

HOUSING & HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2022 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Maskell (Chairman)

Cllrs. Bonin, Bulford, Dr. Canet, Clack, Penny Cole, Perry Cole, Edwards-Winser, Esler and Griffiths

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. G. Darrington and Harrison

Cllr. Dickins and Cllr. G Darrington was also present via a virtual media platform which does not constitute attendance as recognised by the Local Government Act 1972

66. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Advisory Committee held on 6 June 2022, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

The Chairman, with the Committee's agreement, brought forward consideration of agenda item 8 (minute 70) to take place after agenda item 5 and took agenda item 4 after the revised agenda item 6 (minute 71).

67. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

68. Actions from Previous Meetings

The action was noted.

69. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

70. Budget 2023/24: Review Of Service Dashboards And Service Change Impact Assessments (SCIAS)

The Chief Officer - Finance and Trading presented the report which set out updates to the 2023/24 budget process within the existing financial strategy. SDC was not immune from the financial challenges affecting the country therefore this budget process was expected to be particularly challenging.

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No changes had been made to future assumptions at the stage which would be reviewed during the budget process, as usual. However, due to the April 2022 pay award being higher than previously assumed and an annual savings target of £100,000 already included, an annual budget gap of £735,000 was currently reported.

The report presented a growth proposal that had been identified which needed to be considered. It requested further suggestions from Members before finalising the budget for 2023/24. Informed by the latest information from Government and discussions with Cabinet, it was proposed that the Council once again sets a balanced 10-year budget and continues to aim to be financially self-sufficient.

The Committee considered the growth proposal identified in Appendices E & F to the report. Further consideration was given to a Council energy saving advice service, which could help identify ways of helping residents identify where they could be making energy efficiencies and be able to identify appropriate providers for any work which could be carried out.

Members discussed the proposal noting that there were some free services already which offered this advice and considered that the council had previously run a similar service. The Chief Officer, People & Places advised that previously this had been funded by external funding which had since ended. The Chairman advised that any suggestions would have to go through a feasibility study first and this would be able to give a more definitive answer to whether the suggestion would be financially viable as it had to bring in an income rather than be further expenditure.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- (a) the growth proposal (SCIA 01) identified in Appendices E & F to the report applicable to this Advisory Committee, be considered; and
- (b) consideration be given to the following further income suggestion of a council energy saving advice service.

71. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Chairman and Portfolio Holder updated the Committee on the work within his Portfolio. He advised that the number of residents in temporary accommodation had decreased to 98 from 139 in March 2022. This was through the hard work of Officers increasing accommodation through the purchasing of 11-13 High Street, Swanley; and providing prevention assistance through the HERO Team. Quercus Housing is currently progressing the purchase of 27 - 37 High Street, which would provide an additional 17 units with a mix of 1 and 2 bedrooms. He also advised Members of the other successful projects delivered in partnership, including Vine

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Court Road, Orchard Close and Stay Green House, which had been successfully delivered and he expressed his thanks to the Officers.

The Council had achieved both the Bronze and Silver Awards for Health in the Workplace and would be shortly submitting the Gold application.

Members expressed their thanks to the Officers for all their hard work.

In response to questions the Chief Officer, People and Places advised that it was a huge success for the Council to be able to provide affordable accommodation to those who most needed to access affordable private rented homes, and would share with the Committee the housing partners housing delivery targets going forward.

72. Mental Health Update

The Health and Communities Manager gave a presentation which updated the Committee on the work of the Council over the past year to address mental health concerns.

The Committee thanked the Health and Communities Manager for all the work that she and her team had undertaken and commended them for the work on the warm spaces.

In response to a question the Health and Communities Manager confirmed that staff had had the opportunity to provide feedback on the Mental Health initiatives delivered to Council staff in conjunction with the HR Team.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

73. Health And Wellbeing Action Team Half-Year Report

The Health and Communities Manager presented the report which updated Members on the first quarter (April to June 2022) of the action plan. Members were advised that over three topics there were 23 actions and 74% were on target. She advised that quarter two monitoring was being undertaken and some of the amber targets were now mostly green as there had been delays in some of the partners starting the projects.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

74. Summary of the Emerging Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy

The Head of Housing presented the report which set out the Homelessness review and a draft Sevenoaks District Council emerging Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2023- 2028 for consultation.

