

Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee

Minutes

Wednesday, 21 March 2018 at 18:30

PRESENT:

Councillor Grant (in the Chair); Councillors Bird, M Coleman, Hacon, Mavroudis, Pratt, Walch, Waters-Bunn & Williamson.

Councillor Annison attended as a substitute for Councillor Bensly.

Councillor A Grey attended as a substitute for Councillor Flaxman-Taylor.

Councillor Jeal attended as a substitute for Councillor Wainwright.

Mr N Shaw (Strategic Director), Mrs J Beck (Head of Property & Asset Management), Mrs V George (Head of Housing), Mr T Chaplin (Interim Deputy Head of Housing), Mrs A Nugent (Rent Manager), Ms D Lee (HRA Service Accountant) & Mrs C Webb (Senior Member Services Officer).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bensly, Cutting, Flaxman-Taylor & Wainwright.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest declared at the meeting.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2018 were confirmed.

4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the above minutes.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received & considered the Forward Plan.

A Member requested that a report be presented to Committee regarding options for charging mobility scooters safely in Sheltered Housing units and flatted areas. The Head of Housing agreed to add this to the Forward Plan.

6 WELLESLEY RECREATION GROUND - FEASIBILITY STUDY PROPOSALS

The Committee received & considered the report from the Strategic Director.

The Strategic Director reported that the Corporate Projects Group had identified this as a Corporate Project. From a leisure management perspective, the Wellesley Recreation Ground remained a significant cost to the Council. There were a number of opportunities which could be explored for the site including funding for a 3G pitch. Further funding opportunities from Heritage Lottery Fund, Sport England and Coastal Communities Fund could be considered and commercial investment opportunities could also be explored with the aim of bringing in additional investment into the site.

The Strategic Director reported that a feasibility study was required for the whole site which would provide Members with a range of options and outline costs which members could fully consider prior to moving the project forwards. Unfortunately, Sport England have no funding available to support this work strain due to a recent restructure of the organisation.

The Strategic Director reported that Ward Members had been directly engaged with this project but if a feasibility project is agreed, governance arrangements for this project would need to be strengthened by a small Member Working Group consisting of 5 elected Members (politically balanced: 3,1,1).

Councillor Williamson reported that the Football Association had indicated that they were looking to install a 3G pitch into the Yarmouth area and this had been omitted from the report. The Strategic Director reported that Members would need to decide how commercial they wanted this project to become.

RESOLVED:

(i) That funding of up to £25,0000 is allocated from the Council's Special Project's Reserve to fund a Feasibility Study for this project; and

(ii) That a Members Working Group consisting of 5 elected Members, politically balanced, is established to support this project.

7 RESPONSIVE REPAIRS

The Committee received & considered the report from the Head of Property & Asset Management.

The Head of Property & Asset Management reported that the Tenant's Handbook was clear regarding Tenant Repair responsibilities and repair recharges. The Head of Property & Asset Management reported the salient areas from a range of statistics based on the current service delivered by Community Housing Responsive Repairs and this data included information on the top 10 dwellings visited with these properties reporting and receiving between 14 and 40 jobs on average per year.

The Head of Property & Asset Management reported that a significant investment programme had been agreed for the housing stock and that all stock would be classed as Decent by the next Stock Condition survey in 2022. It was therefore essential, that as part of this process, the Council continued to review areas of the business which should incur a recharge as had been identified. This was not a change to the Tenancy Handbook but was a confirmation and verification of our position.

A Member asked for assurances that elderly and vulnerable tenants would be

continue to be assisted by the Responsive Repairs team. The Head of Property & Asset Management assured Members that elderly and vulnerable tenants would receive additional support.

A Member reported that if the Council expected certain standards from its tenants then the Council should reciprocate and at the moment the joint venture with GYN in regard to the replacement kitchens & bathroom programme was failing many tenants. The Strategic Director reported that the nature of the GYN joint venture was at the top of the Council's agenda and a fundamental review was planned for June.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the Responsive Repairs statistics for the period 30 March 2015 to 1 October 2017 confirming the policy of recharging for areas of the business identified as Tenant responsibility through The Tenants Handbook (page 11 refers).

8 LONG TERM EMPTY VOID PROPERTIES

The Committee received & considered the report from the Head of Property & Asset Management.

The Head of Property & Asset Management reported that a number of properties were currently classed as long term voids had been empty for between 12 months and ten years. The financial implications for the properties were significant and was one of the reasons why proposals had taken so long to formulate, however, there was a proven need/demand for these properties in the Borough. Costs were estimated costs and all works would be tendered to ensure best value was achieved.

