

Housing and Neighbourhoods Committee

Minutes

Thursday, 01 October 2020 at 16:00

PRESENT:-

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

Mrs P Boyce (Strategic Director), Mrs N Turner (Housing Director), Ms K Sly (Finance Director), Mr S Hubbard (Strategic Planning Manager), Mrs J Beck (Head of Property & Asset Management), Mrs S Robinson (Early Help Hub Manager), Mrs S Bolan (Enabling & Empty Homes Officer), Ms H Notcutt (Neighbourhood Manager), Mr R Heath (Resident Engagement Officer) & Mrs C Webb (Executive Services Officer).

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cara Walker.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Grant declared a personal interest in item 11, however, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, was allowed to both speak and vote on the matter.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2020 were agreed by assent.

4 MATTERS ARISING

In regard to minute number 5, Forward Plan, Councillor Wainwright informed the Committee that a review of the Selective Licensing Scheme had not been added to the Forward Plan. Councillor Williamson reported that his request that the Committee consider the results from the study by York University on the decline of life expectancy had not been resolved. Councillor Martin asked if the Neighbourhoods that Work workshop scheduled for 30 April 2020 would be rescheduled in the near future.

The Chairman agreed that the Selective Licensing Scheme would be added to the Forward Plan. The Neighbourhood Manager would forward information regarding the recent study on the decline of life expectancy by York University to the Committee. The Chairman informed Councillor Martin that her concerns would be addressed under agenda item 12.

5 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee received & considered the Forward Plan.

The Chairman agreed that the Review of the Selective Licensing Scheme be added to the Forward Plan.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee note the Forward Plan with the addition of the Review of the Selective Licensing Scheme.

6 GREAT YARMOUTH BOROUGH COUNCIL HOUSING DELIVERY ACTION PLAN 2020

The Committee received & considered the report from the Strategic Planning

Manager.

The Strategic Planning Manager reported that the Council had to prepare a Housing Action Plan due to under-delivery of housing in the past three years, even though, the under-delivery was not due to the shortcomings of the Council itself. A significant number of mitigation and improvement measures were already in place which were now coming to fruition and starting to prove successful.

Councillor Wainwright asked if the setting up of a small site sub-group of the Developer Forum had progressed. The Strategic Planning Manager reported that he would discuss this matter with the Director of Planning & Growth and the Planning Manager and report back.

Councillor Williamson asked when the new Planning White Paper was introduced, whether the Housing Delivery Test would be abolished. The Strategic Planning Manager reported that the Housing Delivery Test would be retained but it was proposed to remove the element of the 5 year Housing Land Supply.

Councillor Martin asked whether housing schemes designed for older and disabled residents would be encouraged as there was a high need for adaptive homes in the Borough. The Strategic Planning Manager reported that all new housing must meet the Adaptable Homes Standard to meet the changing needs of occupiers over their lifetime. This was highlighted in the Local Plan Part 2 - Stage 3 Access. The Chairman reported that the majority of the housing need for elderly/disabled would be met by the Council and not by private developers.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor referred to pre-application charging and requested feedback/evidence of the effectiveness of this service be provided to the Committee as she had recently received negative feedback on several occasions from residents.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee:-

(i) Noted that the Council had not met the National Housing Delivery Test for the period 2016/17 to 2018/19 and so needed to prepare and publish a Housing Action Plan; and

(ii) Endorsed the update to the Housing Action Plan as appended to the report.

7 COUNCIL HOMES PROGRAMME

The Committee received and considered the report from the Enabling & Empty Homes Officer and the Housing Director.

The Enabling & Empty Homes Officer reported that the report showed that there was a development pipeline achievable for the Council Homes programme. Although it was recognised that the identified sites within the initial piece of work might not come forward, it did provide confidence that those already identified and those that would come through in the future, could achieve the increase in Council homes which was aspired to.

The Enabling & Empty Homes Officer reported that identifying purchasing options continued but as highlighted in the report, capacity and expertise in development would see outputs increase and a continuing pipeline of developments created.

Councillor Martin asked whether local building companies/tradesmen would be utilised wherever possible. The Enabling & Empty Homes Officer reported that they would be selected from a Local Framework.

Councillor Williamson asked that Ward Councillors be consulted on any identified sites that were situated in their wards. The Housing Director confirmed that Ward Councillors would be consulted on identified sites.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee note the report and progress to date.

