

Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee

Minutes

Thursday, 25 July 2019 at 18:30

PRESENT:

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

Councillor Borg attended as a substitute for Councillor Williamson.

Councillor P Hammond attended as a substitute for Councillor Cameron.

Councillor Annison attended as a substitute for Councillor Hacon.

Mrs K Watts (Strategic Director), Mrs N Turner (Housing Director), Mrs J Beck (Head of Housing and Asset Management), Mr A Nicholls (Head of Planning and Growth, Mrs V George (Independent Living Services Manager), Mrs A Nugent (HRA Income Service Manager), Mrs C Webb (Executive Services Officer), Mrs Ria Frosdick (Executive Services Officer)

Mr G Hollingdale (Managing Director GYN)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cameron, Hacon and Williamson.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Wainwright declared a personal interest in item 9 GYN Annual Business Plan 2019/20 and Annual Report 2018/19 as he is member of the GYBS Liaison Board. However, in accordance with the Council's constitution was allowed to speak and vote on the matter.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 20 June 2019 were confirmed.

4 FORWARD PLAN

The committee received and considered the Forward Plan. There were no further comments.

5 GYN ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2019-20 AND ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

The Managing Director of GYN reported that GYN as the Council's Joint Venture partner for housing repairs, maintenance and asset management produce an Annual Business Plan outlining financial performance, five year business plan, key business aims, risk management and governance arrangements.

The Annual Business Plan for 2019/20 is in a format that reflects the Norse Group corporate standard and has been approved by the GYN Liaison Board.

The Annual Report 2018/19 outlines performance (financial & operational), development and delivery as well as setting out values, corporate strategy and future objectives.

GYN is now in its 5th year of operation and continues to grow in respect of the services it delivers and turnover, anticipated to be £15,970,776 in 2019/20 with a budgeted profit share of £206,875.

The Annual Report for 2018/19 shows GYN has continued to make significant improvements, particularly in the areas of performance and financial management.

Value for money, customer service, improving the standard and conditions of the housing assets and implementing new and improved ways of working to reduce costs and improve efficiencies remain key areas of focus for GYN. Work to improve Strategic and Operational issues impacting on GYN and GYBC continue through the joint Improvement Group.

A Member reported that damp problems in tenants homes were taking an eternity to sort out. The canopies over front doors were also a major concern for him as it would only be a matter of time before one fell down and injured someone. He understood that this repair was tied in with roofing but this issue should be treated as a matter of urgency. He further reported that tenants who had made improvements to their kitchens were being penalised by being moved to the bottom of the kitchen replacement programme and this was most unfair.

A Member reported that window and door replacements were being carried out too quickly resulting in shoddy workmanship and queried whether these should be checked by the Building Inspector before being signed off.

The replacement timetable for boilers was also questioned. The Managing Director GYN reported that boilers were not necessarily replaced on a like for like basis, for example, some boilers were now being replaced by air source heat pumps. The Chairman reported it would be good if the Council was in a position to install hydrogen boilers which were much more energy efficient.

A Member asked in regards to customer satisfaction survey, following the completion of a repair, what was the percentage figure a representation of. The Managing Director GYN reported it was a 10% sample.

Another Member asked whether we were breaking the law if we were unable to gain access to a Council property to undertake the gas safety check. The Head of Property and Asset Management reported that we contacted tenants on a 11 month cycle to give ourselves enough time to access the property before the year end was out. We would try 3 times to access the property and if this failed we would undertake a legal process and/or enforcement action prior to the current gas certificate expiring.

A Member asked for clarification as to whether GYN still operated an apprenticeship scheme. The Managing Director GYN reported that they currently have 3 apprentices as 1 had qualified and been offered a full time position.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee note the report.

6 REVISED PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ADAPTATION AND IMPROVEMENT POLICY

The committee received and considered the report from the Independent Living Service Manager.

The Independent Living Service Manager reported that the policy has been updated to reflect the practical delivery of the mandatory and discretionary assistance the Council makes available to vulnerable residents to support well-being and independence. The intention is for these schemes to be rolled out across the rest of Norfolk, supported by the relevant District Councils and Clinical Commissioning Groups.

Housing has for some time been a Cinderella Service to Health and Social Care. However, there is now a wealth of research and a growing understanding of the vital role housing plays in supporting a person's health and well-being. Locally this is being borne out by the innovative collaborative work the Council is doing with Health & Social Care developing schemes such as Healthy Homes Assistance and District Direct.

The revised Policy and proposal to utilise the Healthy Homes capital budget would only strengthen the assistance available to the boroughs residents.

Great Yarmouth Borough Council's policy sets out the:

- legislation governing the assistance available,
- national and local policy context,
- type of assistance available to applicants (both mandatory and discretionary)
- eligibility criteria for assistance; and the
- capital resource available to deliver the various types of assistance.

The Independent Living Service Manager ask that committee approve the virement of the £400,000 capital budget for Healthy Homes to create a £250,000 budget to fund discretionary disabled facilities (DFG) grants, top up grants and provide a £150,000 budget to fund discretionary DFG top up loans to support the equity loan offer to residents as outlined in Appendices 2 and 4 of the Policy.

