

Meeting/Date:	<b>Cabinet</b> <b>2 November 2023</b>
Report Title:	<b>REFERENCE FROM COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: Community Asset Leasing Policy</b>
Directorate:	Neighbourhoods and Environment
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Wards affected:	None specifically
Public Access	Open
Appendices	None

## 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1. The report outlines recommendations made by the Communities Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet. This follows consideration of a report on the proposed new VCS Leasing Policy, which came to the Communities Scrutiny committee in October 2023.
- 1.2. The Communities Scrutiny Committee considered proposed new VCS Leasing Policy report at its meeting on 18 October 2023.

## 2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1. The committee considered the content and recommendations within the proposed new VCS Leasing Policy report. The Committee recommend that:
  - 2.1.1. Officers to provide clarity of accountability for lease decisions to Cabinet and to include this accountability with lease decisions to leaseholders.
  - 2.1.2. Officers to contact all 30 organisations who are impacted by the policy to allow them time to provide comments, ahead of it going to Cabinet.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1. The Communities Scrutiny Committee received the proposed new VCS Leasing Policy and noted the importance of implementing a consistent approach to leasing properties. This will promote a fair and transparent process and increase trust between the Council and VCS services.
- 3.2. The Committee heard about the research and community engagement which had formed the basis of the proposed policy and the potential next steps. The Committee then asked questions in respect to the report.
- 3.3. The Committee sought to understand how the tenants would be supported throughout the 12-month pilot if the proposed policy is endorsed, noting how a tailored approach would be necessary.
- 3.4. They questioned how the 12-month pilot would be communicated with the 30 properties effected by the proposed new policy, notably the 12 who will be involved in the pilot.
- 3.5. Members were keen to understand how leases will be offered to each of the 30 properties and whether these would be subject to change following the outcome of the pilot.
- 3.6. Member were keen to ensure the process would be transparent throughout, with accountable officers easily reachable. By providing clarity of accountability, this will assure tenants they are able to query the lease with ease.
- 3.7. Members noted how the new policy could be a cause for concern amongst those leasing properties, therefore, suggested that they are contacted before the proposed policy goes to Cabinet. By contacting VCS tenants at an earlier point, it may assure tenants they will be contacted throughout the process of developing the new policy.
- 3.8. In accordance with paragraphs 6.1.1. and 7 of the Constitution, the Committee has asked for its views to be referred to the Cabinet.

### **4. SERVICE RESPONSE**

- 4.1. The Communities Scrutiny Committee recommendations and proposed Service response are below:
- 4.2. **Officers to provide clarity of accountability for lease decisions to Cabinet and to include this accountability with lease decisions to leaseholders.**
  - 4.2.1. Accept: Decisions on leases will be made in line with Council's Constitution and Property Procedure Rules to Director of Commercial Estate and Investment.

**4.3. Officers to contact all 30 organisations who are impacted by the policy to allow them time to provide comments, ahead of it going to Cabinet.**

4.3.1. Amend: We agree wholeheartedly with the committee on the need to engage with our VCS tenants and work together to devise a fairer system of leasing VCS properties. Engagement on the topic of space and fair approaches to property management has been ongoing throughout the last year at various public forums and in one-to-one discussions. We have designed the launch of the leasing policy to begin with a year-long pilot period, during which we will co-design key processes with VCS tenants. However, we assessed that the basic principles of the leasing policy, such as the 80% discount offered to qualifying tenants, require a full Cabinet decision before we can enter meaningful and purposeful discussions with VCS tenants.

In response to the committee's recommendation, we are beginning communications with all tenants of the 30 VCS premises affected by the policy at the earliest opportunity (by Friday 27th October 2023). The preceding 12 months will provide an extended period of engagement that will allow groups to shape and respond to the policy framework, before returning to Cabinet before the end of 2024. In addition, we will come back to Communities Scrutiny in the summer with an update of how the pilot is progressing.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)**

No reports which require listing were used in the preparation of this reference.