

HOUSING & HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2021 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Maskell (Chairman)

Cllr. Coleman (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Bonin, Dr. Canet, Clack, Perry Cole, Edwards-Winsor, Firth, Harrison and Parkin

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. G. Darrington

Cllrs. Dickins and Griffiths were present via a virtual media platform, which does not constitute attendance as recognised by the Local Government Act 1972.

12. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Housing & Health Advisory Committee held on 8 June 2021 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

13. Declarations of Interest

For transparency, Cllr Griffiths declared that she was involved in the landlord incentives scheme.

14. Actions from Previous Meetings

There were none.

15. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder, and Chairman, reported that housing staff undertook rough sleeper count in Swanley, Edenbridge, and Sevenoaks with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities & Local Government (DLUHC) in August. No rough sleepers had been identified. The next count was scheduled to take place on 16 November.

There had been discussions on the future of Quercus Housing with plans to borrow up to £1 million via the Council in order to purchase and refurbish Abbey Court in West Kingsdown. This was to help the delivery of affordable housing in the District. A report on this would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

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The Chairman introduced Sharon Donald who was the new Housing Strategy Manager. Members were advised that two families from Syria had been recently housed within the district as part of the Resettlement Scheme.

Following queries on the specific locations of rough sleep counts, the Head of Housing encouraged Members to contact the housing team to advise them of any specific locations they had seen rough sleepers. It was clarified that if a rough sleeper did not wish to be housed then the caseworker would continue to engage with them.

16. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none

17. Budget 2022/23: Review of Service Dashboards and Service Change Impact Assessments (SCIAs)

The Head of Finance presented the report which set out updates to the 2022/23 budget within the existing framework of the 10-year budget and savings plan. The report presented growth and savings/ additional income proposals that had been identified which needed to be considered, and requested further suggestions from Members, before finalising the budget for 2022/23.

Informed by the latest information from Government and discussions with Cabinet, it was proposed that the Council continued to set a revenue budget that assumed no direct funding from Government through the Revenue Support Grant or New Homes Bonus. This would result in the Council continuing to be financially self-sufficient. To achieve this aim and to ensure a balanced budget position over the next 10-year period would continue to be challenging due to the ongoing financial impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, homelessness and inflationary pressures.

The budget process would be the same as two years ago as opposed to the shortened process last year, but streamlining the process in future years was being investigated.

No changes had been made to the assumptions at this stage, and the annual budget gap included in the report was £100,000 which related to the annual savings target. It was expected however, that the gap would increase.

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

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- a) the savings and growth proposals identified in Appendices E & F to the report (SCIA 01 (22/23), 02 (22/23), 03 (22/23) and 04 (22/23)) applicable to this Advisory Committee, be considered;
- b) consideration be given to asking Officers to review the potential of setting up a social lettings agency.

18. Mental Health Update

The Health & Communities Manager gave a presentation on the mental health initiatives provided by the Council. The Mental Health Strategy was launched in June. The strategy covered what could be done to prevent mental ill health, the Council's commitment to improving mental health, and the Council's partners.

Internally, members of staff had been trained in Mental Health First Aid. The Council was aiming to complete the Kent & Medway Health Workplace Awards, having so far already achieved Bronze.

Members asked questions of clarification.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

19. First Homes Update

The Head of Housing presented the report which updated Members on the First Homes policy. First Homes were new build homes for sale to first time buyers only. Following a written Ministerial Statement on First Homes issued in May, a pilot programme was announced to be launched as part of the next Affordable Homes Programme. The First Homes policy would apply to planning permissions granted from 28 December 2021. Major sites with 10 homes or more where Core Strategy Policy SP3 triggers on-site affordable housing, 25% of affordable housing would be required as First Homes.

A First Homes pilot was currently underway in Bolsover District Council (Derbyshire) and an officer working group would be monitoring the progress of the pilot. Within the District, it was not likely a developer would agree to a pilot.

Members expressed concerns that the policy made targets difficult to meet with house prices and income being higher within the District compared to other areas in England outside London. The Head of Housing advised that feedback on this was going to government and the Council was undergoing a housing strategy review which included consideration of the First Homes policy.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

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20. Landlord Incentive Scheme Update

The Head of Housing presented the report which updated Members on introduction of the Help to Let scheme to encourage private landlords to work with the Council to help assist local families in housing need whilst reducing the risks and difficulties of private sector renting.

As part of the scheme, the Council would provide services free of charge including tenant matching, 'right to rent' checks, electronic inventories prepared and £500 towards repairs during each 12 month tenancy period. Financial incentives included bond or cash incentives equivalent of 6 weeks rent and free landlord insurance through Help2Rent. The service would be promoted by the Council.

Members asked questions of clarification.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

21. Introduction to Affordable Housing

The Head of Housing gave a presentation on the types of affordable housing, its history and ways to deliver affordable housing.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

22. Work Plan

The work plan was noted with the following additions made:

20 October 2021 (additional meeting)

- Quercus Housing - Increasing the Delivery of Affordable Housing.

23 November 2021

- Impact of Homelessness

8 February 2021

- Quercus Housing Update
- Update on Empty Homes Action Plan (moved from November's meeting)

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.01 PM

CHAIRMAN