A Member queried if the Discretionary Forget-Me-Not Grant would be means tested and what would happen should the person need to move due to care needs. The Independent Living Service Manager confirmed it is not means tested and that if someone moves due to care needs then this will be taken into consideration.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing & Neighbourhoods Committee:-

- Approve the Private Sector Housing Adaptation and Improvement.
- Approve the use of the £400,000 budget for Healthy Homes (sitting in earmarked reserves) to create a £250,000 budget to fund discretionary disabled facilities (DFG) grants top up grants and provide a £150,000 budget to fund discretionary DFG top up loans to support the loan offer to residents as outlined in Appendices 2 and 4 of the Policy.

7 GYBC RIGHT TO BUY POLICY

The committee received and considered the report from the HRA Income Service Manager.

The HRA Income Service Manager reported that it is good practice to produce a Right to Buy Policy which provides guidance for applicants on the Right to Buy process, provides information on where discretion can be exercised and by whom and sets out the approach of the Council to the prevention of Right to Buy fraud.

In January 2019 an Audit Inspection within the service area recommended a Right to Buy policy to be implemented.

The policy for consideration brings together current practice and provides a protocol for the handling of Right to Buy applications, including discretionary decisions.

A Member asked for confirmation of what happens following the 28 days cancellation period and whether they can reapply. It was confirmed they can reapply again unless it was denied for specific reasons.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing & Neighbourhoods Committee approve the Right to Buy Policy and delegates authority to the Housing Director and HRA Income Service Manager for discretionary matters.

8 GREAT YARMOUTH BOROUGH COUNCIL TENANCY POLICY

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

A new Tenancy Policy for the Council's housing stock has been produced which combines the previous Tenancy Policy and Introductory Tenancy Policy to create a single document setting out the Council's approach to the grant and management of tenancies as well as succession and mutual exchanges.

The new Tenancy Policy merges the existing Tenancy Policy and Introductory Tenancy Policy and a number of minor amendments have been made to aid clarity. There are two significant differences between the existing policies and the proposed new one:

- Introduction of the ability to grant fixed term secure tenancies following an Introductory Tenancy in some limited cases.
- Clarification of when the Council will grant a new sole tenancy to a former joint tenancy.

A Member asked for clarification as to what happens at the end of a fixed term tenancy. It was confirmed that tenancies would be issued for 5 years and then for a review to take place to establish if the need was there to warrant an extension or whether assistance is required to try and find alternative accommodation.

A Member asked for clarification in relation to adapted properties and the process should the person requiring the adaptations pass away and would their partner be expected to move. It was confirmed that each case would be looked at individually but as we have a long waiting list of people requiring adapted homes, if the person remaining in the property does not require it then alternative accommodation may be sought for them. Each case will be looked at individually.

A Member reported that she was pleased that support is being offered to tenants and thanked the officers for their work.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing & Neighbourhoods Committee approve the Tenancy Policy and delegate authority to the Housing Director and Tenancy Services Manager for discretionary matters set out in the policy.

The committee received and considered the report from the Head of Housing and Growth.

The Head of Housing and Growth reported that increasing the delivery of housing across the country has been a key aim for all recent national governments. For many years, housing delivery has been significantly lower than most estimates of housing need, across all tenures of housing (market and affordable).

The Government's aim is to see housing delivery across England reach 300,000 per year by the mid-2020s. As part of this, it introduced a new national formula to calculate the minimum housing need for each local authority area. The formula takes household growth projections for 10 years as its starting point, and then adjusts to take account of local housing affordability – broadly, the less affordable average house prices are in relation to average local earnings, the higher the “adjustment factor” is applied to housing need (i.e. it adds more houses to the total need). Those authorities with a relatively recent Local Plan do not yet need to use the new national formula, but others do.

RESOLVED:

That Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee:

- (i) Notes that the Council has not met the national Housing Delivery Test for the period 2015/16-2017/18 and so needs to prepare and publish a Housing Action Plan by 16th August 2019
- (ii) Notes that the Council will also not meet the next Housing Delivery Test (for the period 2016/17-2018/19) and so will need to monitor and update the Housing Action Plan in due course
- (iii) Notes and agrees that sections 2-4 of this report will form the basis of the contents of the Council's emerging Housing Action Plan
- (iv) Notes that officers will complete the Housing Action Plan and will keep members updated on the progress of the measures.

10 UPDATE ON EMPTY HOMES POLICY AND TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION REQUIREMENT

The Housing Director report provides a summary of progress against the delivery of the Empty Homes Policy and seeks approval to vire some of the approved budget to fund the purchase of two properties for use as temporary accommodation.

A Member asked when we buy properties for temporary accommodation, do we look at where we buy them and are Ward Councillors consulted, in case of potential issues which the Councillors could raise. The Housing Director

responded that we look to purchase them either in Great Yarmouth town centre or central Gorleston. The Housing Director reported that she is happy to consult Ward Members going forward.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing & Neighbourhoods Committee:

- (i) Note the position on delivery of the Loan Scheme and Invest and Lease Scheme.
- (ii) Request a further update on progress against the delivery of the Empty Homes Policy in 6 months.
- (iii) Approve the virement of up to £172,900 from the Empty Homes budget to fund the provision of Temporary Accommodation as detailed in the report.

11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

12 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part I of Schedule 12(A) of the said Act."

13 GYN LIAISON BOARD MINUTES

(Confidential Minute on this Item)

The meeting ended at: 19:35