

TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Minutes and report to Council of the meeting of the Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Station Road East, Oxted on the 28 September 2021 at 7.30pm

PRESENT: Councillors Pursehouse (Chair), Lockwood (Vice-Chair), Gaffney, Gillman, Groves, Hammond, Mills, Morrow, Ridge, Shiner, Steeds and Swann

** Councillor Mills joined the meeting via Zoom and was, therefore, unable to vote*

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Farr and O'Driscoll

121. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 29TH JUNE 2021

These were confirmed as a correct record.

122. QUESTION SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 30

A question was submitted by Councillor O'Driscoll regarding accommodation issues at Newlands Court (in Coulsdon Road, Caterham). The Executive Head of Communities responded to both this and a supplementary question from Councillor O'Driscoll. The questions and responses are set out at **Appendix A**.

123. HOUSING QUARTER 1 21/22 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee considered an analysis of progress against its key performance indicators, together with a updated risk register and a Council housebuilding / affordable housing development summary for the first quarter of 2021/22. In response to Members' questions, it was confirmed that:

- regarding KPI HO10a (*percentage of emergency responsive repairs completed within the set timescales*) IT problems with a contractor not receiving e-mail notifications had been resolved;
- officers would liaise with Councillor Steeds after the meeting to identify the '*other initiatives*' address the need for affordable housing ... as referred to on page 13 of the agenda pack under KPI HO5 (*number of people in urgent need ... on the housing register*)
- the commentary for risk references 3 and 4 (inability to deliver the housing and homelessness strategies) should not refer to a member Working Group being in place;
- Officers pursue developers as rigorously as possible to secure fair proportions of affordable housing within residential new build schemes;
- efforts were on-going to recruit to two vacant surveyor posts;

- the planned IT system upgrade to enhance the performance of the housing management software (Orchard) would enable an up to date stock condition survey which could be shared with Members;
- regarding the Council housebuilding / affordable housing development update:
 - opportunities for a housing scheme on the current site of the Council depot at Warren Lane, Hurst Green were being pursued, with a report to be submitted to the Committee's next meeting; and
 - the Council appointed an agent to manage contractors for each Council house development scheme (as part of the procurement process for the respective schemes)

RESOLVED – that the Quarter 1 (2021/22) performance and risks for the Housing Committee be noted.

124. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019-2023 ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Committee considered progress against the updated action plan arising from the above mentioned strategy. The accompanying report concluded that the temporary accommodation stock contained sufficient capacity to cope with a likely increase in homelessness applications. Such an increase was anticipated following the ending of the temporary ban on evictions which was imposed during the pandemic. In any event, the Council had received additional Homelessness Prevention Grant for 2021/22, which should cover any increased cost of emergency accommodation provision.

The report highlighted the following achievements in respect of the action plan:

- significant development of multi-agency work to address and prevent rough sleeping and homelessness across Surrey;
- during the pandemic, 33 individuals who were rough sleeping, or at risk of rough sleeping, were provided with self-contained emergency accommodation and assisted to secure settled accommodation;
- the creation and retention of a navigator role within the East Surrey Outreach Service to work with the most complex clients;
- the appointment of a full-time Private Sector Access Scheme (PSAS) Officer, leading to a significant increase in the number of clients assisted through the Scheme;
- commencement of work with the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance to review the Council's effectiveness in supporting survivors of domestic abuse.

The report acknowledged that a small number of actions were behind schedule and that others were expected to commence during the remaining timespan of the strategy.

In response to Members' questions, it was confirmed that:

- the Health Visitor Service (which no longer included dedicated, regular visits to the homelessness hostel in Whyteleafe) was not provided by the Council;
- both the 'navigator role' and the PSAS Officer posts referred to above were funded by external government grants;
- efforts were on-going to support the delivery of Children's Centre services (despite the fact a targeted family centre service would no longer be transferred from Surrey County Council to Tandridge as previously intended) including a scheme in Lingfield which was still awaiting launch by the operator - it was confirmed that both Lingfield and Dormansland Parish Councils had committed funding for that scheme;
- money advice services were still provided by the Council, albeit by staff in the wider benefits & income team as opposed to dedicated Money Advice Officer postholders.

RESOLVED – that the report, and progress against the action plan to date, be noted.

COUNCIL DECISION

(subject to ratification by Council)

125. COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME - APPROPRIATION OF LAND FOR PLANNING PURPOSES

The Committee considered a report which explained that, prior to the commencement of works within the Council house building programme, land must be 'appropriated' for the correct statutory purpose. In this respect, the report identified three sites that needed to be appropriated for planning purposes. An amendment to the Committee's scheme of delegation was also proposed, whereby such appropriations could be resolved by the Committee without having to be recommended to Full Council.

Regarding the scheme at Wolfs Wood (Hurst Green) the Committee was advised that a new arboricultural consultant would have to be sought to undertake the tree survey due to the original consultant falling ill. Furthermore, residents' concerns about the development would be considered by the Council's appointed architect when designing the scheme before and following the public consultation.

