

HOUSING & HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2021 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Maskell (Chairman)

Cllrs. Bonin, Dr. Canet, Clack, Perry Cole, G. Darrington, Edwards-Winsor, Firth and Griffiths

Cllrs. P. Darrington were also present.

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

25. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 28 September 2021 and 20 October 2021 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

26. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

27. Actions from Previous Meetings

There were none.

28. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder, and Chairman, gave an update on the progress of working with Quercus Housing to ensure delivery of affordable housing within the District. The Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer - People & Places advised that at Full Council, the draw down of a loan from prudential borrowing in order to progress the capital purchase and refurbishment of Abbey Court (West Kingsdown) was approved subject to due diligence. If planning permission were to be granted prior to purchase, the price the agent had been selling Abbey Court for would inflate and would no longer be affordable to Quercus Housing. Therefore the purchase of Abbey Court would take place before seeking planning permission for change of use. As the applicant would be the Council, the application would need to be considered at the Development Control Committee meeting which would ensure engagement with the local community, including West Kingsdown Parish Council.

A rough sleeper count took place the previous week in Swanley, Sevenoaks and Edenbridge. One rough sleeper was identified in Swanley and was already known to the Council and had been supported.

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The Vine Court Road partnership project with West Kent Housing Association (WKHA) would provide accommodation for the homeless and was scheduled to open in January 2022.

The results of the recent Older Person's Housing Needs Survey had been fed into the Housing Strategy and Local Plan. Within the District, there was an aging population with varying needs. Most expressed that they wished to stay in their own home and wanted more information and advice on housing. The development of the Housing Strategy was underway with various evidence data and stakeholder interviews to gather views.

The Council received the bronze award for the Kent and Medway Healthy Workplace Programme with the application for the silver award to be submitted later in the month.

Following queries, Members were advised that a notice had been drafted by WKHA for local residents on Vine Court Road and would be released in due course.

29. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

30. Progress on Digital Inclusion

The Health & Communities Manager gave a [presentation](#) on digital exclusion within the District and the work of the Council, Kent County Council and local organisations to promote digital inclusion. The two socio-demographic groupings most likely to be digitally excluded were 'mature older people' and 'working age on low income' which made up 16.1% and 8% of households within the District respectively. Although there were less digitally excluded populations in Sevenoaks compared to the rest of Kent, broadband speeds were a concern, particularly in rural areas.

The Council had secured £79,000 funding to deliver a project with Compaid to support the most vulnerable homeless customers. Digital inclusion had been adopted as a priority for the Sevenoaks District Local Strategic Partnership and Community Wellbeing Fund. Kent County Council had been awarded funding to deliver the government's 'Project Gigabit' Programme aiming to improve broadband connectivity.

The Chairman welcomed Val Sprott, the Training Services Manager from Compaid who gave an update on their work with the Council to support digital inclusion. Compaid had delivered digital training in a relaxed and informal atmosphere for those with learning, physical, financial or mental difficulties. The one-to-one training was person centred and delivered based on their needs. A new project would be introduced to support those who are homeless or in temporary accommodation to help them access essential services online.

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Following queries, Members were advised that as well as training provided in Sevenoaks and Swanley, Compaid would like to deliver face-to-face training in other areas of the District should a suitable venue be provided.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

31. Homelessness Update - Quarter 2

The Head of Housing gave a [presentation](#) updating Members on homelessness within the District. New challenges such as the lifting of the eviction ban, the end of the furlough scheme and increased approaches with the new Domestic Abuse Act had placed increased pressures on the Homeless Prevention Team. As a result, there had been an increase in emergency & temporary accommodation.

Actions taken included the implementation of the Temporary Accommodation Action Plan, the creation of a more holistic approach to homelessness prevention and support services, the launch of a Voluntary Relocation Scheme and Family Incentive and updating of the Quercus Housing Business Plan. Projects in the pipeline included progressing the purchase of Abbey Court in West Kingsdown, expansion of the HERO team, development of an Empty Homes Action Plan and the revision of the Council's Homelessness Strategy and Allocations Policy. Members were advised of sources of income and the current risks to the services.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

32. A Local First Homes Policy for Sevenoaks District

The Housing Strategy Manager presented the report proposing a local First Homes Policy for the District. The national First Homes policy would be implemented for 106 sites on 28 December 2021. First Homes would be sold at a prescribed discount to first time buyers and held as affordable housing in perpetuity.

Based on the recommendations from the Targeted Review of Local Housing Needs (TRLHN), it was proposed that the Sevenoaks First Homes policy should contain a 50% discount on open market value, a capped maximum discounted sale price of £250,000 at initial sale and a set annual household income of £56,250.

Following concerns expressed from Members, it was acknowledged that it would be difficult to implement the policy due to the large average house prices within the District but the proposed Local First Homes policy would be more suitable for the District than the national First Homes policy.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

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Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) a Local First Homes policy for Sevenoaks District, including the contents as set out in the report, or further refined, be approved and adopted for implementation on 28 December 2021; and
- b) any supplementary First Homes policies, including re-sales and use of First Homes commuted sums, be drawn up by Officers, with delegated authority given to the Chief Officer - People & Places and Chief Officer - Planning & Regulatory Services, following consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Housing & Health and Development & Conservation, for their approval.

33. Approval to seek Additional Designation of Parishes/Areas Under Section 157(1) of the Housing Act

The Housing Strategy Manager presented the report proposing an application be submitted to the Secretary of State for Department of Levelling up, Housing & Communities to seek additional areas within the District to be designated 'rural' under section 157(1) of the Housing Act 1985.

From 2014, affordable housing contributions could be sought for planning application sites with a net residential addition of ten or more homes. Local authorities were able to set a lower threshold to rural areas described under section 157(1) of the Housing Act 1985. S157 designation had applied to over 60% of the District as they were located within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). A lower site threshold of six to nine homes was agreed by Cabinet to be applied to these designated areas, but could not applied to rural areas located outside of the AONBs.

Local authorities may apply to have additional areas designated rural under S157(1). Parishes would be required to have a population density of less than two persons per hectare and for any settlements within them have a population of fewer than 3,000 inhabitants, with some flexibility to the first criterion.

Rural designation under S157(1) would allow the Council to put restrictive covenants in place so the home could only be sold on to someone who had been living or working in the parish for three years. It would also enable the Council to apply the lower site threshold to all new market housing sites within the parish to maximise the opportunity for S106 commuted sum payments towards the delivery of new affordable housing.

Members asked questions of clarification.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

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Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that an application to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, seeking additional areas/parishes in the District (as detailed in Appendix A) to be designated under section 157(1) of the Housing Act 1985, be submitted.

34. To note minutes of the Health Liaison Board

The Minutes of the Health Liaison Board meeting held on 3 November 2021 were discussed and noted.

35. Work Plan

The work plan was noted with the following items moved from the meeting taking place on 17 January 2022 to the following meeting in Summer 2022:

- Housing Allocations Policy
- Update on Empty Homes Action Plan
- Rough Sleeper Initiative Update
- Out of Borough Replacement Policy.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.49 PM

CHAIRMAN