



**GREAT YARMOUTH**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee

## Minutes

Thursday, 26 January 2023 at 18:30

**PRESENT:**

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

Also in attendance were:

Karen Sly (Finance Director), Nicola Turner (Housing Director), Chris Furlong (Director of Housing Assets), Justin Gibbs (Tenancy Services Manager), Jane Bowgen (Senior Accountant), Dave Zimmerling (IT Services), Christina Webb (Executive Services Officer), Rebekah Downie (Democratic Services Officer) and Terhi Koomson (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

### **01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Grant and Cllr Price.

### **02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interests.

### **03 MINUTES 10.11.22**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th November 2022 were confirmed.

### **04 MATTERS ARISING**

None.

### **05 FORWARD PLAN**

The Chair confirmed that the Members Briefing to update on Housing Compliance Report has been provisionally scheduled for 8th March and further details will be forwarded to Members in due course.

### **06 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET REPORT 2023-24**

The Committee received and considered Housing Revenue Account Budget 2023/24 report attached to the agenda pack. The report was presented by Senior Accountant Ms J Bowgen and sought approval for the 2023/24 Housing Revenue Account Budget, the Rent and Service Charge proposals for the 2023/24, along with the HRA Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2027/28. At the same time, it presented the latest revenue and capital forecasts for the current financial year and projections for the HRA covering the period 2023/24 to 2027/28. The budget and forecasts had been informed by a number of workstreams.

Cllrs Wainwright and Williamson advised the Chair that the Labour Councillors would abstain from debating the HRA budget as they had not yet had a budget briefing.

Following a vote it was RESOLVED:-

That the Committee agree and recommend to Council:

1. A capped increase to rents of 7%, as set out in the New Direction on the Rent Standard and Policy Statement for 2023/24;
2. The revenue budget for 2023/24, along with the forecast projections for the period up until 2027/28, including the extended borrowing to support the provision of additional HRA homes;
3. The Capital budget for the period 2023/24 to 2027/28;
4. The HRA Service charges for 2023/24;
5. An increase to the Repairs and maintenance budget of £584,000 for immediate Fire Risk Assessment and remedial works in 2022/23.

## 07 HOUSING TENANT INSIGHT UPDATE

The Committee received and considered a report providing a 6-month update on Tenant Insight surveys presented by Tenancy Services Manager Mr J Gibbs.

Transactional surveys are currently undertaken on Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), New Home, Tenancy Support, Tenancy Review Visits and Caretaking and Gardening. A total of 460 surveys were received during the first two quarters of 2022/23. A total satisfaction rate across all surveys was 83.15% compared to 85.80% in 2021/22. The report also gave more detailed 'spotlight' to survey results on ASB, New Home and Caretaking and Gardening. In total, 87.5% were satisfied with the way their ASB case was handled, 94% were satisfied with the experience of starting a tenancy with the Council and 74% of the respondents were satisfied with Caretaking and Gardening.

The Tenancy Services Manager confirmed that in the next quarter, two further surveys will be introduced. One on the Income Team to better understand the approach to visits and support provided by the team and the other on Asset Team, to understand the satisfaction levels on capital works including kitchen and bathroom upgrades, windows, doors and heating systems.

Cllr Williamson thanked for the report and found the survey results interesting but noted that overall response rate is low.

Cllr Candon agreed that response rate is low but was pleased to see that generally satisfaction rates were above target and up from the previous year.

Cllr Wells further noted that when only those that have used the service are being surveyed, the ones with the positive interaction are more likely to respond to the survey than those that had a bad experience. To counter that, he further asked if any random contact is made with those service users who have not responded.

Tenancy Services Manager Mr J Gibbs confirmed that these are transactional surveys given to those who have actually used a particular service. Only difference is the Caretaking and Gardening survey which is selective, and different streets and schemes are surveyed each month. The surveys are reviewed monthly, and any negative feedback is considered with the aim to improve service delivery. He thanked the Members for the feedback and agreed to take the points made into further consideration.