8 TENANCY STRATEGY 2020

The Committee received and considered the report from the Housing Strategy, Policy & Performance Officer and the Housing Director.

The Housing Director reported that a new Tenancy Strategy had been developed following the review of the Council's Tenancy Strategy 2013. The Tenancy Strategy set out the matters to which Registered Providers of Social Housing should have regard to when formulating their own Tenancy Policies. The strategy would be going out to consultation for a six week period, and, once approved, minor changes might be made once the feedback from Registered Providers & stakeholders had been considered.

Councillor Wainwright referred to page 44 of the agenda report as he was concerned regarding the stages indicated to assess the resident's individual circumstances and whether the Council currently had the capacity to undertake this amount of work. The Housing Director explained the rationale behind the processes and suggested that the report be re-worded as follows; During the review process, resident's individual circumstances should be assessed and the following considered, as applicable.

Councillor Williamson was concerned that this might lead to tenants losing the guarantee of having a fixed tenancy. The Housing Director reported that

this was a review process and she could not guarantee that some tenants would not lose their fixed term tenancy and not be issued with another tenancy. However, these tenants could approach the Council who would assist them through the homelessness process.

Councillor Wainwright asked for clarification regarding how this new strategy would affect mutual exchanges.

Councillor Candon referred to page 44 of the agenda report; 8.2 Decision not to renew a tenancy and asked for clarification regarding a registered provider not renewing a tenancy as the property was permanently under-occupied.

Councillor Martin reported that it was an excellent report with good protective measures in place to provide tenancy with secured five year tenancies.

RESOLVED:-

(i) That the Committee approves the Tenancy Strategy subject to consultation with Registered Providers and stakeholders; and

(ii) That the Committee delegated authority to the Housing Director to make any minor changes to the strategy following consultation, with the caveat that any major changes would be presented to a future Housing & Neighbourhoods Committee.

9 RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Resident Engagement Officer gave a presentation to the Committee on Delivering Engagement & Strengthening the Tenant Voice.

Councillor Wainwright thanked the Resident Engagement Officer for his informative presentation but was dismayed that no reference had been made to the involvement of Members in any of the processes.

The Resident Engagement Officer assured the Committee that he was keen to work with Members and include them, wherever possible, in community engagement.

Councillor Wainwright reported that the previous Tenant Forum had to be disbanded due to lack of funding and asked what the budget provision was for tenant engagement. The Housing Director reported that there was a small budget but she did not have the exact figure to hand and would respond to Councillor Wainwright after the meeting.

The Housing Director reported that resident engagement was embedded across the tenancy services team to encourage tenants to engage with us to

help improve our services.

Councillor Smith-Clare highlighted technology poverty as one of the leading barriers to effective communication with residents and asked whether performance indicators had been set to allow the Committee to monitor the effectiveness of tenant engagement.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor reminded the Resident Engagement Officer that many Members sat on Outside Bodies which could be an effective way to increase engagement.

Councillor Martin asked whether the Resident Engagement Officer was aware of the door knocking exercise to be undertaken by the Shrublands Community Trust, who intended to knock on every door in Gorleston to survey the views of residents on a raft of local issues. She suggested the Resident Engagement Officer might be able to piggyback on this survey.

The Housing Director thanked Members for their feedback and stated that the Resident Engagement Strategy would be brought to Committee for their approval and endorsement.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee noted the update on Tenant Engagement.

10 HRA BUDGET MONITORING PERIOD 4

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

The Finance Director took the Committee through the salient areas of the report and requested that Members consider the 2020/21 Housing Revenue & Capital Budget monitoring position, as at the end of period 4.

The Finance Director reported that the majority of the HRA revenue income & expenditure budgets were on track to meet 2020/21 budget provisions, with the exception of reduced income streams following the Covid19 pandemic.

Councillor Wainwright trusted that the Council would not take a heavy-handed approach to rent arrears as Covid19 had taken its toll on local residents who were already struggling. The Housing Director reported that the Council had adopted a supportive approach and was signposting tenants to other agencies to help maximise their income and affordable payment plans were being implemented, as we were well aware that debt had a massive impact on mental health and well-being.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee note the report.

