

# Nottingham City Council

## Housing and City Development Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Ground Floor Committee Room - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 18 November 2024 from 2:00pm to 3:22pm

### Membership

#### Present

Councillor Sarita-Marie Rehman-Wall  
(Chair)  
Councillor Michael Savage (Vice Chair)  
Councillor AJ Matsiko  
Councillor David Mellen  
Councillor Samina Riaz

#### Absent

Councillor Kevin Clarke  
Councillor Sam Harris  
Councillor Adele Williams

### Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Antony Dixon - Head of Supported Housing  
Beverley Gouveia - Head of Property  
Councillor Jay Hayes - Executive Member for Housing and Planning  
Nicki Jenkins - Interim Corporate Director for Growth and City Development  
Mark Lowe - Head of Housing and Regeneration  
Adrian Mann - Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer  
Councillor Ethan Radford - Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Skills, Growth and Economic Development  
Damon Stanton - Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer

### 23 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Kevin Clarke - work commitments  
Councillor Adele Williams - work commitments

### 24 Declarations of Interests

None

### 25 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2024 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

### 26 Asset Rationalisation Programme - Delivery Progress

Councillor Ethan Radford, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Skills, Growth and Economic Development; Nicki Jenkins, Interim Corporate Director for Growth and City Development; and Beverley Gouveia, Head of Property, presented a report outlining the current delivery progress of the Council's Asset

Rationalisation Programme and the work being done to revise the underlying Disposals Policy. The following points were raised:

- a) There is a pipeline of around £141 million of forecast capital receipts from the Asset Rationalisation Programme and, to date, around £77 million in receipts has been secured. Assets identified as being no longer required are recorded in a Disposals Tracker, which helps sales to be risk-adjusted depending on the asset's complexity and marketability. An asset review timetable has been developed and the Programme is currently on track for delivery. The decision-making process remains under review to ensure that the Programme can be accelerated as quickly as possible, with a matrix process being developed with Finance colleagues to aid timely decision-making.
- b) Additional resource is needed in the Property, Finance, and Legal teams to assist in accelerating the disposals process. Some additional resource has recently been approved and a recruitment process is underway to recruit to those posts, though staff capacity remains a constant challenge.
- c) The underlying Disposals Policy was last updated in September 2021, to provide a robust framework for the sale of the Council's assets and to ensure that best value is achieved. A review of the Policy is currently taking place with a view to updating connections to other key documents (such as the Council's Improvement Plan) and strengthening the process around off-market sales and special purchasers.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- d) The Committee asked how property within the Asset Rationalisation Programme disposals pipeline were prioritised and resourced. It was explained that there are a number of variables that determine the prioritisation of an asset sale, such as whether the property is vacant or if it requires Planning Permission for development. Generally, vacant properties and those that will be easiest to sell are prioritised. Staff resourcing is a significant issue and this does affect the delivery pace of the Programme. However, the Disposals team has nevertheless been performing well, with around £77 million of capital receipts achieved to date.
- e) The Committee sought assurance that the assets in the pipeline for disposal were deliverable, and asked what the primary risks were to the proposed timeline. It was reported that the Disposals team had aimed to carry out more sales in the current financial year, but that there are still a number of large disposals underway and an ambitious auction programme is taking place over the next three months that aims to achieve a substantial return. Delivery of the overall Programme remains a challenge, but there is confidence that the needed receipts can be achieved as planned, with the disposals risk-adjusted so that Finance colleagues are aware if any of the current receipts will instead be received in the next financial year – and the position is monitored weekly.
- f) The Council has a considerable commercial property portfolio, but it does need to make difficult decisions, particularly when balancing the capital and revenue implications. In the long term, the Council is reviewing every type of asset that it holds to keep the pipeline moving but, fundamentally, the Council must head

away from a position where it is dependent on Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) to pay for its day-to-day spending and services. As part of its overall improvement journey, the Council has to work to become more financially sustainable so that it no longer needs EFS and can therefore use capital receipts to support its capital priorities.

- g) The Committee asked whether proportionate revenue savings were being realised as the Council reduced its capital estate. It was set out that revenue savings varied from building to building, but that work had recently been done by colleagues that looked at the total operating costs of the Council's estate and potential ways of reducing them. Energy usage is one of the most significant costs and work is ongoing on how the Council could decrease this, along with other general operating costs. The sale of assets is not necessarily prioritised based on the revenue saving achieved by the sale, but it can be the case that holding an asset is costly to the Council. Revenue savings are also dependent on a property's marketability and the likelihood of achieving a sale.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Leader of the Council, the Interim Corporate Director for Growth and City Development and the Head of Property for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

**Resolved:**

- 1) To request that further information is provided on the projects within the Asset Rationalisation Programme that face the highest risk to their successful delivery within the required timeframe and the work being done to mitigate against these risks.**
- 2) To recommend that detailed consideration is given to how the operational estate maintained by the Council can be made as energy efficient as possible, to seek to reduce its energy operating costs and contribute to the delivery of the Council's Carbon Neutral targets.**

**27 Independent Living Review and Future Model**

Councillor Jay Hayes, Executive Member for Housing and Planning; Nicki Jenkins, Interim Corporate Director for Growth and City Development; Mark Lowe, Head of Housing and Regeneration; and Antony Dixon, Head of Supported Housing, presented a report on the Council's Independent Living service offer. The following points were raised:

- a) There are 1,986 Independent Living homes with 2,100 tenants accommodated in the city, which are distributed over 59 individual schemes. There is a mixture in the type of housing available in the schemes, including corridor, courtyard and bungalow provision. Overall, around 32 full-time equivalent staff support the service, including 24 Independent Living Coordinators working directly with tenants. A small number of additional staff also work to facilitate communal activities within the schemes. All tenants receive an annual assessment to assist in developing the right amount of direct contact that they need and to identify further support requirements.

