

Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee

Minutes

Thursday, 20 June 2019 at 18:30

PRESENT:-

Councillor Grant (in the Chair); Councillors Cameron, Candon, Flaxman-Taylor, Galer, D Hammond, Martin, Smith-Clare, Talbot, C Walker, Wainwright & Williamson.

Mr N Shaw (Strategic Director), Mrs K Sly (Finance Director), Mrs N Turner (Housing Director), Mrs J Beck (Head of Property & Asset Management), Mr T Chaplin (Housing Transformation Manager), Mrs D Lee (HRA Service Accountant) & Mrs C Webb (Executive Services Officer).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hacon.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2019 were confirmed.

4 MATTERS ARISING

With regard to minute number 13, the Strategic Director reported that the contract for the RNLI Lifeguard Service had been signed.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received & considered the Forward Plan.

A Member requested that an update on future funding initiatives for the Neighbourhood Teams & a breakdown of the economic and social well-being of neighbourhoods on a ward by ward basis be added to the Forward Plan for consideration at the September meeting and that an update on the Strategic Transformation Plan be added to the Forward Plan for consideration at the October meeting.

6 HRA OUTTURN REPORT 2018-19

The Committee received & considered the report from the HRA Service Accountant.

The HRA Service Accountant reported on the draft outturn position for the Housing Revenue Account for the 2018-19 financial year which had been utilised in the production of the statutory account for audit and subsequent approval by this Committee. The HRA Service Accountant reported details of the more significant year-end variances compared to the current budget for 2018-19.

A Member raised his concerns regarding the length on time it was taking for works required for the replacement of concrete canopies as this was a dangerous and could be an accident waiting to happen.

A Member requested that in future, the Supervision & Management Budget and outturn figures be shown separately to indicate whether value for money was being achieved. The Finance director agreed to look into this matter for future reports.

RESOLVED:-

(i) That the Committee approve the outturn position for the Housing Revenue Account for 2018-19 as included in the report and appendices,

(ii) That the Committee approve the updated 2018-19 HRA revenue and expenditure budget as detailed at Appendix C; and

(iii) That the Committee approve the updated 2018-19 HRA capital programme and associated financing as detailed within the report and at Appendix D.

7 PERFORMANCE REPORT Q4 2018-2019

The Committee received and considered the report from the Housing Transformation Manager.

The Housing Transformation Manager reported the salient areas of the performance data from the Housing Department for Quarter 4 of 2018-19.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee note the report.

8 PROPERTY RENTAL COMPANY

The Committee received & considered the report from the Strategic Director.

The Strategic Director reported that the Council was keen to establish a company which could hold residential properties which it could let. Equinox Enterprises was not currently established to undertake this function and the Council was seeking to establish a "sister" company to Equinox Enterprises. This would enable Equinox Enterprises which was wholly owned by the Council to hold rental properties and it would then seek to engage a letting agent to undertake the day to day tenancy management.

The Strategic Director reported that the Policy & Resources Committee had already agreed a mechanism through which the Council would purchase the properties which was set out in the Acquisitions & Disposals policy agreed at Committee in March 2019. An initial £2m capital budget was also agreed which would provide an initial tranche of funding for the new company to purchase the properties.

The Strategic Director reported that the Council had sought independent legal advice from nplaw and Trowers Hamblins who had considerable experience advising local authorities in setting up their own property rental companies.

Establishing the new company as a "sister" company to Equinox ensured it was legally compliant and the more tax efficient vehicle to hold the properties.

The Strategic Director requested that the Committee refer the report onto Full Council for consideration and approval on 11 July 2019.

A Member reported that he felt that this was a good proposal but it should be the aim of the Council to build good quality houses at future phases of East Wood for rent. The Strategic Director reported that a mixture of different tenures would be considered for Phase 2 at East Wood and a report would come to Committee in the Autumn for Member input.

RESOLVED:-

(i) That Members consider the scope and strategic objectives of the Property Rental Company contained in this report and that these be incorporated within the Equinox Enterprises business plan,

(ii) That Members consider that a "sister" company to Equinox Enterprises be established to hold rental properties,

(iii) That Members consider the appointment of the existing Directors of Equinox Enterprises as the Directors of Equinox of the new property Rental Company,

(iv) To delegate authority to the Council's Strategic Director who, in conjunction with the Monitoring Officer, would establish the new company and engage a letting partner to undertake tenancy management for the rental properties; and

(v) That the Committee refer the report onto Full Council for consideration and approval.

9 RIGHT TO BUY

The Committee received and considered the report from the Housing Director.

The Housing Director reported that the Right to Buy had allowed many tenants to purchase their home with sales increasing over the last few years to the current peak of 50 sales in 2018/19. The impact of these sales on the Council was an ongoing reduction in the number of homes owned and managed and consequential negative impact on the Council's ability to meet housing needs.

The Housing Director reported that as a consequence of the 97 sales across 2017/18 and 2018/19, the Council had accumulated £2,063,993 of retained receipts to part fund the costs of directly replacing sold homes in its own stock or to provide as grants to Registered Providers to deliver new homes over the next three years. Across 2017/18 and 2018/19, the spend of retained receipts

received in 2014/15 and 2015/16 resulted in 13 new homes being built or acquired.

The Housing Director reported that whilst the use of retained receipts was targeted at homes for which there was the greatest housing need, the ability to acquire larger or adaptable homes was being constrained by the current limit on the maximum price which could be paid for an acquisition. It was therefore recommended that the Council increased the price limit for acquisitions of homes with 4 or more bedrooms and for homes which were adapted or could be adapted to meet the specific need or adaptable and accessible homes.

RESOLVED:-

(i) That the Committee note the report and approve the following variations to the Use of Retained Receipts Policy:

- To introduce a new price limit of £350,000 for acquisitions of homes which will meet specific needs for adapted or adaptable homes and for the acquisition of homes with 4 or more bedrooms.
- To amend the payback period for all acquisitions for up to 40 years.

10 PERIOD POVERTY

The Committee received and considered the report from the Strategic Director.

The Strategic Director reported that a briefing paper was circulated to all Members on 15 February 2019 and this report provided an update on the progress of the project which started in March 2019. The Council was providing distribution points for the free items at Greyfriars House, Comeunity and MESH Neighbourhood offices. The Council had designed and printed vouchers, posters and distribution bags. However, having received feedback regarding the distribution bags, an alternative product would now be sourced.

The Strategic Director reported that to date, £213 had been used to fund the production of posters, vouchers, leaflet holders and bags. £297 had been used to bulk purchase sanitary products. The Council would provide up to a maximum of £5000 to support the project if additional demand was identified by the distribution partners during 2019/20.

A Member reported that he had received negative feedback from service users regarding the poor quality of the products provided and the inappropriate bag which was not discreet enough. A Member responded that in local schools, sanitary products were distributed in brown paper bags and suggested that the

Council should do the same.

A Member reported that she was disappointed that interested Councillors had not been consulted in the purchase of sanitary products to ensure they were appropriate and of good quality.

The Strategic Director agreed to provide Members with a quarterly update report via email.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee note the work of the Tricky Period project in response to the Council motion and note the concerns of the quality and range of sanitary products currently offered.

11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman reported that there was no other business being of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

12 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC

The meeting ended at: 20:20