11 ACQUISITION OF COUNCIL HOMES

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

The Housing Director reported that the current Covid19 pandemic had highlighted the need to increase the number of one-bedroom homes within the Council's housing stock to meet the need from single people and childless couples. The report sought approval to procure the delivery of 36 new one-bedroom homes to meet some of the increased demand.

The Housing Director reported that this reflected the Council's prevention focus and increases in homelessness for this group as a result of Covid19. Modular homes would provide the Council with the opportunity to provide homes which met the Council's requirements for good quality accommodation within a much shorter timescale and the ability to use frameworks to deliver the homes also reduce the timescale for delivery of completed homes.

The Housing Director reported that the procurement of Broadland Housing Association would provide the relevant development skills and capacity to ensure the timely delivery and quality of the new homes and overall scheme in terms of construction and design. A modular company had been identified which could meet the Council's requirements.

Councillor Wainwright congratulated the Housing Director on an excellent report with an ambitious deadline as the Borough was desperately short of 1 and 2 bedroom properties.

Councillor Talbot asked whether these properties would be classed as supportive housing. The Housing Director responded that they would be classed as general needs housing.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor asked that if the modular build programme was successful, could this avenue could be explored for larger modular properties.

Councillor Williamson welcomed the size of the proposed one bedroom flat of 50m² which was larger than the prescribed national guidelines.

Councillor Candon remarked on the longevity of the units which was unusually high for a modular building and very impressive.

The Chairman thanked the Housing Director and her team for the excellent report.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee:-

(i) approve the use of an appropriate framework or frameworks to procure, on a turnkey basis, 36 one-bedroom modular homes,

(ii) delegate decisions in the relation to the procurement of the 36 homes to the Housing Director and Section 1515 Officer, reflecting the prior approval by Full Council on 30 July 2020 of £5.2m capital expenditure and HRA borrowing; and

(iii) request a progress report on the delivery of the new homes, following the completion of the procurement process.

12 LOCALITY UPDATE

The Strategic Director, Neighbourhood Manager & Early Help Hub Manager gave a joint presentation to the Committee on Locality.

Councillor Wainwright thanked the officers for their in-depth presentation and asked that the presentation be forwarded to all Members. He also requested that an All Member Briefing on Locality be arranged in the near future. The Strategic Director agreed to forward the presentation and to arrange an All Member Briefing in November.

Councillor Flaxman-Taylor reported that she had dialed into the Neighbourhoods that Work meeting last Friday and was impressed with the multi-agency approach already in operation across the Borough, particularly the Primary Care network, and that all partners were singing from the same hymn sheet.

Councillor Talbot asked that obesity caused by stress eating/comfort eating/sugar addiction be treated as a mental health condition, as per anorexia and bulimia, as opposed to a stand-alone issue. The Strategic Director agreed to pass this observation to the Clinical Lead for Mental Health Services.

Councillor Williamson reiterated the need for an All Member Briefing and asked for clarification as to whether Halfway House, which was in his ward, would remain with MESH. The Strategic Director reported that Halfway House would stay in the Primary Health Care Trust which covered it.

Councillor Martin reported that she was disappointed that the Neighbourhoods that Work workshop had been unable to go ahead due to Covid19 and that the Council had lost its valued Community Development Workers. She was pleased that most of them had secured similar employment with other agencies but they had been invaluable in building bridges between the Council and its communities.

The Strategic Director reported that our VCSE/community sector partners continued to have community-facing workers available, given that these can be funded via external grant pots. Thus, partnership working was the way

forward with a desire to undertake joint commissioning with statutory partners e.g. Norfolk County Council. The Council still has access to Community Development Workers. In addition, Children's Services have Community Development Workers focused on children and family support. The Lottery had also indicated that they would be interested in co-funding Community Development Workers in the future. However, it was imperative that we go forward with the structure we have in place now.

RESOLVED:-

(i) That the Committee note the Locality update; and

(ii) That the Strategic Director to forward the presentation to all Members and arrange an All Member Briefing on Locality.

13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman reported that he had no other business being of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration at the meeting.

14 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.

15 CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX - ACQUISITION OF COUNCIL HOMES

The Committee received, considered & noted the confidential appendix on the Acquisition of Council Homes.

16 CONFIDENTIAL - DRAFT GYN LIAISON BOARD MINUTES

The Committee received, considered and noted the draft confidential GYN Liaison Board minutes held on 20 August 2020.

The meeting ended at: 18:00