- b) Currently, there is an apparent oversupply of Independent Living provision. Since 2016, there has been a relative increase in Independent Living properties and a decrease in 'general needs' homes. In the same period, there has been a significant increase in homelessness. Benchmarking work is ongoing, but the initial indications suggest that the Council has a higher number of specialist older persons' provision than its comparable peers. Currently, there is a much higher proportion of voids in Independent Living properties than there are in 'general needs' homes, and they also take longer to let.
- c) The current eligibility criteria for Independent Living is age 60 (or 55 with an age-related disability), and 55% of new tenants are of still of working age (under 67). Perceptions of what constitutes an 'older person' have changed, yet the model the Council currently uses has not. Residents moving into Independent Living are now both younger in terms of age, but also in terms of their outlook on life, and as such are not necessarily engaging with the services that the Council provides within Independent Living schemes for 'older people'. Issues are also arising with anti-social behaviour. There are some accessibility issues with the Council's Independent Living homes that may be impacting on how attractive the properties are to prospective tenants, and the lettings process may also not be suited to older residents due to a certain degree of complexity.
- d) As part of developing a new model for the future, consideration is being given to rebranding 'Independent Living' to 'Retirement Living', reducing the amount provision to rebalance the levels of the types of housing provided by the Council in general, raising the age criteria, ensuring that complex care needs are met within more specialised schemes, introducing a stronger letting standard and simplifying the lettings process. The next steps in developing the proposals are to take them for consideration to the tenant-led Housing and Assurance Board (HAB), and a general tenant survey and an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) will also be completed.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- e) The Committee asked what could be done to improve the standard of Independent Living properties and make them more lettable. It was reported that work in this area includes improving the decorative standards and ensuring that properties are more accessible, including being 'dementia friendly'. Proposals have been made for further investment in accessibility improvements from the Housing Revenue Account so that Independent Living properties can be more attractive to the prospective tenants who need them. The Council can increase rent levels by up to 10% for introducing specific improvements, but the general approach is that all properties should be of a good standard, comparable to other providers in the market. Increasing the age criteria could limit demand, but it could also make the properties more attractive, particularly if there is an increased focus on right-sizing and marketing the service as retirement living.
- f) The Committee asked what engagement had been carried out with the current Independent Living tenants on the proposed future model. It was explained that quarterly residents' meetings take place, along with engagement with tenants around activities – and a survey of prospective tenants was being conducted to seek their views on Independent Living models. Further consultation will be

carried out on the future model proposals as they are developed and any action that will impact specific Independent Living schemes will involve direct consultation with the tenants affected. As the Council looks to rebalance supply provision and demand, if an Independent Living scheme is identified as a potential site for decommissioning, a full options appraisal will be conducted to ascertain the most appropriate usage for that site going forward. There is a Council team that directly supports the re-homing of tenants where this is needed – including helping to ensure that people who want to stay together in a new scheme are able to do so.

- g) The Committee asked how Independent Living was being advertised, and if enough focus was being placed on older residents looking to downsize, which could help alleviate pressures within 'general needs' housing. It was set out that there are a mixture of schemes within the city that are predominately one-bedroomed accommodation, but the demand for two-bedroomed accommodation and bungalows is higher and these kinds of property are developed where viable. The Council has been exploring further ways in which it can promote Independent Living schemes, including through open days. However, voids and average re-let times have been increasing for several years and, therefore, this is a long-term issue and the Council must take the opportunity to explore how to best use its housing stock, going forward. There are proposals under consideration for a new 'right-sizing' team to support people effectively in move into the property that is best for their needs.
- h) The Committee asked how residents with additional care needs were being supported. It was reported that, due to the funding structure around social care, there are financial barriers to the Council providing specialist accommodation for residents with complex needs via Independent Living schemes, so commissioning through third-party providers is sometimes more appropriate in ensuring that a full package of support can be implemented effectively.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for Housing and Planning, the Interim Corporate Director for Growth and City Development, the Head of Housing and Regeneration and the Head of Supported Housing for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

**Resolved:**

- 1) To request that the Equality Impact Assessments developed as part of any proposals for the redesignation of specific Independent Living schemes are circulated to the Committee.**
- 2) To request that further information is provided on the development of a dedicated 'right-sizing' housing service offer, as this progresses.**
- 3) To recommend that the further development of the Independent Living offer is supported by a targeted advertising and communications process, so that it is straightforward for people who would benefit from the service most to find out about and apply for it.**

## **28 Responses to Recommendations**

The Chair presented the latest responses received from the Executive to recommendations made to it previously by the Committee.

The Committee noted the responses of the Executive to its recommendations.

## **29 Work Programme**

The Chair presented the Committee's current Work Programme for the 2024/25 municipal year. The following points were discussed:

- a) An item to review the 2025/26 budget proposals for the Growth and City Development directorate and the associated impacts on service users is scheduled for the Committee's January meeting. A report on social housing repairs and maintenance performance will be considered alongside the outcomes of the Regulator for Social Housing's inspection of the service in March.
- b) The Committee discussed potential items for focus such as new Planning regulations to speed up house building, changes to the law on 'no fault' evictions and changes to how 'Right to Buy' receipts can be used. The Committee requested that a briefing note was provided on the 'Right to Buy' position to summarise the upcoming changes and their likely impacts.

The Committee noted the Work Programme.