The Head of Property & Asset Management reported that the budget for long term voids 2017/18 was £100k which was unspent and it was proposed to request that this was rolled forward to incorporate the £100k 2018/19 budget totalling £200k with additional funds utilised from the Major Void budget as required.

RESOLVED:

(i) To carry forward the 2017/18 budget to provide funding of £200k in the 2018/19 budget to undertake repair and redevelopment proposals as detailed on the identified properties; 17 West Road, Great Yarmouth, retain 1 bed bungalow, 30 Exmouth Road, Great Yarmouth, refurbish to provide 2 bed house, 2 Coastguard Cottages, Winterton, retain 3 bed house, 38 Admiralty Road, Great Yarmouth, conversion to 2 bed house, 54 Harboard Crescent, Great Yarmouth, conversion to 2 bed house and 103/104 Admiralty Road, Great Yarmouth, conversion of two properties to form one 6 bed house,

(ii) To utilise the major voids budget for any shortfall in funding,

(iii) With the approval of Committee, a full tendering process would commence if costs and works were in line with this report, refurbishments would commence, however, if tenders identified any increase in costs, information would come back to Committee for further consideration prior to works being undertaken; and

(iv) The Committee to agree that 103/104 Admiralty Road, Great Yarmouth, the conversion of two properties to form one six bed house would result in the loss of one property from the Council's housing stock.

9 COMMUNAL AERIAL BRIEFING NOTE

The Committee received & considered the briefing note from the Head of Property & Asset Management.

The Head of Property & Asset Management reported the contract for Community Housing Aerial provision and updated the Committee in relation to the current position.

The Strategic Director assured the Committee that the lack of review clauses and termination clauses in a contract had been a lesson learned and future long term contracts would not suffer the same fate.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report.

10 LEASEHOLDER MANAGEMENT & SERVICE CHARGE ARREARS POLICY

The Committee received & considered the report from the Rent Manager.

The Rent Manager reported the salient points of the two policies which covered leasehold management within the Housing Department and the collection of service charges from leaseholders.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee approve the Leaseholder Management Policy & the Leaseholder Service Charge Arrears Policy.

11 REVISED RENT INCOME AND ARREARS POLICY

The Committee received & considered the report from the Rent Manager.

The Rent Manager reported the introduction of a revised Rent Income & Arrears Policy which outlined the steps that the Council would take when collecting rent and other Housing Revenue Account (HRA) income from tenants.

A Member asked that the Council exert pressure on the Government to ensure that housing rent is paid direct to the landlord and not the claimant.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee approve the Rent Income & Arrears Policy.

12 HRA PERIOD 10 2017/18 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report from the HRA Service Accountant.

The HRA Service accountant reported the salient areas of the 2017/18 Housing Revenue Budget monitoring position as at the end of period 10.

A Member asked if Members would be allowed to have access to individual Stock Condition Survey reports to assist them when helping tenants to resolve housing issues.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report.

13 HOUSING & NEIGHBOURHOODS QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee received & noted the report from the Interim Deputy Head of Housing.

The Interim Deputy Head of Housing reported the salient areas of performance data from the Housing & Neighbourhoods Directorate for Quarter 3 of 2017/18.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the report.

14 REVIEW OF HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Committee received & noted the report from the Head of Housing.

The Head of Housing summarised the proposals to revise the Council's current Housing Allocation Policy. The current scheme was adopted in 2011 and revised in 2014, to take account of changes in legislation, e.g. The Welfare Reform Act (2012). It was timely for the Allocations Policy to be reviewed to ensure that it took account of changes in legislation such as the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) and to ensure the policy still met the Council's priorities in terms of allocating housing.

A review of the policy had been undertaken which included a Member Workshop in January 2018 which concluded that the majority of the existing Allocations Policy was still fit for purpose. Members discussed changing the residency criteria from two to three years and asked the Committee to reach a consensus at the meeting. The Chairman proposed that the residency criteria be raised from two to three years.

RESOLVED:

- (i) To approve the revised Housing Allocations Policy subject to consultation with registered providers and stakeholders,
- (ii) To delegate authority to the Head of Housing to make any minor changes to the policy following consultation with the caveat that any major changes would be presented to a future Housing & Neighbourhoods Committee,
- (iii) To delegate authority to the Head of housing to approve allocations as set out in paragraph 3.2 of the agenda report,
- (iv) To introduce a wider Housing Register to provide the Council with greater depth of information on local housing need; and
- (v) To increase the residency criteria from two to three years.

15 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

The meeting ended at: 20:30