RECOMMENDED – that

- A. in respect of the following sites, Officers commence the process of appropriating the land from housing to planning purposes:
 - 106 - 128 (even numbers) Wolfs Wood, Hurst Green
 - Garage site at Hollow Lane, Dormansland
 - 63 - 78 Featherstone, Blindley Heath
- B. in respect of the site at 63-78 Featherstone, Blindley Heath, Officers commence the process of appropriating a part of the land known as Featherstone Open Space from the General Fund to planning purposes; and

- C. the Housing Committee's terms of reference be amended to include the appropriation of land (subject to any statutory consents and procedures) identified for Council housebuilding for planning purposes and the Committee be empowered to approve the appropriation process in connection with future schemes within the Council house-building programme.

126. COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME - SMALL SCHEMES UPDATE FOR CATERHAM ON THE HILL

A report was presented in light of recent Council planning applications for six affordable homes at Auckland Road and Windmill Close in Caterham on the Hill. The Planning Committee, on the 29th July 2021, had recommended that both applications be approved, subject to ratification by Council on 21st October 2021.

The report reflected on issues raised at the Planning Committee meeting regarding loss of trees, tree planting and traffic management (in connection with Windmill Close) and explained subsequent measures to address Members' concerns, namely:

- proposals for a compensatory tree planting scheme to mitigate against any unavoidable removal of trees or hedgerow, i.e. via re-planting either on or near the original site or in a local park or recreational space in consultation with Ward members and the Council's tree officer and, if approved, this would be adopted at Windmill Close and all future schemes in the Council's house building programme;
- a draft construction traffic management plan (prepared by the prospective contractor) for the Windmill Close development – this was still subject to approval by officers; and
- offers by the Council (to affected Windmill Close residents) to fund the provision of dropped kerbs and hard-standings to address parking concerns.

The report also advised that, should the Planning Committee's recommendation to grant permission for the Windmill Close development not be ratified by Full Council, the budget for the Rochester Gardens and Town End schemes would need to increase by £100,000. This was in light of the collective procurement exercise for the four Caterham on the Hill schemes which resulted in the tenders for Rochester Gardens and Town End being over budget, while those for Windmill Close and Auckland Road were below budget.

During the debate, concerns were expressed regarding the lack of available on-street parking in adjacent roads should contractors' vehicles be banned from Windmill Close. In response, the Committee was informed that discussions were taking place with the Ministry of Defence regarding the possibility of land close to the Sea Cadets site being made exclusively available for contractor parking during the Windmill Close construction phase.

The extent to which the Council could force contractors to adhere to agreed traffic management plans was discussed. Officers advised that, while there were no direct financial penalties, potentially significant reputational damage could arise from such plans being disregarded by contractors.

Members also commented on the cost of planting 'one standard tree' as part of the Council housebuilding programme, quoted in the report as being approximately £2,500 (covering the initial purchase and regular ongoing maintenance / management). It was acknowledged that this was a likely figure, with exact sums dependent on individual circumstances.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. the adoption of a compensatory tree planting scheme within the existing budget for the Council House Building Programme be approved; and
- B. an additional budget of £100,000 for Rochester Gardens / Town End, in the event that planning approval for Windmill Close is not ratified by Full Council, be approved.

127. AFGHAN RELOCATION AND ASSISTANCE POLICY (ARAP) SCHEME - CONFIRMATION OF DECISION TAKEN UNDER URGENCY POWERS

A decision had been taken by the Chief Executive on the 7th September 2021, under the urgency provisions of Standing Order 35, to support the Government's Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) Scheme. This scheme offered to relocate (to the UK) current or former locally employed staff assessed to be under serious threat to life in Afghanistan.

A report was presented which sought ratification of the above mentioned decision on the basis that the Council would commit to assisting two households through the scheme. This would supplement the commitments already given by Reigate & Banstead and Mole Valley Councils to assist three and two households respectively. The report also explained the Government's separate Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) which had been introduced on the 13th September.

Arising from Members' questions, officers advised that Reigate & Banstead's Global Resettlement Team were experienced in helping to integrate immigrant households within the local community. It was also explained that the Council's financial contribution towards assisting households under the ARAP scheme would help fund net rental shortfalls after allowing for universal credit payments.

Notwithstanding the merits of engaging in both schemes, the need to recognise the needs of UK veterans affected by the Afghan conflict was acknowledged during the debate.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. the decision taken under the urgency provisions of Standing Order 35 to support the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) Scheme be ratified; and
- B. eligible households that qualify for assistance under either the ARAP Scheme or the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme be considered for support.

128. RENEWAL OF THE KITCHENS AND BATHROOMS CONTRACT

The existing contract for replacing kitchens and bathrooms was due to end on the 31st March 2022. There was no option for any further contract extension.

A report was submitted which explained the proposed procurement process for securing a new contract from 1st April 2022, together with the regime for signing off designs and installations.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. the procurement of a three-year kitchen and bathroom replacement contract (commencing on the 1st April 2022) with an option to extend for a further two years, be approved; and
- B. authority be delegated to the Executive Head of Communities, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Housing Committee, to award the contract to the successful tenderer.

