

Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee

Minutes

Monday, 16 December 2019 at 18:30

PRESENT:

Councillor Grant (in the Chair); Councillors Candon, Flaxman-Taylor, D Hammond, Hacon, Martin, Talbot, Smith-Clare and Wainwright.

Councillor Wells attended as a substitute for Councillor Cameron.

Councillor P Hammond attended as a substitute for Councillor Galer.

Councillor Waters-Bunn attended as a substitute for Councillor Williamson.

Councillors Jeal & Robinson-Payne attended as observers.

Mrs N Turner (Director of Housing), Mr A Moore (Housing Growth Manager), Ms H Notcutt (Community Development Manager) & Mrs C Webb (Executive Services Officer).

Ms A Ellis (Head of Strategic Property Services, GYN).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cameron, Galer & Williamson.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest declared at the meeting.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November were confirmed.

4 MATTERS ARISING

Councillor Talbot asked whether the times of the out of hours service operated by the CCG had been confirmed.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received and considered the Forward Plan.

The Chairman reported that item no. 14 referred to the Traveller's Site at Gapton Hall.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee note the Forward Plan.

6 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

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

The Housing Director gave a presentation to the Committee which highlighted the salient points contained within her report. A new proposed Housing Allocations Scheme had been produced to replace the current scheme which was no longer meeting the requirements of the Council. The new scheme had a number of differences to the existing scheme which were designed to improve the allocation process and address current issues of low demand properties. To maximise the effective use of the affordable housing stock, the scheme included a transfer quota to increase the number of tenants who were able to move through the scheme.

Councillor Wainwright asked for clarification regarding tenants who had previously bought their Council property through the Right to Buy scheme and how the new Housing Allocations Policy would encompass them.

Councillor Wells asked for clarification of the Right to Acquire scheme.

Councillor Waters-Bunn requested that perspective tenants were made aware of the reality of the social housing situation in the Borough as there was far, far more demand than supply of properties available. Councillor Jeal reported that the Government must allow Council's to build social housing properties as a matter of urgency.

Councillor Smith-Clare welcomed the flexibility allotted to tenants who had been in rent arrears in the part as this could be as a result of many causes, for example, relationship breakdown or mental health issues.

Councillor Candon proposed an amendment (which was seconded by Councillor P Hammond) that in regard to page 49, the paragraph to read as follows:-

- Applicants who live in the borough of Great Yarmouth and have done so for a period of 3 out of the last 5 years.

The Chairman requested that Housing Department staff assist the public to complete the online Housing Register application form either face to face or over the telephone if they were experiencing difficulties or had special need for support. Therefore, Councillor Wainwright referred to page 37 of the report and asked that the wording be changed to as follows:-

- Whilst all applicants will be expected to apply online to join the Housing Register, for applicants for which there is a special need for support, the Council will assist the applicant to apply and provide information in different formats.

Councillor Waters-Bunn reported that she felt that a 24 hour window to accept a tenancy was too short. The Chairman asked the Housing Director to keep a watching brief on this point.

Councillor Wainwright highlighted that the policy made no reference to the Housing Appeals Committee. The Housing Director agreed to check the terms of reference for the Housing Appeals Committee and to circulate the document to Committee members.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee recommends that Full Council approves and adopts the Housing Allocations Scheme with the amendments approved at the meeting.

7 VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE GRANT PROCESS 2020/21

The Committee received and considered the report from the Community Development Manager.

The Community Development Manager reported that in 2019-20, the Council had provided annual funding of £99,500 for voluntary, community & social enterprise grants (£54k of this fund was allocated through the GYBC General Fund with the remaining £45.5k allocated from the Housing Revenue Account). In 2019-20, the Council awarded a one year grant which started in April 2019 and will cease at the end of March 2020. The Council now needed to agree the process for commissioning the grants from April 2020 and the Community Development Manager outlined two possible options to the Committee to achieve this aim.

The Community Development Manager reported that there was a risk in consideration of the current time frame available for Option 2, if a commissioning process commenced in January 2020, this would impact on potential continuity of staff and delivery currently funded through these grants. This could mean a disruption in service delivery and undermining the continuity of support to local residents.

Councillor Wainwright reported that Option 1 should be chosen on the proviso that a new commissioning process (i.e. Option 2) was put in place starting in June 2020 as the Council had left this too late in the day once again and this was unacceptable.

Councillor Waters-Bunn reported that she was infuriated by this report as last year, at Full Council, Councillors had been assured that a new commissioning process would be undertaken during 2019. The application process in 2019 had been flawed as the portal had only operated for 8 days out of the 10 day application window and several smaller charities had missed out on the opportunity of applying for this grant funding.

Councillor Hacon reported that she had found the whole commissioning process to be wrong and was also unhappy with the interim six monthly monitoring process. Councillor Hacon requested that the Council reconsider the re-introduction of the Councillor Ward Budget scheme which enabled Councillor's to help smaller charities in their wards.

Councillor Wainwright proposed that Option 1 be implemented on the proviso that Option 2 be undertaken starting June 2020. This motion was seconded by Councillor Smith-Clare but was lost at the vote.

The Chairman proposed that Option 2 be implemented but that a paper application process be implemented and/or assistance offered in completing the application form on the portal. This motion was seconded by Councillor Candon.

The Housing Director reported that a special Committee could be held in March 2020 to ratify the outcome of the commissioning process and that all current grant recipients would be notified before Christmas of the Committee's decision.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee agree that Option 2 be implemented for delivering community and voluntary sector grants in 2020-21 with the amendment approved at the meeting and that the Committee forward the names of four Committee Members to the Community Development Manager to sit on the Grants Panel.

8 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered the Housing Quarter 2 Performance Report 2019-20 from the Housing Transformation Manager.

The Housing Director reported the salient areas of the report to the Committee.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee note the Housing Quarter 2 Performance Report 2019-20.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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