

APPENDIX 5

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGENERATION AND SKILLS)

5 MARCH 2024

BRIEFING NOTE RE: COUNCIL HOUSING GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

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Background

The Council's latest Forward Plan indicates that a report on the Council Housing Governance and Management Arrangements will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 4 April 2024. The report to Cabinet has not yet been prepared but bearing in mind the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets before 4 April, Councillor Dowd, Chair of the Committee, has requested that this briefing note be prepared to provide an outline of the matters to be considered by Cabinet. The information set out below provides an update.

Update Position

In November 2023, Cabinet considered a report and associated Business Case to acquire 18 homes (apartments) to deliver as Council housing at Sandway Homes' development site at Buckley Hill Lane, Netherton. This Business Case was approved and on 18 January 2024, Full Council approved the supplementary capital estimate for the acquisition.

Sandway Homes have now started on site at Buckley Hill Lane which is an important milestone for the Council Housing Programme. We anticipate taking handover of the apartments in April 2025 and welcoming tenants into their new homes with the support of our Managing Agent once they are fully onboard. Work to onboard the Managing Agent is progressing well.

A significant amount of work is being progressed behind the scenes both to facilitate the handover of properties and ensure the Council is ready to become a social housing landlord with all of the associated responsibilities. The Council will be regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing as a Local Authority Registered Provider and the Council will need to ensure it is compliant with the published set of regulatory standards.

Following the introduction of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, the regulatory standards have seen an overhaul with a new set of standards due to be introduced in April 2024. A large proportion of the work at present is focused on a detailed policy review. A suite of housing management related policies will need to be in place to comply with a range of legislative and regulatory requirements and work is progressing to draft these policies. Alongside this, our legal advisors Freeths are working to draft a tenancy agreement that will be used for the future lettings of our Council owned homes.

APPENDIX 5

The Regulator of Social Housing proposes to continue to take a co-regulatory approach to regulation. Responsibility therefore lies with Councillors of Local Authority registered providers to meet the standards set by the Regulator with robust mechanisms in place to provide assurance of compliance. With this in mind, we are in the process of developing proposals for our future governance arrangements for the Council Housing Programme.

The Cabinet paper on 4 April 2024 sets to seek delegated authority to formally adopt a suite of social housing policies that will be necessary to facilitate the management of any new Council owned homes, complying with legislative and regulatory requirements. The report will set out proposed governance arrangements for the Council Housing Programme which will see the creation of a Housing Advisory Board who will have an advisory role in respect of the operational activity and ensuring that the Council's homes which will be managed by a Managing Agent meet all requirements set out in the regulatory framework.

Given that the properties at Buckley Hill Lane are due for completion April 2025, there may be opportunity to acquire some properties earlier, the report will further consider this as an option, however opportunities are currently being considered in order to inform a potential proposal.