

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 29th June 2021 at 7.30pm

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

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Allen

54. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 11TH MARCH 2021

These were confirmed as a correct record.

55. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 27TH MAY 2021

These were confirmed as a correct record.

56. HOUSING FINANCE REPORT - MONTH 2

A report concerning the Committee's revenue budgets and capital programme (for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Fund) as at the end of May 2021 (month 2) was presented.

The report advised that the budgets were provisional, pending the 2020/21 outturn to be presented to the Strategy & Resources Committee following the completion of the forensic review of the potential deficit by Grant Thornton (minutes of the 8th June 2021 Strategy & Resources Committee refer).

The HRA revenue budget was projected to be underspent by £14,000. No variances were forecast for the Housing General Fund revenue budget and the capital programme. However, the £250,000 carry forward from the 2020/21 HRA capital programme was subject to confirmation of the 2021/22 budget outturn.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. relevant budget changes since approval of the 2021/22 budget at Full Council in February 2021 (paragraph 4 of the report) be approved, namely:

“The Housing budget has been reset to remove the unconventional practice of assigning budgets to non-cash/accounting items. In usual circumstances and for budgeting purposes, only cash items would have a budget set against them as they have an element of controllability. The Council’s practice (which goes back some time) has been to apply budgets to items which are of an “accounting treatment” nature only, depreciation is an example. The changes identified ... relate to the removal of budgets for depreciation.”

- B. the 2021/22 budget after recent budget virements be noted; and
- C. the Committee's forecast revenue and capital budget position as at month 2 (May 2021) be noted.

57. HOUSING QUARTER 4 20/21 PERFORMANCE REPORT

Members were presented with an analysis of progress against the Committee's key performance indicators and risks for the fourth quarter of 2020/21.

Regarding performance target HO1 (Local Council rent collection and arrears: proportion of rent collected) the Committee was advised of an error in the summary text which should read:

"Collection performance at the end of the year was 0.07% below our target of 2.50%. At the end of March 2021 rent arrears totalled £386,034, a reduction of £21,293 compared to the same period in March 2020 when rent arrears totalled £407,203. This has been achieved during an unprecedented year for income collection due to the pandemic and inability to recover rent arrears via legal remedies and a suspension on evictions."

Officers also provided an update on the Council's house building programme and confirmed that regular updates would be brought to future committees.

RESOLVED – that the Quarter 4 (2020/21) performance and risks for the Planning Policy Committee be noted.

58. MOBILE HOME SITES - FIT AND PROPER PERSON APPLICATION FEE POLICY

A report was submitted with recommendations arising from 'The Mobile Homes (Requirement for Manager of Site to be Fit and Proper Person) (England) Regulations 2020' ('the Regulations')

The Regulations required Local Authorities to be satisfied that owners of mobile home sites met fit and proper person standards to manage their sites. Non-commercial family occupied sites were exempt. All other mobile home site licence holders in Tandridge (29 in total) were required to apply to the Council between the 1st July and 1st October 2021 for a fit and proper person assessment. Such assessments included consideration of the applicant's legal interest in the site, their conduct (e.g. any criminal record) and the site's financial and management arrangements. Applications may be approved; approved with conditions; or refused. Applicants will have a right of appeal.

Subject to a fee policy being agreed and published, the Council was empowered to charge a fee for processing applications in order to recover associated costs. A proposed Mobile Home Site (Fit and Proper Person) Fee Policy for Tandridge accompanied the report. This included a recommended application fee of £386, based on the recovery of relevant costs as detailed within Appendix B to the report. The policy stated that, in order to limit the financial burden of this new requirement on site owners and operators, an annual fee (as permitted by the Regulations to cover the cost of monitoring the scheme and maintaining the register of site owners and operators) would not be applied.

Paragraph 12.1 of the proposed policy stated that:

“The policy for Fit and Proper Person Fees will be reviewed 2 years from implementation, and thereafter, annually. The review will assess and incorporate any changes that need to be made. This will include a full review of the fee levels, to take into account the effect of inflation and any surpluses or deficits incurred on the predicted level of expenditure in the first two years.”

Councillor Lockwood proposed:

- that Recommendation C of the report be amended as follows:

“authority be delegated to the Executive Head of Communities, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, to make any minor amendments to the policy ~~that may be necessary when reviewed annually.~~”

- an additional resolution to require the Committee to review the policy and associated fees annually.

RESOLVED – that

- A. subject to the first sentence of paragraph 12.1 being amended as follows:

The policy for Fit and Proper Person Fees will be reviewed 2 years from implementation, and thereafter, annually

the Mobile Home Site (Fit and Proper Person) Fee Policy and application fees as set out in Option A of the report be adopted (*i.e. an application fee of £386 be charged to the owners of all commercially operated residential sites*);

- B. the fee be effective from 1st July 2021;
- C. authority be delegated to the Executive Head of Communities, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee, to make any minor amendments to the policy; and
- D. the Committee reviews the policy and associated fees annually.

59. CAPITAL FUNDING OF ACCOMMODATION FOR ROUGH SLEEPERS

A report was submitted which informed the Committee that the Council, in partnership with Transform Housing and Support (Transform) had the opportunity to apply to Homes England for grant funding to purchase two further ‘Move-On’ homes in the District. This would be part of a joint East Surrey bid with Mole Valley, Reigate & Banstead and Epsom & Ewell for funding to purchase eight Move-On properties across the four local authority areas, with each local authority committing to grant fund 25% of the scheme cost.

In Tandridge, the homes would take the form of 2 x one bedroom flats, to provide supported housing for former rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. The report sought approval to proceed with the joint bid and to use commuted sums in the form of local authority grant to Transform to support the purchases

Officers explained that the circumstances had changed since the report was written and that Homes England had advised that the total grant available for the East Surrey bid had been significantly reduced due to pressures on their budget and that the need was low in comparison to proposals submitted from other parts of the country. The East Surrey Partnership had collectively agreed that this was no longer value for money for the local authorities and decided against pursuing the bid at this time.

Members still considered the paper and its recommendations as the financial situation may change over time and a bid may be pursued if a value for money solution is offered.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. approval be given to participate in a joint Homes England bid with the 3 other East Surrey Local Authorities in partnership with Transform Housing and Support for funding from the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme;
- B. use of commuted sums of up to 25% of the total scheme cost, subject to a maximum of £50,000 per unit (total £100,000) be approved and given by way of grant to support Transform Housing and Support in the purchase of two properties in Tandridge to provide housing with support for rough sleepers, former rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping; and
- C. authority to be delegated to the Head of Legal Services to agree the terms of the necessary nomination and funding agreements in support of the proposal should the bid be successful.

Rising 8.47 pm