

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 4 October 2022 at 7:30pm.

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

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

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors Evans, Hammond and Swann

125. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Shiner declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 5 (Appropriation of Land for Council House Building – Minute 127) on the basis that she lives in Wolfs Wood and had taken part in the public consultation.

126. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 JUNE 2022

The minutes were approved and signed as a correct record.

127. APPROPRIATION OF LAND FOR COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING - WOLFS WOOD - NEXT STEPS

The Committee received a report seeking the appropriation of land at Wolfs Wood for planning purposes. This would facilitate the redevelopment of the land once planning permission was granted. Beneficiaries of any third party rights that may have been interfered with would be able to claim compensation but would not be able to hinder the development.

A consultation on the appropriation of the land was run concurrently with a consultation on the development proposal in May and June. No comments were received in relation to third party rights or the appropriation of the land. Appropriation does not guarantee planning permission would be granted.

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

- There would be opportunity for comments on the development proposals during the planning process.
- It was unlikely there would be any significant claims for third party compensations.
- Construction vehicles would access the site using the existing roadway and via the garage site. Agreement had been reached with a resident for using part of their garden to access the site. A traffic management plan would form part of the planning application.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. the land at the proposed development site indicated in the plan at Appendix A to the report, being the garage site and 106-128 (even numbers) Wolfs Wood be appropriated for planning purposes to facilitate the redevelopment of the land for the proper planning of the area and contribute to its economic, social and/or environmental wellbeing;
- B. the Council seek the consent of the Secretary of State for the appropriation of housing land for planning purposes by demonstrating that the land is not required for the purposes for which it is currently held and that the use of the power of appropriation is in the public interest;
- C. delegated authority be provided to the Executive Head of Communities, at the appropriate time to sign a memorandum stating that the land is appropriated from planning purposes to housing.

128. COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME - PELHAM HOUSE

The Committee considered a report which sought approval for Officers to prepare detailed proposals for the redevelopment of Pelham House in Caterham. This followed approval of a planning pre-application budget for redevelopment of the sheltered housing scheme by the Committee at its meeting on 24 March 2022. Officers had commissioned surveys and worked with Planning officers to develop a proposal for the demolition of the existing block of 12 one-bed flats and studios, and the development of 6 x three-bed houses, 2 x two-bed flats and 2 x one-bed flats.

The existing residents had been informed of the proposals and the Council's obligation to find suitable alternative accommodation. There had been no objections to the proposals and Officers would continue to work with existing residents to address any concerns. The budget had been calculated using current build costs and included costs of building to net zero carbon and additional build cost inflation.

It was confirmed that the decision did not require ratification by Full Council. The Chair therefore proposed that the wording of recommendation D end after the word 'commence'. This was agreed.

In response to a Member question, the Committee were provided with information about the 2017/18 review into sheltered housing. This review sought to ensure accommodation was provided in appropriate areas of the District, including sites near local amenities. The review reduced the number of units from 600 to 333 and had earmarked a number of schemes for development, including Pelham House. The development of Bronzeoak House made it possible for the redevelopment of Pelham House as residents from Pelham House could be moved into nearby suitable accommodation. There had also been new schemes at Shallcross, Warlingham and The Greenway, Hurst Green.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. Officers prepare detailed proposals for the development of Pelham House in Caterham for a mix of 3 bedroom houses and 1 and 2 bedroom flats for affordable rent and submit a planning application to develop the site and approve a budget of £3,667,926 for the project;
- 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 an architect, Employers Agent and 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;
- D. should approval be given to proceed with the redevelopment scheme, work to rehouse residents displaced by the redevelopment will commence.

129. ADOPTION OF PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY

The Committee received a report recommending the adoption of the Private Sector Housing Policy. The Committee had approved a draft policy for consultation at its meeting on 21 June 2022. A public consultation had since been held, and several amendments made to the policy as set out in the report.

Clarion Housing Association had agreed to contribute to adaptations in their homes. Officers would continue to have discussions with other housing providers about their provision of a financial contribution to major works.

Officers explained that the approach to major adaptations would be shared with the Surrey wide Aids and Adaptions Group as other authorities were interested in implementing a similar approach.

Councillor Gaffney proposed the following additional recommendation. Councillor Lee seconded.

‘Officers will review the policy in six months and twelve months, and present a report of the findings to the Committee.’

This was agreed.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy at Appendix A to the report, be adopted.
- B. Officers will review the policy in six months and twelve months, and present a report of the findings to the Committee.

130. GARAGE MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The Committee received a progress update on the delivery of the garage management strategy which was first presented to councillors in March 2021. The annual equivalent income had improved by approximately £68,000 since March 2021. However, it would be a challenge to maintain income levels due to the rising cost of living. A number of tenants were in arrears or terminating their rental agreement as a result.

It was noted that the sale of the stand-alone garage mentioned in paragraph 5 of the report had been completed. Further sales were expected, and it was recommended to delegate authority to the Executive Head of Communities to negotiate the terms and proceed with the sale of garages where a long-leasehold sale would be considered advantageous.

In addition to the garages listed in the report, garages at Lagham Road, South Godstone had also been condemned and would be demolished.

