

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 17 November 2022 at 7:30pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Pursehouse (Chair), Lockwood (Vice-Chair), Evans, Gaffney, Hammond, Montgomery, Robinson, Shiner, Stamp, Swann and O'Driscoll (Substitute) (In place of Groves)

PRESENT (Virtually): Councillor Groves

ALSO PRESENT (Virtually): Councillors Moore, C.Farr and S.Farr

Prior to the business of the meeting, the Head of Housing made a statement on the issue of damp and mould. The Head of Housing explained that where damp and mould are reported in a Council owned property, a building surveyor will inspect and raise any necessary works to remedy the problem. Where damp and mould issues are reported within the private rented sector, the Council, through the joint Environmental Health partnership, will investigate and take the necessary steps with the landlord to resolve the issues. Advice on damp and mould was available on the Council's website and Members were asked to notify the Head of Housing if any issues were reported to them. A report would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee outlining how the environmental health team regulate housing standards.

160. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 OCTOBER 2022

The minutes were approved and signed as a correct record.

161. TO DEAL WITH ANY QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 30

Two questions were submitted under Standing Order 30. The questions and the responses were provided at Appendix A to these minutes.

162. HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2019-2023 ACTION PLAN UPDATE - NOVEMBER 2022

The Committee received an update on the progress made during the past year in delivering the Homeless Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2023. The Strategy lay out the Council's plan to address homelessness. It had been designed to complement the Council's Housing Strategy and developed in line with national policy and legislation and tailored to take account of local needs. The Action Plan set out the Council's actions it would undertake to deliver the Strategy.

The Council had continued to progress the actions set out in the Action Plan with most actions on or ahead of target.

In response to questions from Members, Officers confirmed:

- there was one rough sleeper in the District. Outreach workers were in regular contact with him and continued to offer appropriate assistance.
- they were confident that the actions marked as amber would be delivered during the life of the Strategy. Delays had been mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- the Council continued to fund a domestic abuse sanctuary and worked with partners in the East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service. Surrey County Council had recently announced it would be funding sanctuary schemes across the County, including East Surrey. Tandridge District Council provided funding for a scheme coordinator and Independent Domestic Abuse Advocates to work alongside survivors of domestic abuse.
- they would liaise with the Community Partnerships team and police colleagues to consider the development of a scheme enabling shops to be accredited as a safe space for people fleeing domestic abuse or whose safety is otherwise under threat

RESOLVED – that the contents of the report and progress made to date be noted.

163. QUARTER 2 2022/23 BUDGET MONITORING - HOUSING COMMITTEE

The Committee received a report outlining the financial position of the Revenue and Capital budgets for the Committee, including Housing Revenue Account, as of Quarter 2 2022/23.

The report set out a projected underspend of £44k for the Housing General Fund. This was an £44k improvement from the Quarter 1 position. In terms of the Housing Revenue Account, there was a projected underspend of £67k. The main reasons for this were a £22k salaries underspend due to a vacancy, and a one off £30k saving on vehicle repairs, as the vehicles were still under warranty, and fuel, due to improved fuel efficiency of the vehicles.

There was also a total net underspend in the Capital Budget of £381k. In the Housing General Fund Capital Budget, there was a £60k underspend due to Disability Facilities Grant costs being less than forecast. In the Housing Revenue Account Capital Budget, additional funding had been provided for potential development sites and inflationary pressures, and there had also been delays in development and slippages. These factors resulted in a total forecast net underspend of £321k.

Members noted that an underspend on the Capital budget as a result of delays and slippages meant that the Council was unable to deliver housing as quickly as it would like.

In relation to Meadowside Mobile Homes, Officers confirmed that the reported £10k reduced income on commission of sales of mobile homes had been identified as a one off increase to the target income for the 2022/23 financial year, based on assumptions made in January 2022. However, sales had not been as expected, and this assumption would not be made in the emerging 2023/24 budget. Members thanked Officers for the engagement work undertaken with residents of Meadowside.

RESOLVED – that the Committee’s forecast Revenue and Capital budgets positions as at Quarter 2 / Month 6 (September) 2022 be noted (including the Housing Revenue Account).

164. TO CONSIDER PASSING THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – that the press and public be excluded from agenda item 9 in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) on the grounds that:

- i) the item involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act; and
- ii) the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

165. CONTRACT UPDATE: CATERHAM ON THE HILL DEVELOPMENTS

RESOLVED – that the recommendations in the report be approved.

Rising 8.28 pm

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Housing Committee – 17 November 2022**Questions submitted under Standing Order 30****1. Question from Councillor O'Driscoll**

Residents in housing association blocks across Tandridge have expressed concerns about anti-social behaviour taking place in recent months. What steps can this Council take to compel the housing associations to take action to address these issues?