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The Housing Strategy 2022-2027 was approved in July 2022 and contained 4 key themes of focus for the District Council's housing service over the next 5 years. It included reducing homelessness and improving routes into permanent accommodation.

The Council had a statutory duty under the Homelessness Act 2002, to have a Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy. The Strategy must be renewed at least every 5 years.

The Strategy must set out the Council's plans for the continued work towards:

- prevention of homelessness
- provision of sufficient accommodation/sustainable solutions
- support to be available for people who become homeless or who are at risk

The Council were required to undertake a Homelessness Service Review to inform the Strategy. The review provided information on the needs of people who had approached the Council's housing service for help since the last Homelessness Strategy was adopted. It considered what the Council had achieved, successful funding bids to widen service provision and the delivery of additional affordable housing units through Quercus Housing.

The objectives of the draft Strategy would cover prevention, interventions and sustainable solutions detailed on page 78 and the actions to be taken to deliver these in the Action Plan page 124.

Members were advised of the consultation timetable and the feedback from the consultation would come back to the Committee on 7 February 2023.

In response to questions, Members were advised that the Council's partners were aware of the consultation and had been involved already with conversations as part of the action plan. A survey would form part of the Consultation and this would be available on the Council's website as well as workshops available for Members and key stakeholders. If required the consultation period could always be extended if it was thought necessary to gain additional data.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) The outcome of the Homelessness Review, the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy and the proposed timetable for consultation and implementation, be considered; and

- b) the first draft of the emerging Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for public consultation, subject to any required amendment, be approved.

75. Making Best Use Of The Social Housing Stock - Under Occupation Initiative

The Housing Strategy Manager presented the report which advised members that the Housing Strategy 2022-2027 highlighted the importance of making the best use of existing social housing. Approval was being sought to introduce an under occupation initiative which was open to all Registered Provider partners with family sized housing stock located in the District. The proposed initiative could be funded from available S106 affordable housing monies for an initial 2 year period, from April 2023 to March 2025, subject to Portfolio Holder approval for the use of these funds.

Members considered the report.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: that it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) the introduction of a new under occupation initiative, be agreed; and
- b) following consultation with the Portfolio Holder of Housing & Health, the Housing Strategy Manager, be delegated authority to finalise details of the initiative in collaboration with Registered Provider partners to make any minor amendments.

76. Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy

The Housing Strategy Manager presented the report which set out how the Council's Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2017 would provide assistance to homeowners and private tenants to enable them to keep their homes in good repair and free of hazards and enable them to live as independently as possible. The Policy set out the assistance available to disabled people to help them adapt, improve or repair their homes. The levels of discretionary grant assistance contained within the Policy were regularly reviewed to ensure they remained fit for purpose. The last review was undertaken, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, in June 2022. The next full review was to take place in 2025, unless there were legislative changes then a review would take place sooner.

Members discussed the report noting the importance of the policy. In response to questions the Housing Strategy Manager advised she would look into whether assistive technology grants were available.

Action: For Housing Strategy Manager to look into whether assistive technology grants to support independent living were available.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that the updated levels of discretionary grant assistance available under the Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy.

77. Empty Homes Strategy and Action Plan

The Housing Strategy Manager presented the report which set out that the Housing Strategy 2022 - 2027 included the theme of promoting quality and optimising range and suitability of new and existing homes, which included an objective of fewer empty homes.

Members discussed the report asking questions of clarification and noted the importance of bringing empty homes back into use and the proposed collaboration between internal departments including Council Tax and Housing

Public Sector Equality Duty.

Members gave consideration to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that the Empty Homes Strategy and Action Plan 2022- 2028 be adopted.

78. Work Plan

The work plan was noted with the following additions to the meeting on 7 February 2023:

Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy
Scope for Council's Energy Efficient advice

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.20 PM

CHAIRMAN