



**GREAT YARMOUTH**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee

## Minutes

Thursday, 10 November 2022 at 18:30

**PRESENT :**

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

Councillor Wells attended as an observer for item 6.

**Also in attendance were:**

Kate Blakemore (Strategic Director); Lorna Snow (Financial Services Manager); Nicola Turner (Housing Director), Tanya Rayner (Housing Options Service Manager); Nick Fountain, (Principal Strategic Planner); Chris Furlong (Director of Housing Assets), Chloe Ingram (Communications and Media Officer), Michael Brett (IT Services); Terhi Koomson (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Sammy Wintle (Corporate Services Manager).

### **01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence received.

## **02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Grant declared a personal interest in Item 9 as he had facilitated and accommodated some temporary housing.

## **03 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 3 October 2022 were confirmed.

## **04 MATTERS ARISING**

Councillor Wainwright referred to his previous question whereby he has asked when the Asset Management Strategy would be brought to the Committee. The Director of Housing Assets confirmed that this had been renamed Housing Investment Strategy and would be brought to the Committee in March following an all Member briefing on the subject.

Councillor Wainwright referred to page 3 of the minutes and advised that he was still seeking clarification if play equipment owned by Parish Council were still maintained by GYBC. The Strategic Director advised that she would take this matter away and look into it.

**ACTION : The Strategic Director to seek clarity around play equipment owned by Parish Council and whether these were still maintained by GYBC.**

Councillor Williamson asked if actions that were agreed at the meeting could be included within the minutes, this was confirmed and the Corporate Services Manager advised that this could be rolled out across all Committees.

**ACTION : All actions agreed at Committees to be included within the minutes.**

## **05 FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee received and noted the contents of the Forward Plan.

## **06 OPEN SPACE NEEDS EVIDENCE**

Members received and considered the Principal Strategic Planner's report which provided Members with an update on the Open Space Needs Assessment and The Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy following the consultation. The Principal

Strategic Planner confirmed the changes that had been made to the final draft and outlined the recommendations that the Committee were being asked to consider.

Councillor Galer asked Members to draw their attention to page 113 of the report which referred to a play facility at Ryelands Hemsby, a significantly small play area targeted for the smaller years children, he therefore commented that he did not feel that future development at this site was the best way to resolve the deficit of play space in the area.

Councillor Williamson sought clarification regarding the Claydon Ward allotments being in surplus, as he advised that the provision in the area had been reducing in recent years and he wondered if up to date maps had been used. The Principal Strategic Planner confirmed that the survey undertaken had been based on the current provision and all allotment providers were contacted as part of supply/demand assessment.

Councillor Smith-Clare commented that the report did not appear to include all sports, he advised that he had been made aware of the local Petanque team who had been performing well nationally and therefore felt that this should be included. The Principal Strategic Planner advised that this sport had not been included in the brief and at this stage would not be possible to re visit. The Strategic Director asked Councillor Smith-Clare to forward the details of the team to her so that they could be contacted to establish their potential requirements.

**Action : Councillor Smith-Clare to provide Kate Blakemore with the details of the Petanque team, with contact to be made by GYBC to ascertain their potential requirements.**

The Chairman thanked the Principal Strategic Planner for his report and hoped that this would allow for some more sports within the Borough.

RESOLVED :

That Committee endorses the content and recommendations to adopt :-

1. The Open Space Needs Assessment
2. The Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy.

## **07 2022/23 PERIOD 6 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the HRA Service Accountant's report which asked Members to consider the 2022/23 Housing Revenue and Capital Budget monitoring position at the end of period 6.

The Financial Services Manager advised that the report presented the period 6 budget monitoring position for the Housing Revenue Account.

The detail of the report shows a revised 2022/23 forecast surplus of £0.134m, from a currently budgeted forecast deficit of £3.129m, resulting in a favourable movement of £3.263m. However, there are further in-year budget pressures that have not yet been allocated at a service level, namely the outstanding agreement of the 2022/23 pay award and the impact of increases to energy and transport costs. After allowing for direct employee costs alone, this will produce a forecast gap in the current year of

£116k.

The HRA forecast position is also facing increasing pressures of inflationary costs, for example, utility costs and interest rate rises. Whilst some increases in utility costs were allowed for within the 2022/23 budget provision, the current level of increases have exceeded predictions for the financial year and could not have been envisaged. Utility costs for the Housing Revenue Account in 2021/22 totalled £242k. The forecast position for 2022/23 has been partly adjusted for some anticipated increase in utility costs in the main areas. Overall costs will be monitored closely, and forecasts updated as the year progresses.

