

HOUSING & HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2023 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Perry Cole (Chairman)

Cllrs. Bulford, Camp, Clack, G. Darrington, Edwards-Winser, Gustard, Lindop and Streatfeild

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Harrison, Hudson and Cathy Morgan, Hudson, and Cathy Morgan.

Cllrs. P. Darrington and Robinson were also present.

24. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held 12 September 2023 be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

25. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

26. Actions from Previous Meetings

There were none.

27. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder, and Chairman, gave an update on the services within their portfolio. They had recently supported the District Council Network's commitment for all Councils to write a letter to the Chancellor, calling for several policy asks to be adopted by Government. These policies would support housing and homelessness services, which were facing enormous budget pressures. The most common reasons for homeless approaches to the council were domestic abuse, friends and families no longer being able to accommodate, and the ending of private tenancies. The Local Housing Allowance was based on rates in 2018, and was frozen in 2020, which created affordability issues and greater homelessness pressures. The council, alongside partners including Citizens Advice, Mind, and Porchlight, was hosting a Housing & Community Hub at the Council Offices, and the HERO team provided outreach support at community hubs across the district.

The council's trading company, Quercus Housing, completed the purchase of the council-led development at 27-37 High Street, Swanley in September. This provided 17 new affordable homes, 11 of which were for essential workers, and 6 for essential

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workers under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. 11 further homes would be delivered in the district over the next 6 months.

The Homes for Ukraine scheme was ongoing. The council were working with Kent County Council to support resettlement for the remaining 115 households that were still with hosts.

The Private Sector Housing team made a successful bid for £1.25 million from the government's Home Upgrade Grant. This was being used to deliver energy efficiency and clean heating upgrades to 60 low-income households.

Kent Public Health had recently confirmed the continuation of their funding for the council's One You service for 2024/25. External funding from Kent Public Health would be used to provide two additional One You advisors at the new Edenbridge Memorial Health Centre, which would open on 27 November 2023. They would provide an on-site community based healthy lifestyle and wellbeing support programme over the next two years. The Council had further secured external funding to deliver a community development program in Swanley and Northern Parishes, as a result of partnership work with the Dartford, Gravesham, and Swanley NHS Health & Care Partnership. This program would focus on community health and wellbeing.

28. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

29. Health Inequalities Work in Swanley

The Health Team Leader presented the report, which updated the committee on the progress of the Swanley and Northern Parishes Health Inequalities project. The project was funded by the Dartford, Gravesham, and Swanley Healthcare Partnership, and aimed to engage with local communities to combat health inequalities. The project prioritised community engagement and insight, as the interventions would be unsuccessful without their willing participation in the medium and long terms. A Community Development Officer had been hired internally to gather feedback from stakeholders and partners, and an external organisation had been commissioned to engage with residents about their needs and priorities. This information was being analysed to inform the development of intervention programmes, which would be proposed to the Healthcare Partnership and the Integrated Care Board.

In response to questions, the officer explained that the blueprint approach outlined in the report was for data gathering, and that the proposals would be developed in line with the Integrated Care Strategy. The long-term nature of the interventions made a metrics-based approach difficult to implement. The project received a very small share of the available funding from the Partnership, and so it was targeted at specific areas and demographics to address key issues, such as obesity. An application for

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similar funding was also made to the West Kent Health Care Partnership, which would have applied to the rest of the district, but this was unsuccessful, as the available data did not show a significant need.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

30. Budget 2024/25: Review of Service Dashboards and Service Change Impact Assessments (SCIAs)

The Chief Officer – Finance & Trading presented the report which set out updates to the 2024/25 budget process within the existing framework of the 10-year budget and savings plan.

Some changes had been made to future assumptions and they would be continued to be reviewed during the budget process. The key cost driver continued to be inflation, with pressure coming through on service demand, the pay award and the cost of goods and services. The items listed in Appendix E reported a current annual budget gap of £1.368m. Members were advised that they were likely to have to make more difficult decisions during the 2024/25 budget setting process than they had had to make for many years. Members noted an error in Appendices G and H, which included two savings SCIAs which did not fall within the remit of the Committee. These SCIAs would not be voted on and would instead be presented to People & Places Advisory Committee.

No further items for savings or growth were put forward by Members of the Housing and Health Advisory Committee.

Informed by the latest information from Government and discussions from Cabinet, it was proposed that the Council once again set a balanced 10-year budget and continued to aim to be financially self-sufficient with no direct funding from Government through additional Revenue Support Grant or New Homes Bonus.

In response to questions, the officer explained that the budget retroactively incorporated external funding, but did not assume its existence for the purposes of balancing the budget. Balancing the budget over 10 years allowed for greater flexibility in addressing large surprise costs.

