

Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee

Minutes

Thursday, 22 June 2017 at 18:30

PRESENT:

Councillor Grant (in the Chair); Councillors, Bensly, Bird, Flaxman-Taylor, Mavroudis, Pratt, Wainwright, Walch, Waters-Bunn and Williamson.

Councillor Lawn attended as a substitute for Councillor M Coleman.

Mr R Read (Director of Housing & Neighbourhoods), Mr T Chaplin (Group Manager, Housing Services), Mrs V George (Group Manager, Housing Health & Wellbeing), Mrs K Sly (Section 151 Officer), Mrs J Bowgen (Housing Business & Housing Finance), Mrs E Hamilton (Leaseholder Consultant), Mr G Bedford (Development & Investment Manager) & Mrs C Webb (Member Services Officer).

Debbie Wildridge (Head of CLT, CLT East).

Mr R Oliver (Asset Manager, GY Norse)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Coleman.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman declared a personal interest in Item 6 as he was involved in setting up a CLT in Hopton & Lothingland and in Item 11 as he was a Sentinel Board member.

Councillor Walch declared a personal interest in Item 11 as he was a member of the Wellesley Road Working Group.

Councillor Williamson declared a personal interest in Item 11 as he was a Sentinel Board member.

However, in accordance with the Council's constitution they were allowed to both speak and vote on the items.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2017 were confirmed.

4 MATTERS ARISING

With regard to minute number 7, Voluntary Sector Grants, a Member asked why the item had been omitted from the Forward Plan and the agenda. The Director of Housing & Neighbourhoods explained that the report would need to go to Audit & Risk Committee first on 10 July 2017 and then be reported to this Committee on 27 July 2017.

5 FORWARD PLAN - HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

The Committee received & considered the Forward Plan.

A Member reported his concerns regarding the proposed cuts to the Sheltered Housing Warden Service proposed for 2018/19 and asked for the item to be included on the Forward Plan. The Director of Housing & Neighbourhoods reported that this would be picked up under the umbrella of Building Resilient Lives which was a standing agenda item.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the Forward Plan.

6 COMMUNITY LED HOUSING - BACKGROUND REPORT

Debbie Wildridge, Community Land Trust (East) gave a presentation to the Committee regarding Community Led Housing.

A Member reported that he was unsure how this initiative would work in the Borough which was in dire need of good quality homes for rent. Debbie Wildridge reported that CLT houses would be owned by the community in perpetuity and were not subject to Right to Buy. The viability of the scheme was dependant on the value of the land, the type of property built and the agreed pricing scheme, for example shared ownership.

The Chairman thanked Debbie Wildridge for her informative presentation.

7 FIRE RISK

The Committee received and considered the report from Richard Oliver, Asset Manager, Great Yarmouth Norse, which detailed our response to the Department for Communities & Local Government's request to check fire safety, as well as addressing initial enquiries regarding GYBC's residential asset portfolio, following the recent devastating fire at Grenfell Tower in Kensington, London which raised the concern of the risk of fire to our tenants.

Richard Oliver reported that no recommendations were currently being made; however, as GYN sought to better understand the causes and risks of fire in GYBC properties, recommendations might be included as part of any future Asset management Strategy.

The Chairman asked if all Council owned flats contained smoke alarms. Mr Oliver reported that all flats contained fire alarms within the flats, but not within the communal areas.

A Member was concerned regarding the new cladding on the outside of Havenbridge House, which looked similar to that which had been installed on Grenfell Tower, as a number of local residents worked in the building. The Chairman reported that this was the responsibility of the owners of the building, and not the Council, but that he would ask Building Control and report back to the Member.

A Member raised concerns regarding cavity walls in kitchens of flats built in the 1970's, for example, Magnolia Green and Pine Green. The cavity walls behind where the cookers had once stood had not been sealed with fire resistant materials when they had been refitted which could lead to a "chimney effect"

from one flat to another if a fire broke out. The Member was also concerned with the provision of fire doors in the flatted areas of Pine Green. Mr Oliver agreed to look into these concerns and report back to the Member concerned.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report.