Current revenue under spends within the service will be utilised to accelerate further work maintaining the Councils responsibilities, to include working with GYN, ensuring best practices, to address the Councils compliance requirements and further develop procedures. The capital financing has been revised following the increased number of Right to Buy (RTB) sale completions year to date. As a result of increased completions, increased RTB receipts are available to fund the current years capital programme, reducing the requirement of revenue to finance capital.

It was reported that the overall position would continue to be monitored and used to inform the budget work for 2023/24.

Councillor Wainwright questioned why there were issues with the meeting of the acceptable Home Standards requirements when there was an apparent underspend in capital expenditure. The Director of Housing Assets confirmed that this was not necessarily an underspend, but that currently as the contracts are awarded yearly, the expenditure accelerated towards the year end. This annual top/start approach in managing contracts will be reviewed as part of the Asset Management Strategy and consideration will be given to benefits in awarding longer term contracts.

Councillor Wainwright further asked if any update had been received in reference to the Government consultation of setting rent levels for the budget year 2023/23. The Director of Housing Assets confirmed that no update or outcome had been received to date.

Councillor Jeal referred to section 3.7 of the report and considered this to be an fantastic project. However, he expressed his disappointment on the recent vandalism that occurred at the Middlegate Estate and commented that he felt there had been a lack of communication with the ward Councillors ahead of public communication. The Housing Director apologised for this and advised that she had hoped to speak to Ward Councillors prior to the press release being published however, this had been released before those conversations had taken place.

Councillor Grant and Williamson together with the Chairman highlighted that despite a number of previous requests, there still wasn't enough clarity and breakdown of the Supervision and Management costs detailed within the budget, the Financial Services Manager agreed to try to breakdown this area further and this would be sent round. The Chairman advised that she would bring this matter up at the GYN Board Meeting.

**ACTION : The Financial Services Manager to provide a breakdown of the £3.199M allocation for GYN within the supervision and Management finances.**

RESOLVED :

That Committee note the 2022/23 Housing revenue and capital budget monitoring

position as at the end of period 6.

## **08 COUNCIL HOUSING COMPLIANCE - SIX MONTHLY UPDATE AS AT END OF QUARTER 2**

Members received and considered the Director of Housing Asset's report which provided Members with a six-monthly compliance update in relation to the Council's housing service and its compliance with the Regulatory standard as set by the Regulator for Social Housing.

It was reported that the Council's compliance against the requirements of the five regulatory standards had not changed over the last six months with the key concern being the non compliance against the home standard. This standard related to the quality of homes provided and the delivery of a cost effective repairs and maintenance service and a service that meets all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of occupants in their homes.

Members were advised that a recent audit and fire safety management review had been undertaken and had resulted in concerns with regard to the Council meeting its statutory requirements to provide for the Health and Safety of the occupants of the homes that the Council let.

Some of the key concerns were as follows:-

- o Ensuring that Fire Risk Assessments are fit for purpose
- o the timely completion of fire safety remedial works
- o the timely completion of water hygiene remedial actions
- o the management of asbestos data
- o the frequency of EICR inspections
- o the overall management of compliance data

As a consequence of the above and in accordance with the guidance from the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH), the Council made a self-referral to the RSH for a potential breach of the Home Standard. On October 26th, the RSH published a Regulatory Notice that GYBC had indeed, failed to adhere to the requirements of the Homes Standard. The RSH recognised that the Council had developed a Compliance Improvement Plan to address the issues and as such, would not be taking any statutory action against the Council preferring to monitor the delivery of the plan only.

Based on the successful delivery of the Compliance Improvement Plan, Members were advised that it was anticipated that the Council would return to full compliance with the Homes Standard by May 2023. It was noted that the Committee would continue to receive updates on the progress with the action plan to ensure future compliance with the standards is met.

The Chairman asked with regard to the management of the Helpline that was set-up in response to the Regulatory Notice. The Director of Housing Assets confirmed that over the nine days, 33 calls had been received and were all resolved without escalation. It was felt that overall the communication plan with the residents over the issue had worked well.

Councillor Wainwright was pleased to note that there was an action plan, but commented that in his opinion the Council should have never allowed itself to be in this position in the first place.