The report presented a growth item that had been identified which needed to be considered, and requested further suggestions from the Advisory Committee, before finalising the budget for 2024/25.

The Committee considered the proposal as set out in Appendices G and H, which was a one-off increase of £150,000 in budget to support the homelessness service.

Members gave further consideration to additional suggestions for growth and savings which had been suggested by Members. The suggestions were not relevant to this Advisory Committee, and were referred to the appropriate Advisory Committee.

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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 G1) identified in Appendices G&H to the report applicable to this Advisory Committee, be considered; and that
- b) That no further income or growth proposals were identified.

CHANGE IN THE ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

The Chairman, with the Committee's agreement, brought forward consideration of agenda items 9 and 10.

31. Housing Strategy - 1 Year On

The Head of Housing presented the report, which provided an update on the Housing Strategy and Action Plan, following its adoption at Full Council in July 2022.

In response to questions, the officer explained that rural housing need was calculated from Rural Housing Needs surveys that were conducted in partnership with Race and the parish councils, and schemes were delivered by specialist registered providers. These rural sites would be required to provide affordable housing on developments of 6 to 9 units. Work was ongoing in addressing issues regarding S106 infrastructure requirements and rural exception sites, as these sites were designated for local people, which would reduce the infrastructure impacts of the development, allowing for more affordable housing to be viable. Cabinet had agreed a Registered Provider Eligibility Criteria, and registered providers were encouraged to come forward to be added to the Council's list. Thus far, two providers had been added and another application was progressing. Members were encouraged to engage with the upcoming Regulation 18 Consultation for the Local Plan, to support local sites which could sustain all types of housing, including market, social, and affordable housing.

In response to further questions, Members were advised that the changes Kent County Council had made to their care leavers program would create a significant homelessness pressure for the council.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

32. Rough Sleeper Initiative Fund Year 1 Update

The Head of Housing presented the report, which updated the committee on the delivery of the Rough Sleeper Initiative Funding. The funding had been used to allow for additional officers to provide outreach services and supported accommodation. There were some challenges in delivering services with the unwillingness of customers to engage with outreach work.

Members discussed the report.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

33. Housing Stock & Waiting Times in the District Update

The Head of Housing presented the report, which updated the committee on the waiting times for applicants on the Council Housing register, and the number of social and affordable rented units in the district.

In response to questions, the officer explained that Band D of the register (single local essential workers) was used to allocate properties of intermediate rent in developments that required local essential workers, who did not have a traditional housing need. The upcoming Allocations Policy review would examine the possibility of removing or changing the single requirement to couples in the band. The total number of people on the housing register in October 2023 was 821. The register consisted of people waiting to be allocated social housing provided by Registered Providers, such as West Kent Housing, in the district. Officers would investigate bringing a like-for-like comparison between years for the register but advised members that unique issues and changes from one year to the next made comparisons difficult. For example, the Covid pandemic and the cost of living crisis had impacted the service significantly. Average wait times were provided, rather than maximums and minimums, as this provided a better overview between bands. Some customers elected not to bid for properties that were available and met their housing need as they desired to live elsewhere, which affected the longest wait times.

Members asked further questions of the officer regarding the provision of affordable housing in the district. The Housing team advised that they did not deliver affordable housing, but contribute to the formation of planning policy – such as through the Affordable Housing SPD. The Housing team worked with existing and new Registered Providers to enable the delivery of social and affordable housing in the district. Assessing the viability of affordable housing in developments was outside of the team's remit. However, it was noted that there were significant challenges to the viability of social and affordable housing for developers, including Registered Providers and the Council, due to the scale of sites and increases in construction, labour and material costs over the past few years.

Members were advised that homeless customers could be housed outside of the district in suitable and affordable private accommodation. Some affordable housing was provided through Quercus Housing, by purchasing housing directly from the market or developers. The Council had secured £2.8 million in capital funding from the Local Authority Housing Fund to use in acquiring affordable housing to meet refugee need (such as in the Homes for Ukraine and Afghan resettlement schemes). So far, 6 units had been delivered in Swanley to support essential workers housed under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Other developments were being investigated for further opportunities.

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Temporary accommodation for homelessness was included within the homelessness budget. In the previous financial year, roughly £1.3 million was spent on emergency accommodation, of which the maximum of 30% was reclaimed through Housing Benefit. There were no customers in any hotel accommodation at the time of the meeting. The housing allowance was based on figures from 2011, which further increased the budget pressure arising from the service. Members discussed the impact that the lack of affordable housing and notably, social housing being delivered by Registered Providers, had on the homelessness budget.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

34. Work Plan

The Work Plan was noted.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9:00PM

CHAIRMAN