8 LEASEHOLD SERVICE CHARGES

The Committee received & considered the report from the Group Manager, Housing Services which provided details on the legal background and procedures for raising annual service charges and further charges for major works to leasehold properties within the Council's housing stock.

A Member asked whether a Leaseholder Handbook would be produced for leaseholders detailing all the relevant legislation. The Group Manager, Housing Services, reported that once the policy had been adopted that it was envisaged that a handbook would be available for leaseholders towards the end of the year.

A Member reported that it was imperative that the Council could prove to leaseholders that they received value for money for any maintenance undertaken. The Chairman reported that the Council charged a management fee to leaseholders of 15% (10% for re-roofing of properties), which was lower than the national recommended fee of 20%, which was exclusive of VAT.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report.

9 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - OUTTURN 2016-17

The Committee received and considered the report from the Housing Business and Finance Manager which set out the outturn position of the Housing Revenue Account 2016-17, which was subject to Audit review and would be completed in September 2017.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report.

10 HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS PERFORMANCE MEASURES 2016/2017

The Committee received and considered the report from the Group Manager, Housing Services which detailed Housing & Neighbourhoods Performance Measures for 2016/17.

The Group Manager, Housing Services highlighted performance measure HN04, GYCH Rent Collection Rate, and that he was confident that tenant arrears collection figures would improve.

A Member highlighted performance measure HN06, Average Time to Re-let Local Authority Housing as he felt that a turn around time of 54 days was too high. The Group Manager, Housing Services reported that it was hoped to drive this figure down by the end of the year.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report.

11 BUILDING RESILIENT LIVES

The Committee received & considered the report from the Group Manager, Housing Health & Wellbeing which provided an update on the building Resilient Lives work, in particular, the development of the Locality Investment Proposal Matrix, which Norfolk County Council asked District Councils or other lead locality organisations to complete in partnership.

The Director of Housing & Neighbourhoods reported that with regard to all the individual funding pots available across the County, the Council was joining all the dots up, unfortunately, other County organisations were not.

Members reported that they were concerned that vulnerable tenants would suffer as a result of the proposed funding cuts and that 544 people totally relied on sheltered housing support, as they had no family support to fall back on. This would ultimately put a greater strain on the James Paget Hospital and the NHS.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report.

12 WELLESLEY RECREATION GROUND

The Committee received and considered the report from the Neighbourhood Manager.

The Director of Housing & Neighbourhoods reported the current issues and options for the future development and operation of the Wellesley Road Recreation Ground. However, there was an expectation that the Council would have to provide funding for this once in a lifetime opportunity.

The Director of Housing & Neighbourhoods reported that one of the options would be to offer trust management as a way forward for the Wellesley and this could be undertaken by Sentinel Leisure Trust which managed outdoor sporting facilities in Waveney. There was also a possibility of linking football with job skills and training which was an exciting prospect.

A Member reported that the GYSLT was sitting on £400k of funds and suggested that some of this could be re-directed to this project as match funding. The Director of Housing & Neighbourhoods reported that the Trust had been written to on this matter.

Councillor Walch queried paragraph 2.4 of the report and asked for assurance that Big Lottery programme funding, if awarded in 2007, had not been spent as a result of the Youth Club disbanding, and whether the money would be available for use on this project. The Director of Housing & Neighbourhoods reported that he would look in to the matter and report back to the Member directly.

Members were in agreement that a cohesive scheme for sports provision in the Borough was required and that they supported this project.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee consider the content outlined in the report and approve the development of a full business case for the site, to include options around site management arrangements to be considered at a future Committee; and note that the business case may lead to a proposal to the capital programme for 2018/19 for Council match-funding to the scheme.

13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

14 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC

The meeting ended at: 20:10