Councillor Williamson agreed, and advised that he had highlighted issues in relation to poor quality of repairs for the past six years. He raised concern with regard to the fact that despite complaints from residents whenever they had received any satisfaction surveys, the service delivery had achieved 95% satisfactory.

Councillor Jeal noted that as they had a Selective Licensing scheme operating in the Nelson ward, some private landlords had highlighted the double standards ie; The Council requests certain standards from the private landlords, yet fail to meet the same themselves.

Councillors Price and Grant highlighted the difficulties in managing the GYN contract.

Councillor Candon requested that the full report relating to the Housing Standards be circulated and shared with all Members. The Chair agreed for this to be sent round to Members.

**ACTION : The Council House compliance report to be circulated to all Members**

Councillor Talbot requested more efforts to safeguard existing fittings in the properties should be considered as part of void works and secondly, that the main disrepair issue affecting many properties was mould, she commented that in her opinion the mould wash undertaken would only deal with the symptoms of mould and not the root cause of the problem.

The Director of Housing Assets confirmed that the void policy in relation to existing fittings within a the property was being looked at. He further confirmed that new working process was being implemented in relation to mould complaints, and that a specially trained officer was now carrying out inspections and follow-ups to ensure that issues are properly addressed.

Cllr Hammond highlighted the lack of a general handy person on the estates for small repairs as well as removals service. The Strategic Director confirmed this matter was being looked into.

Councillors Jeal, Price and Talbot all commented on issues relating to mould in the properties which was partly caused by poor ventilation. Councillor Galer asked if any training was available to residents in relation to managing of properties and issues relating to mould. The Director of Housing Assets confirmed this is not something done at present, but could be considered. Councillor Grant added that certainly in relation to older properties built in 50's/60's the approach with tackling mould needed to be re looked at from individual dwellings into looking at the building as a whole.

The Chair confirmed that following the self-referral to the RSH, conversations with GYN had taken place and thanked the Director of Housing Assets for all the work that had been completed and hoped that things would improve from here on.

**RESOLVED :**

That the Committee note the Director of Housing Asset's report.

## **09 HOMELESSNESS UPDATE AND TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION ACQUISITION**

Members received and considered the Housing Director's report that provided an update on temporary accommodation usage, current homelessness pressures and requested approval from Members to purchase 6 x 2-bedroom flats in order to increase the Council's portfolio of temporary accommodation.

Councillor Hammond raised some concern with regard to the lack of equipment that those placed into housing have when they first allocated. The Housing Director advised that for those households in temporary accommodation who did not have furniture when placed, their time in temporary accommodation provides time for them to gather the items required when allocated housing but commented that there was a need for a further look at the work between the Communities Team, the Tenancy Team, Registered Providers and the Private Landlords to ensure the residents have what is needed when they are offered a tenancy.

Councillor Talbot asked for confirmation if temporary storage was offered for belongings, this was confirmed.

Councillor Martin requested additional information with regard to the Section 21 Notices and the process that follows in assisting applicants as she felt that these notices were currently driving the increase in homeless applications. The Housing Director agreed to provide this.

### **Action : The Housing Director to provide guidance on the serving of Section 21 Notices**

Councillor Candon commented that he fully supported the report but further commented that in his opinion the cost of living crisis and the proposed plan to abolish s.21 notices in the future were the key drivers behind the high level of evictions from the private sector.

Councillor Williamson voiced his support for the report and confirmed this was right approach and hoped it would continue in the future.

Following an unanimous vote it was RESOLVED :

That the Committee :-

- (1) Approve the acquisition of 6 x 2-bedroom flats to increase the Council's Temporary Accommodation portfolio.
- (2) Recommend to Full Council the approval of the expenditure and borrowing set out at paragraph 1.3 of the Confidential Appendix.
- (3) Delegate decisions in relation to the acquisition of the properties in accordance with the Property Acquisitions and Disposals Policy to a Strategic Director and the Section 151 Officer.
- (4) Delegate decisions in relation to the works required on the properties

and applicable expenditure to to the Housing Director.

## **10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chairman wished to re-acknowledge her disappointment of the recent vandalism at the Middlegate Estate already referred to in the meeting. Councillor Jeal again raised his concern and commented that he hoped strong actions would be taken against those found to be guilty of the damage. The Strategic Director assured that all possible measures had been undertaken to identify the perpetrators and appropriate actions would follow. Members were advised that consideration was being given to the potential of CCTV within the area.

The meeting ended at: 19:45