In response to questions from Members, Officers confirmed that they would consult Members and residents on sites at Drivers Mead and Clifton Close which were due to be considered for alternative use. It was noted that there had been no concerns raised by residents about the demolition of garages at Rochester Gardens, Auckland Road or Windmill Close.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. the report be noted and the progression of work in line with the site-specific recommendations of Appendix A to the report be approved;
- B. authority be delegated to the Executive Head of Communities (in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of this Committee), where a long-leasehold sale of the garage at Ward Lane or the garages at Clifton Close is considered advantageous, to negotiate the best possible terms and proceed to sell these properties.

131. HOUSING REVENUE OUTTURN 2021/22

The Committee received the Housing Revenue Outturn 2021/22 report. There had been an overall underspend of £523k in 2021/22, the reasons for which were set out in section 3 of the report and the appendix. The underspend was ring-fenced to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and had been transferred to HRA reserves for specific uses in the future.

In relation to the HRA Capital Programme, there was an underspend of £5.719m, of which £5.370m had been agreed to carry forward into 2022/23 by the Strategy and Resources Committee on 1 June 2022.

RESOLVED – that the Housing Revenue Account's Revenue and Capital outturn positions for the year 2021/22 be noted.

132. QUARTER 1 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 1 2022/23. Officers explained the budget monitoring position would be reported to the four policy committees on a quarterly basis.

The report set out a projected forecast of a nil variance overall for the full year of the Housing general fund as of the end of June. However, there was an offsetting variance on two individual budget lines:

- There was a forecast underspend of £80k for homelessness. A regular grant was received for homelessness. However, the budget did not reflect that this was funded this way as opposed to through the revenue budget.
- There was a forecast overspend of £80k on housing benefits. This was as a result of the government subsidy not being designed to meet the full costs to the Council of providing housing benefit.

There was an assumption that these lines would offset each other and this would be kept under review throughout the year.

In terms of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), it was assumed there would be a nil variance overall at this relatively early stage of the year.

In terms of the Capital Programme, there were some minor changes to individual budget lines within the HRA but there was no variance forecast. The position did not reflect the more recent pressures in the construction industry however, and this would be kept under review. There was a minor variance on the disabled facilities grant as it was not expected to expend the full budget.

In response to Member questions, it was confirmed that:

- The revenue risks outlined in the report would be reviewed in light of rising build costs. Officers would report to the Committee the particular aspects which would make up any variance as a result of building cost inflation. The house building business plan for 2023/24 would be drafted earlier to give visibility to estimated inflation. There may be an impact on the revenue account if there were delays to expected tenancies.
- In terms of the Westway Centre, Caterham, Officers were in discussions with the board on lease arrangements, and the Council was taking a flexible approach. A lease was needed in order for the board to receive grant funding. Members expressed a desire for Council partners to also provide funding to the Westway Centre.
- The Council had properties which had asbestos in and is required to hold an asbestos register. These were identified in stock condition surveys, and removals took place where necessary or recommended by third party contractors.

RESOLVED – that the Committee’s forecast Revenue and Capital budgets positions as at Quarter 1 / M3 (June) 2022 be noted (including Housing Revenue Account).

133. HOUSING COMMITTEE – FUTURE TANDRIDGE PROGRAMME UPDATE - SEPTEMBER 2022

The Committee received an update on the Future Tandridge Programme for services within the scope of the Housing Committee. The review was looking at statutory housing services and the Council's landlord service separately. However, there were a number of cross cutting areas under consideration, with the aim of providing a holistic housing service. Housing repairs and building maintenance reviews formed part of the operational services and asset management reviews which would be presented to Community Services Committee on 18 October 2022. It was expected that significant savings would be made as a result of this review, as well as improvements to service delivery.

The landlord service review was considering alternative delivery options for the management of the Council's housing stock. It did not include housing allocations. An options appraisal was set out in the report, alongside the course of action to be undertaken over the next year. A new structure was to be put in place, supported by an improvement plan focused on data and benchmarking, compliance and co-design of policies and procedures.

Officers confirmed that:

- Work was forthcoming on the development of a resident engagement strategy and a resident engagement post. Scheme coordinators would also be tasked with resident engagement.
- The Housing department did not currently have the skillsets to manage outsourced contracts and this would be addressed over the course of the review. Further investment in capacity and experience to manage outsourced contracts would be necessary. Data would be collated over the year so that meaningful benchmarking against other providers could be undertaken. This data, along with cost and consideration of the service residents would receive, would inform the decision on which option would be pursued.
- The programme included the review of Housing policy and processes, including the homelessness strategy. A report would be presented to the committee on the homelessness strategy action plan at the November meeting. Officers were working to increase the amount of temporary accommodation that was available to limit the number of people being temporarily accommodated in hotels.

RESOLVED – that

- A. the progress of both the Housing Statutory and Housing Landlord service reviews outlined in Appendix A be noted;
- B. it be noted that an update on the outcomes of the Housing restructure will be presented to the Housing Committee in September 2023
- C. the direction of travel on the Housing repairs and maintenance service, which is included within the scope of the Operational Services review, be noted.

134. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – that the press and public be excluded from agenda items 14, 15 and 16 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.

135. COUNCIL HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME - OPEN MARKET LAND PURCHASE

The Committee received a verbal update on the proposed purchase of land as part of the Council House Building Programme.

136. UPLANDS - CONFIRMATION OF DECISION TAKEN UNDER URGENCY POWERS (STANDING ORDER 35)

RESOLVED – to note the decision taken in relation to the Uplands under urgency powers (Standing Order 35).

137. BRONZEOAK HOUSE - CONTRACT UPDATE

RESOLVED – that the recommendations in the report be approved.

Rising 9.00 pm