

HOUSING & HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2022 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Maskell (Chairman)

Cllr. Harrison (Vice - Chair)

Cllrs. Bonin, Bulford, Perry Cole, G. Darrington, Edwards-Winsor, Griffiths and Harrison

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Dr. Canet, Clack and Esler

Cllrs. P. Darrington and Osborne-Jackson were also present.

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

51. Appointment of Chairman

Resolved: That Cllr. Maskell be appointed as Chairman of the Advisory Committee for the year 2022/2023.

(Cllr. Maskell in the Chair)

52. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

Resolved: That Cllr. Harrison be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Committee for the year 2022/23.

53. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2022 be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record

54. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

55. Actions from Previous Meetings

There were none.

56. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

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There were none.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

The Chairman, with the Committee's agreement, brought forward consideration of item 8 - Quercus Housing - increasing the delivery of affordable housing in the Sevenoaks district (Minute 57).

57. Quercus Housing - Increasing delivery of affordable housing in the district

The Chief Officer, People and Places presented the report which recommended that the Council approve £15 million to be drawn down by Quercus Housing over a 10-year period to deliver affordable housing in the district.

The report laid out that Quercus Housing remained ambitious in achieving the delivery of affordable homes in the Sevenoaks District and was seeking a longer term position to support this ambition and develop a project pipeline for the next 10 years. Quercus Housing had identified sites that were under development by the Council, including Stangrove, White Oak and Farmstead Drive, where Quercus Housing could acquire the affordable units.

An indicative pipeline of projects was discussed. Each site would be looked at on a scheme by scheme basis and subject to the usual due diligence, financial assessment and securing relevant permissions, such as planning.

Projects costs, financial viability assessment and borrowing requirements would be impacted by existing inflation levels and would therefore be undertaken on a site by site basis. Quercus Housing would benefit from an ongoing income stream on the assets that should increase in value over time which would reduce the overall risk.

Members asked questions of clarification and the Chairman used his discretion to allow the Chairman of the Finance and Investment Advisory Committee in attendance to address the Committee. The Chairman of the Finance and Investment Advisory Committee expressed a desire for an illustrative model of how the borrowing might be used in order to generate funds to pay the loans. It was explained that this would be completed on a scheme by scheme basis.

In response to questions Officers advised that any profits generated by Quercus Housing would be retained by Quercus Housing and utilised for further affordable housing. The business cases would be approved on a case by case basis as approved by the Quercus Housing Board in line with the business plan approved by the Quercus Housing Guarantor Board which was made up of Cabinet Members. This would then go to the Deputy Section 151 Officer and the Chief Executive. Officers emphasised that the cases would be considered individually and would have to be identified as affordable.

In response to questions it was confirmed by Officers that up to 45 units could be delivered in the 10 year timeframe. If more sites were viable on the proposed

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funding model then additional funding may be looked into. Two developments had already been completed Gladedale House and 11-13 High Street, Swanley. The viability for the developments would be constantly assessed including land viability assessments and maintenance costs over a comprehensive timeframe.

Members discussed the importance of the affordable housing proposals and noted that the Council continued to work with other local housing providers and landlords. The proposals would provide another way to meet the demand for affordable housing. Members noted that the assets would ultimately be owned by the Council as the shareholder of Quercus Housing.

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 to recommend to Council that

- a) a financial facility of up to £15m to be drawn down by Quercus Housing over a 10-year period from prudential borrowing obtained by the Council and to be used for the purpose of delivering affordable housing, be approved; and
- b) the Deputy S151 Officer in consultation with the Chief Executive be delegated authority, to agree the terms of any borrowing to be determined at the point of draw down.

58. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Chairman and Portfolio Holder gave an update to the Committee.

The new Homelessness Prevention Manager and a new Head of Housing had been recruited and were welcomed by the Chairman.

11 to 13 High Street, Swanley had formally launched providing 15 new affordable units for the local community. Furthermore, a positive meeting had been had with Rockdale Housing regarding a potential joint venture at Abbeyfields, Riverhead.

The Rough Sleeper Initiative funding update would be presented to the meeting as a report on the agenda (minute 62)

The Better Care Fund allocation had been approved and SDC had been awarded £1,303,129. This was for the disability facility grants which created adaptations in the home for disabled residents.

The Homes for Ukraine Scheme had been introduced and as of 24 May, 125 homes had been inspected from a pool of 143 matched households. The Chairman and Portfolio Holder expressed his thanks to the team for their hard work.