Response from the Head of Housing:

As part of the ongoing work being undertaken around anti-social behaviour, a Council wide enforcement policy is due to be written. This work will be led by senior officers from housing, community partnerships, legal and environmental health. This policy will set out how anti-social behaviour will be tackled within the district, regardless of whether it is within Council owned housing stock or not. Consideration is also being given to delegate powers to housing associations within the district, allowing them to use the legal tools to tackle such behaviour in accordance with the anti-social behaviour, crime and policing Act 2014.

If residents within housing association owned properties are unsatisfied with the way in which their landlord is dealing with the anti-social behaviour, a Community Trigger can be instigated via the Council's website. Once a Community Trigger request is deemed to meet the threshold, the Council can call upon both the housing association and other partner agencies to resolve the matter. This is likely to result in the issue being discussed at the Community Harm and Risk Management Meetings held monthly which is attended by partner agencies and housing providers. It is through these forums that housing associations can be held to account.

2. Question from Councillor O'Driscoll

Vulnerable residents requiring new homes in Tandridge are facing lengthy waits in accommodation that is simply not fit for purpose. I've been contacted by younger families rehoused away from their support networks who are feeling trapped and isolated and by families with several autistic children who are living in one-bedroom flats in Whyteleafe and Caterham. Residents in both of these situations have told me they feel like hope is being sucked away from them as a result of there simply not being enough homes to suit their needs.

While I appreciate the positive steps being taken by this Council to reduce the waiting time for a new home, can this Council take steps to further reduce this?

Response from the Head of Housing:

The Council's housing allocations scheme sets out how affordable accommodation is allocated within the district. The scheme assigns medical priority to households on the housing register where sufficient supporting medical evidence is provided. This is to help prevent lengthy waiting times for suitable accommodation. However to prevent lengthy waiting times there needs to be a sufficient supply of accommodation.

Members will therefore be aware that the Council has an ambitious house building programme that aims to deliver new council homes on both council owned land and land purchased on the open market. The programme is focussed on delivering family sized accommodation to reflect the greatest needs on the housing register. There has been a slow down over the last year, partly due to a lack of resources but largely due to the difficulties contractors have had with sourcing materials and labour to maintain their programmes. The situation has been further compounded by the financial collapse of W Stirling which will see the remaining 17 units at Uplands delivered a year later than originally forecast. There is no disguising the fact that the construction industry is experiencing unprecedented difficulties owing to the combined factors of Brexit, Covid and the invasion of Ukraine. To try and combat the slow-down in delivery and to assist with meeting the growing demand on the register, Officers will be proposing an extension of the buy-back programme in the next financial year to allow the open market purchase of a further 10 family sized properties in 2023/24. The emphasis will be on purchasing properties that assist in future scheme delivery such as those with restrictive leases or those that would enable access to developable land beyond.

Sales of new market properties have recently started to fall with the contraction in available mortgages and the cost of living crisis and there are signs of a slow-down in volume house building. This may see the more recent increases in material prices start to level off which will bring some stability back to the sector. The onset of a recession has historically seen housebuilders turn to local authorities and housing associations to buy their surplus stock in return for a quick capital receipt. Officers of the Council and our housing association partners will be monitoring the market closely so that we can capitalise on any opportunities that arise because of a downturn. Naturally, a recession will have other negative impacts on SMEs so there will still be risks associated with the building programme.

The Council also has a housing enabling function and Officers continue to be involved in pre application discussions where there is an obligation to provide affordable housing so that the proposed mix best meets the identified needs of the district. Financial viability agreements are robustly defended and affordable units are secured by way of a S106 obligation with early delivery of the units where possible.

In addition to the work being undertaken by the development team, initiatives such as the incentive scheme and assisted purchase scheme are in operation to incentivise residents to downsize or move from family sized accommodation where it is no longer required, in turn freeing up high demand accommodation. Work with private sector landlords continues through our private sector liaison officer which will be supported by the development of an empty homes strategy in 2023/24.

Supplementary Question from Councillor O'Driscoll:

Most of the shortage of housing in my experience has been found in north of District in Woldingham, Caterham and Whyteleafe. You mentioned the market purchase of family sized properties. Would these properties be located where the demand is greatest?

Response from the Housing Development Specialist:

The previous buyback programme will see us shortly complete on the tenth and final purchase. Almost all, if not all, are in Caterham and Whyteleafe and that's largely due to the fact that there are family sized properties in flatted schemes and where we already own the freehold it is much easier for us to buyback those properties from the leaseholder at a competitive price. I foresee the next 10 properties being in the north of the District, maybe some further south but values are higher further south for family sized accommodation which makes it difficult for us to put in a competitive offer.

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