

TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Minutes and report to Council of the meeting of the Committee held in the Council Chamber - Council Offices on the 14 September 2023 at 7:30pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Pursehouse (Chair), Damesick (Vice-Chair), Evans, Gaffney, Hammond, Montgomery, O'Riordan, Robinson, Shiner, Smith and O'Driscoll

ALSO PRESENT (Virtually): Councillors Chris Farr and Sue Farr

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor Groves

96. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 JUNE 2023

The minutes were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

97. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE OPTIONS APPRAISAL OUTCOME - HOUSING COMMITTEE

The Committee considered a report outlining the outcome of the Grounds Maintenance Options Appraisal as it related to Housing Revenue Account (HRA) land. This followed a review to identify the best option for delivery of the ground maintenance service across the Council as part of the Future Tandridge Programme. Grounds maintenance had been delivered through a mixture of in-house and outsourced arrangements. The report highlighted the recommendation for all grounds maintenance activity in the HRA estate to be undertaken in the future by an in-house team, supported by improved specifications and performance monitoring.

RESOLVED – that the Committee recommend to the Community Services Committee that:

- A) the progress made to date and the details of the Grounds Maintenance options appraisal be noted.
- B) the lot structure approach be approved.
- C) the delivery of Housing Revenue Account Grounds Maintenance work via an in house team be approved.
- D) it be noted that the resources required to deliver the preferred option will be recommended to the Strategy & Resources Committee to approve as part of a wider Future Tandridge Programme update.

98. COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME - WARREN LANE DEPOT FULL BUDGET APPROVAL

A report was submitted which sought approval for a full budget for the council house building scheme at the Warren Lane depot site in Hurst Green. The scheme involved the redesign of the existing depot site to rationalise it and free up approximately half of it to develop up to 22 new

affordable Council homes for families on the Council's housing register. The scheme was planned to deliver 14 x 3 bedroom houses, 4 x 2 bedroom houses and 4 x 2 bedroom flats.

The Committee had given approval for a pre-application budget at its meeting on 21 June 2022. A range of specialist consultants had been appointed and pre-application advice had been sought which had resulted in some redesign of the scheme. A public consultation would be undertaken prior to the planning application being submitted in the autumn.

Officers explained that the site was challenging to develop. A robust estimated cost was not available from the Council's surveyors for the abnormal work as the design work and surveys were in progress. These would be completed prior to submission of the planning application. A figure of £1m, was included in the full budget of £9.9m, had been estimated to cover the abnormal work. If the costs were lower, it would result in a higher land value transfer from the Council's General Fund. If the costs were higher, the decision on the budget would be revisited. Costs would be kept under continual review.

RESOLVED – that:

- A) Officers prepare detailed proposals for the development of the Warren Lane depot site in Hurst Green for a mix of 2 and 3 bed houses for affordable rent and submit a planning application to develop the site and that a budget of £9,937,406.00 for the project be approved.
- B) authority be delegated to the CEO in consultation with the Council's Leadership (as detailed in Standing Order 46 of the Council's Constitution) to procure and award a contract for the proposed development to the most economically advantageous tenderer, subject to the outcome of the planning process and construction costs being within the approved budget.
- C) the above approval to proceed includes the appointment of other specialist consultants and surveyors to act for, or advise, the Council and the commissioning of necessary reports to take the schemes forward through to completion, all subject to the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

99. HOMES ENGLAND INVESTMENT PARTNER STATUS AND GRANT AGREEMENT

A report was submitted which sought approval for the Council to enter into a grant agreement with Homes England. This would secure grant funding for the Council house building programme. The programme had previously utilised Right to Buy Receipts as a form of subsidy to develop most of the schemes. However, the receipts were largely depleted and allocated to existing schemes, and the expected level of future receipts would not provide the level of subsidy required for the rest of the programme.

An application for Investment Partner status had been submitted to Homes England and was under consideration. A bid application for grant funding for the remainder of the units to be developed in the Uplands scheme had also been submitted to Homes England and was under consideration. In the future, Homes England grants would be sought for the majority of the schemes.

In response to Member questions, Officers confirmed that:

- successful grant applications would reduce the amount of capital that would need to be borrowed.

- separate bid applications would be submitted for each scheme.

RESOLVED – that the Council enter into a grant agreement with Homes England in order to secure grant funding for the Council house building programme.

100. LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND - ROUND 2

Officers provided an update on the use of indicative funding received from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to provide accommodation to families with housing needs who had arrived in the UK via one of the Afghan resettlement and relocation schemes. Two purchases had been completed, The Council had exchanged on one property and offers had been accepted on four other purchases.

DLUHC had extended the Local Authority Housing Fund and the Council had submitted a validation form to indicate its preparedness to deliver six further properties under the extension. The report sought approval for the Section 151 Officer to agree to and sign the DLUHC Memorandum of Understanding and commit to the purchase of six further properties under the extended scheme. The funding would provide 40% of the capital costs for the purchase of three homes for the Afghan cohort and three homes for temporary accommodation. The total grant would be £1.3m and the Council would contribute £1.8m, funded through borrowing provided for in 2023/24 Capital Programme estimates.