The rural housing needs survey had been re-run from 9 May 2022 in Horton, Kirby and South Darenth.

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The Health Liaison Board met on 25 July, updates were provided on, among other things the Integrated Care Systems, Run- Walk- Push against dementia event and the Kent Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Some concern was raised by a Member as to the Out of Hours Homelessness partnership with Centra and the processes that were utilised. The Chairman noted that the issue would be discussed as a later item on the agenda (minute 63). Officers asked that any service concerns Members had should be brought to them as soon as possible.

Members discussed parking concerns around 11 to 13 High-Street Swanley. It was raised that there was a negative result on the neighbouring trading estate. Officers confirmed that residents of the site had free parking permits nearby at Bevan Place and Officers were monitoring the situation. Any concerns could be reported to the Council. Members raised concerns about the parking problems being exacerbated by the Bevan Place site and noted that further consideration would be required once the new site was completed. The Chief Officer, People and Places identified that she would investigate the use of parking by residents of 11 to 13 High Street and feedback to members in response to concerns.

59. Draft Housing Strategy 2022 - 2027

The interim Head of Housing presented the report which proposed the second draft of the Housing Strategy following consultation. Responses had been positive and there was good support for the proposed schemes. Areas of note included protecting the green belt, the type and quality of new housing, energy efficiency and the need for more affordable housing.

The themes contained in the draft Housing Strategy 2022 - 2027 were subject to public consultation between 14 February and 18 April 2022. Over 140 responses were received. It was considered that a broad range of participants responded to the consultation. Subsequent to the consultation, it remained the case that officers believed the themes of the Housing Strategy addressed the housing needs and aspirations of local people, whatever their background.

Members discussed the number of responses. Officers highlighted that the consultation had been publicised by the Communications team via Social Media and the Council's Magazine, Inshape among other places. Members discussed the possibility of posting out the consultation as pre-paid to stakeholders and residents so as to encourage further engagement. Officers suggested that the cost to this alternative would be great and the quality of response may not ultimately be improved. The cost to response ratio would have to be carefully considered. It was noted that consultation events had been held with members, town and parish councils, housing associations and voluntary sector organisations supporting homelessness. Historically, it had been difficult to generate feedback for Housing Strategy Consultations. It was suggested that should the strategy be recommended, Officers would present additional engagement figures to Cabinet to highlight the length and breadth of the consultation.

In response to questions it was emphasised that the Council's Housing Register Allocations Scheme 2022-27 which was to be considered on the agenda (minute

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60), was a separate document and had generated more engagement as this had a more direct impact on residents and would generate a different, more immediate interest from respondents.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

Resolved: That the Committee

- (a) note the feedback received from the public consultation;
- (b) consider and recommend to Cabinet that it be recommended to Council that the draft Housing Strategy 2022 - 27 be adopted

60. Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocation Scheme 2022 - 2027

The Interim Head of Housing presented the report which outlined the Council's Housing Strategy Allocations Scheme. The report presented a second draft of the Housing Register Allocations Scheme 2022-2027, which had been refined in light of feedback received from a recent public consultation.

The Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Scheme enabled the Council and its partners to work together to ensure that those in most need of affordable housing were prioritised. The Council operated a Choice Based Letting Scheme and the Housing Register Allocations Scheme set out a framework that described how to register, the assessment process and property allocation process. Over 500 responses were recorded including from Members, partners and key stakeholders. The Committee noted their thanks to all those involved in the consultation process.

A few respondents had commented on the difficulties faced by young people who wanted to move to their first independent home, but who were impacted by high property prices and rents combined with low wages/zero hour contracts. As was drafted, people sharing facilities (e.g. young people still living at home with their parents and sharing cooking and bathing facilities, who wanted to live independently), were not classed as having a housing need and were not eligible to join the Housing Register. Therefore, it was recommended that an additional category be added in Band D (low priority) and to create a Local Lettings Plan to give an element of priority, which would be agreed on a site-by-site basis, to this category of applicant on selected schemes.

The current scheme did not require applicants to disclose whether they were staff or Members of the Council or related to, partner of, or living with staff or Members of the Council. It was recommended that this requirement be introduced to protect the Council's interest and that of its employees and elected Members. It was recommended that their status be flagged on the Council's computer system, and failure to disclose this information could result in the application being suspended or cancelled as determined by the designated manager. It was also recommended that applicants for vacant pitches on the Hever Road traveller site were required to join the Housing Register, in the same way that all other

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applicants requiring housing assistance were required to do. It was suggested that a bespoke allocations policy be prepared for the letting of pitches on Hever Road.

