work for the Champion and it was noted that this was due to conclude shortly with a report being made to the CCWG at its next meeting.

It was noted that during the year, the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan had undergone a review process against the agreed actions. Strong progress had been made against a number of actions, including the rollout of food waste collections, the launch of the Repair Café and work with local schools to raise awareness. The Strategy and Action Plan was currently undergoing a refresh, taking into account the new carbon footprint data. It was felt that the Strategy and Action Plan should be more focussed with a smaller number of key projects to be delivered.

Communication and engagement had also been a key area during the year, activities included an article in Arena, increased frequency of updates to Members via the Chief Executive's bulletin and continued engagement with key stakeholders. A number of events were also being planned for later in the year, these included Big Green Week and an Eco Fair.

The Committee discussed the Report and made a number of comments, in particular, taking account of the proposed reduction in the number of Cabinet Champions from three to two. Following the Outcomes Based Budgeting processed, it was proposed that the Climate Change Champion be retained. It was also felt important that the Cabinet Champions reported into the Cabinet on a regular basis throughout the Municipal Year.

Concern was raised over the slow progress of the response to the Climate Change emergency and some Members expressed the view that more progress would be made going forward.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Masterson for his presentation.

(2) Armed Forces

The Committee noted the Report from the Armed Forces Cabinet Champion and the work undertaken during the year. It was noted that the Champion had participated in the Covenant Partnership Conference in November 2022, which had brought together a range of military and civilian partners working together for the effective delivery of the provisions of the Armed Forces Covenant and Armed Forces Act 2021. Cllr Thapa and Shadow Champion Cllr Nadia Martin, had also regularly attended the Aldershot Garrison Community Hub “Meet and Greet” network meetings which brought together a range of welfare and advice organisations to support military and non-military families. It was noted that veterans had also been a priority for the Champion during his year - work had included understanding the current provision to developing connections through a monthly surgery at the Prospect Community Centre.

It was also noted that the Champion had attended a number of events throughout the year which were aimed at both the military and civilian communities.

Cllr Thapa made a number of recommendations and proposals for next steps for the 2023/24 Municipal Year, that could be incorporated into the priorities going forward. These included:

- An Armed Forces Champion webpage on the Rushmoor site to help sign post and provide relevant information
- Increase the visibility of the veteran community to help improve links with support services
- Continue to develop the covenant partnership
- Re-examine the criteria and possibility for the Council to work towards the Gold Award standard in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme

The Committee discussed the report and **ENDORSED** the work of the Armed Forces Champion. It was felt important that the criteria for the Gold Award was understood and taken forward if possible.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Thapa for his report.

(3) Equality and Diversity

The Committee noted the Report from the Equality and Diversity Cabinet Champion. Cllr Makunura provided an overview of the achievements and activities throughout the 2022/23 Municipal Year. These included:

- The establishment of the Rushmoor Accessibility Action Group (RAAG) which aimed to develop awareness around accessibility and safety for residents and visitors and to highlight inclusivity.
- The establishment of the Rushmoor Cohesive Communities Group (RCCG) which contributed to the actions in the Council's Equality and Diversity Action Plan. It was noted that around fifteen different nationalities were represented in the Group which had met twice so far. The Group were looking at opportunities to hold a Rushmoor Cultural Day and to work closer with the Rushmoor International Association.
- The Champion had been involved in a number of events throughout the year, these included Black History Month, International Women's Day and supporting Homes for Ukraine

It was noted that the focus during the year had been to establish a structure to support the Council's Equality and Diversity Action Plan. It was suggested that the Action Plan could be considered for a review and refresh to ensure it remained relevant and up to date.

The Committee discussed the report and made a number of comments, these included:

- Ensuring events, such as the Black History Month exhibition were more accessible to the public
- Ensure that the LGBTQ+ activities/events (Pride) were incorporated into the Equality and Diversity Action Plan going forward

The Chairman thanked Cllr Makunura for her report.

29. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee noted the current work plan and was advised that a meeting of the Progress Group was scheduled for the following week to address any outstanding issues and plan for the forthcoming Municipal Year.

The meeting closed at 9.54 pm.

CLLR M.D. SMITH (CHAIRMAN)