Cllr Martin asked clarity on New Homes survey and who qualifies for the decoration voucher adding it was important that individual need and vulnerabilities are considered and that every new tenant should be offered at least a 'clean blank canvas' especially as tenants often have a very short notice to move-in. Tenancy Services Manager confirmed that voucher is given if the existing decor is considered to need updating and Tenancy Support Officer also provides further assistance to those most vulnerable. Director of Housing, Mr C Furlong added that for Sheltered units additional support is offered and affordability is taken into consideration.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee note the Tenancy Insight report that provides an overview of the insight surveys Housing Services has undertaken for the period 1st April to 30

September 2022 (Quarter 1 & 2).

## **08 TENANT - LEASEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT UPDATE**

The members received and considered the Tenancy Services Manager Mr J Gibbs's report which provided an update on Tenant and Leaseholder engagement strategy. The Engagement Strategy and associated action plan was adopted by the Housing and Neighbourhood Committee in Nov 2021. Good progress has been made delivering on targeted areas across four objectives: Increasing Number of Conversations, Expanding Opportunities, Develop and Use Insight and Embedding the Engagement Approach.

In the last quarter, 36 new tenants/leaseholders have volunteered, and a total of 326 Area Voices are now engaged with the Council. There have been further engagement events, latest held in Bradwell which also gave an opportunity to provide advice and promote the use of the Love Clean Streets (LCS) Application to report service issues. Together with other partners, the team has also participated in the Anti-Social Behaviour Week and worked with residents to develop resolutions. Estate Newsletters have now been introduced to provide feedback on key issues and local improvements. Opportunities for engagement continue to be promoted and participation is encouraged in different ways. This includes small community consultations through a 'Let's Talk' approach. So far 28 of these approaches have been completed in the first two quarters compared to total of 17 in a whole year of 2021/22.

Participation with Insight surveys has increased with 460 surveys completed in the first two quarters compared to 133 in the same period last year. All survey data is regularly reviewed with Operational Management Team to embed improvements identified into service delivery. Housing Service is also currently undertaking a STAR survey to understand current perception of service delivery and to benchmark against other providers. The outcome results are due to be presented to the Committee towards end of March 2023. The work has also been done to increase website content to improve information and increase self-service options. Induction chats with new staff members have also been introduced and regular updates are also provided to staff on engagement activities.

The Tenancy Services Manager further confirmed that the future activities will include a Service Charge Review to consult with tenants and leaseholders on delivering a fairer and transparent charging system for gardening and caretaking, Sheltered Housing Review, Estate Walkabouts and Area Focus Groups to increase accountability and transparency about service delivered in local areas.

Cllr Wainwright asked if ward Councillors will be invited to the Estate Walkabouts and Area Focus Groups. The Tenancy Services Manager Justin Gibbs confirmed that Members will be invited and information on any local events will be circulated in good time. The aim is to get high engagement both from residents and the Councillors.

RESOLVED: -

The Committee note the report that provides an update on tenant/leaseholder engagement and progress towards delivering the Tenant/Leaseholder Engagement Strategy.

## **09 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Cllr Jeal noted that the new Allocations Policy is not on the forward plan and asked if it would be possible to get an update / briefing on the implementation of the policy.

Housing Director Mrs N Turner confirmed that the new allocations policy will go live on the 6th March. Current applicants who wish to retain their original application date need to submit their online application by 3rd March. All current applicants have been sent initial information letter followed by two reminder letters.

Cllrs Jeal, Talbot, Williamson and Wells asked clarity on what support is offered to applicants including IT access and how to ensure relevant medical information is obtained if old files are not transferred over to the new system. Housing Director assured the Members that extra support is provided to vulnerable applicants and IT access is made available in the Housing Office. Clear guidance has also been provided to all applicants in relation to submitting relevant and up-to-date medical information including guidance not to pay for any G.P. / medical letters.

Cllr Wainwright requested that an Allocations Policy update would be provided as soon as possible.

The Chair confirmed this would be arranged.

**ACTION:** Provide an Allocations Policy Briefing to all Members. (NT)

The meeting ended at: 19:20