In response to Member questions, Officers explained that three homes would help meet the increasing need for temporary accommodation. It was also explained that, in terms of provision of accommodation to veterans, their service within the armed forces was taken into consideration.

RESOLVED – that Members approve that the Section 151 Officer agree to and sign the Memorandum of Understanding, attached at Appendix A to the report, no later than 5pm Monday 18th September and commit to the purchase of 6 further properties under the LAHF Round 2, subject to the requirements of Financial Regulation 17.

101. RESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP - PETS POLICY

The Committee received a report which recommended the approval of a draft Responsible Pet Ownership Policy. Officers explained that the Policy offered guidance to Council house tenants and Officers when considering pet ownership. It had been written following review of best practice within the sector. It was explained that permission for a pet would not unreasonably be withheld and Officers would base decisions on pet ownership on individual circumstances, household composition, the size and type of property and the size and type of pet.

During the debate, Members expressed the view that section 5.1 of the policy, which outlined the categories of pets for which permission was required, was not clear.

The Chairman, Councillor Pursehouse, seconded by Councillor O'Driscoll, proposed that the bullet points in section 5.1 be removed and that Officers make consequently amendments to the wording of 5.1.

Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was carried.

Members expressed the view that the period, set out in section 12.2 of the policy, which determined whether tenants vacating a property where they had requested a cat flap be installed should pay for a replacement door, was too long.

Councillor Gaffney, seconded by Councillor O'Driscoll, proposed an amendment to reduce the period from five years to one year.

Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was lost.

Councillor O'Driscoll, seconded by Councillor Robinson, proposed an amendment to reduce the period from five years to two years.

Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was carried.

Following questions from Members, Officers explained:

- discretion would be exercised when giving permission for additional cats and dogs. In using this discretion, Officers would consider the size and type of the cats and dogs, the type of property and whether there was a garden or not. Any costs to the Council incurred to ensure the property was suitable for re-letting would be borne by the vacating tenant.
- the policy would be monitored through tenancy audits undertaken by Housing Officers. Members expressed the importance of timely and effective enforcement and of residents knowing what action may be taken against them if there is a breach in the tenancy agreement conditions.
- the policy would not apply to Housing Association tenants, unless the Council were to take over the management of Housing Association stock.
- in the case of a resident wishing to downsize to a smaller Council property, Officers would discuss existing pets with the tenant during the application process to downsize and some discretion would be applied.

RESOLVED – that the Committee approves the Responsible Pet Ownership Policy as attached at Appendix A to the report, as amended.

102. QUARTER 1 2023/24 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - HOUSING COMMITTEE

The Committee received a report outlining the Quarter 1 2023/24 performance against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Three of the KPIs had not been met, with appendix A to the report providing explanation as to why.

The Committee also received the Housing Risk Register at appendix B to the report for July 2023 which included the mitigating actions taken against the identified risks.

The current position with regard to the Council House Building Programme at the end of Quarter 1 was outlined in appendix C to the report.

In response to Member questions, Officers confirmed that:

- a reason for closed risk H1 would be circulated to Members.
- the Council house building programme scheme at Windmill Close was progressing and it was estimated that the scheme would be delivered in spring 2024.

RESOLVED – that the Quarter 1 2023-2024 performance and risks for the Housing Committee be noted.

103. QUARTER 1 2023/24 BUDGET MONITORING - HOUSING COMMITTEE

The Committee received a report outlining the financial position of the Revenue and Capital budgets for the Committee, including the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), as of Quarter 1 2023/24.

The report set out an outturn variance of £15k for the Housing General Fund as a result of increased costs for planned repairs and tree works at Meadowside Mobile Home Park. Increasing costs of temporary accommodation was a risk being monitored, along with any knock on effects to the housing benefit budget. Ringfenced reserves for Housing Benefit could be called upon if the budget was overspent and the Government had provided an additional grant of £154k to assist with temporary accommodation costs. Savings of £60k had been delivered. £150k of savings, related to homelessness, was deemed to have some risk due to uncertainty around the need for temporary accommodation.

In the HRA, there was an overspend of £60k due to a software upgrade. £150k of savings on the HRA were expected in relation to housing management salaries.

The Housing General Fund Capital Budget related to Disability Facilities Grants and had been set at £642k, which included a carry forward from 2022/23 of £139k. There was expected to be surplus capital of £139k in 2023/24 and this would be reprofiled into 2024/25. The budget for the HRA Capital Programme was set at £19.9m, which included £4.5m carried forward from 2022/23. The capital schemes had been reviewed and there was a projected slippage of £3.8m in 2023/24 which would be reprofiled to 2024/25.

In response to Member questions, Officers explained that slippage of around 20% in the HRA budget could be expected due to various factors which would result in delays in the development of existing schemes.

RESOLVED – that the Committee's forecast Revenue and Capital budget positions as at Quarter 1 / M3 (June) 2023/24 be noted.

Rising 8.55 pm