129. EXTENSION TO THE CLEANING CONTRACT

The current contract with Wettons Cleaning Services Limited commenced on the 1st April 2019 and covered the cleaning of housing estates, void properties and the Council Offices. It was due to expire on the 31st March 2022 and a two year extension was proposed in light of the quality of service provided by Wettons to date.

RESOLVED – that the existing cleaning contract with Wettons Cleaning Services Limited be extended for a further two years from the 1st April 2022 until the 31st March 2024.

130. EXTENSION TO THE EXTERNAL PAINTING AND REPAIR CONTRACT

The current contract with C&C (Southern) Property Services commenced on the 1st April 2018 and covered the external decoration and repair of Council properties. It was due to expire on the 31st March 2022 and a two year extension was proposed in light of the quality of service provided by C&C to date.

RESOLVED – that the existing contract with C&C (Southern) Property Services for the external decoration and repair of Council properties be extended for a further two years from the 1st April 2022 until the 31st March 2024.

131. GAS AND ELECTRICITY CONTRACTS - CONFIRMATION OF DECISION TAKEN UNDER URGENCY POWERS

The Committee was advised that, following a recent procurement exercise, contracts had been awarded for the supply of gas and electricity to the Council as follows:

- Gas – Gazprom (3 years from 12th October 2021)
- Electricity - Drax Energy (18 months from 1st October 2021)

Permission for the Executive Head of Communities to award the contracts had been agreed by the Chief Executive on the 14th September 2021 under the urgency provisions of Standing Order 35.

Due to the energy market's specialist and volatile nature, the Council had engaged its energy consultants 'Inspired Energy' to undertake the procurement exercise on its behalf. A report was presented which explained the background to the contract awards and the processes undertaken by Inspired Energy for recommending the above suppliers and the respective contract terms. While the electricity contract would use 100% renewable energy, a 'green gas' option offered by Gazprom had been rejected on financial grounds due to the 42% increase over current expenditure. Opposing views were expressed on the merits of not pursuing that option.

The report also proposed that Inspired Energy be appointed to sign the Council up to a flexible electricity contract via its 'compliant single supplier framework' to allow trading from the first quarter of 2022/23.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. the decision taken under the urgency provisions of Standing Order 35 to procure new contracts for the supply of gas and electricity be ratified;
- B. the outcome of the recent exercise to procure new contracts for the supply of gas and electricity be noted; and
- C. Insight Energy be appointed to procure a flexible electricity contract for the period beyond April 2023.

In accordance with Standing Order 25(3), Councillor Ridge wished it recorded that he voted against resolutions A to C above.

Rising 9.15 pm

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Housing Committee – 28th September 2021 - Question under Standing Order 30

Question from Councillor O'Driscoll

On a recent visit to Newlands Court in Westway ward, a resident in the block has brought to my attention a number of issues which need addressing. These issues include a faulty tumble dryer left in situ, rough sleeping in the corridors and fire alarms in communal corridors that have been removed.

Seeing these first hand was shocking as it is not right that residents in Westway are having to live in these conditions. Will this Council commit to ensuring that these concerns are resolved so that Newlands Court residents can feel safe in their own homes and can this Council ensure that communal fire alarms are installed in every Council owned block in the District?

Response from the Executive Head of Communities

Newlands Court was, until 2019, a sheltered housing scheme with a daily site visit by a Sheltered Scheme Co-Ordinator and an emergency alarm provision. Following the decommissioning of the block, as part of the sheltered housing review, Newlands Court has since been general needs accommodation without the provision for daily visits and emergency alarm assistance. Like in all decommissioned blocks, the communal fire alarm was removed due to there being no ongoing provision of resource to carry out regular tests or attend the building should the fire alarm sound. All properties and communal areas within Newlands Court are fitted with mains powered smoke detectors, mitigating the need for a full alarm system. This is also true for every other building allocated as general needs accommodation. To install, maintain and monitor any alarm system is costly, a cost which would need to be recovered from residents by means of service charge. It should be noted that all Council owned blocks are subject to regular Fire Risk Assessments. The last one for Newlands Court took place in 2017 and later reviewed in 2019. So one is due again.

Having checked repairs raised against Newlands Court, we have just replaced a faulty tumble drier. In the past, the fault would have been reported by the Sheltered Scheme Co-Ordinator during their visits. As these visits no longer happen, residents are required to report any faults or damage to white goods in the laundry room in the same way as they would raise a repair request for their own property. A repair works order would then be raised and the surveyor would address the issue.

Finally, after speaking to colleagues from the Housing Needs team, there have been no reports of a rough sleeper using the communal areas at Newlands Court. Occasional one-off reports of rough sleeping around the District are sometimes received and encouragement is given to all to report on-going incidents to Streetlink via our website. This then triggers an outreach team to go and visit if accurate information on description of location and bedding down times are provided.

Continued ...

Supplementary Question from Councillor O'Driscoll

I took the Chief Executive to Newlands Court as part of his Ward visit earlier in September and he met residents who relayed the concerns expressed in my first question. Would the Executive Head of Communities be willing to meet with Newlands Court residents to listen to their concerns ...we can arrange the timings outside of the meeting?

Response from the Executive Head of Communities

Yes I would.