Members discussed the proposal to retain a 'low priority' category band D. It was expressed that adding excess numbers of people onto the register would be unnecessary and have the potential to stretch the Council's resources. Officers confirmed that the long waiting times and low-priority status of young people living with their parents meant that younger, key-workers were discouraged from attaining a place on the register. The additional category would allow a small amount of those essential workers to gain a small percentage priority on the register which would help those younger key workers in high-value areas.

Officers confirmed that for clarity the local connection criteria would be re-iterated under the new band category.

Members discussed the need for a local connection requirement should a resident wish to join the housing Register. Residents could be left in limbo should they not be able to afford property within the Sevenoaks district despite being able to find affordable property outside the district. Officers outlined that the constraints of the District did cause problems in terms of the Green Belt and Housing development restrictions.

Members asked questions of clarification regarding the local connection criteria's effect on homeless inhabitants and temporary accommodation. Officers confirmed that the local connection criteria were correlated to a family member or previous home under homeless law. It was confirmed that the homelessness and allocations policies were separate. Applications for temporary accommodation and the housing register were established under separate legislation. The previous local connection criteria had been 6months. The new criteria had been extended to three years via employment and living which would encourage those that were committed to obtaining social housing. This also encouraged users to seek private accommodation. It was also emphasised that social housing demand outstripped supply.

Members asked clarifying questions as to the requirement to disclose working for or being related to Council employees. It was confirmed that this was recommended for the purposes of transparency to ensure fair claim to social housing. Officers suggested being mindful about a failure to disclose the information being subject to discretion for a period of three years to encourage users to come forward.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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

Resolved: That

- a) the feedback received from the public consultation be noted; and

- b) following consideration, it be recommend to Cabinet to recommend to Council that the second draft of the Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Scheme 2022-2027 be adopted.

61. Sevenoaks District Council Out of Area Placement Policy

The Chief Officer People and Places presented the report which proposed the Council's Out of Area Placement Policy.

The demand for both temporary accommodation (TA) and settled accommodation was growing across the district with the number of applicants approaching the Council for resettlement support growing each year. Alongside the increase to local demand, the Council was also competing for both TA and longer-term accommodation with other districts and boroughs including unitary London Authorities, whom have a far more generous budget and funding streams than Sevenoaks District. There was a lack of available move on properties. These pressures led the Council to consider the manner in which resources were allocated based on household composition; community contribution including work and volunteering; and social and welfare needs. The proposed Out of Area Placement Policy set out how the Council sought to work with households based on their priorities, presenting needs and affordability in order to offer the most appropriate accommodation for both TA and through the Private Rented Sector as a longer-term housing solution.

Members discussed the report and asked questions of clarification.

It was confirmed that a financial incentives package was being looked at to encourage landlords to get involved. Private sector offers were encouraged to prevent homelessness and prevent residents getting stuck in temporary accommodation.

Members expressed some concern regarding vulnerable people being moved out of the area. It was confirmed that permanent relocation was possible for those that wanted it but that this was not an ideal solution and could cause problems long-term for residents if they wished to return. It was also confirmed that the Council kept track of temporary accommodation placements. Costs and duration were tracked. In-district accommodation was also encouraged with support being offered to those in temporary accommodation including schooling and transportation needs. Members also raised concern regarding the breadth of choice being provided for those with temporary accommodation needs.

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 to adopt the Sevenoaks District Out of Area Placement Policy.

62. Rough Sleeper Initiative update

The Chief Officer People and Places presented the report which presented an update on the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI), a grant provided by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLHUC) to local authorities to provide local support for people living on the streets.

The report provided an update on how the funding had benefitted the Sevenoaks District in the 12 months prior and provided an update on DLHUC's announcement of a fifth phase (RSI 5), which would cover the period 2022 - 2025. The deadline for bid submission was late February 2022 and the decision would be published following the Government embargo soon after.

Any interventions funded would be contained within the RSI funding envelope and no match funding or additional administration costs were required to accept and manage the funding. Successful outcomes would reduce future costs arising from repeat homelessness, and associated costs to the public purse from rough sleeping.

Members discussed the report and asked questions of clarification. Sevenoaks had a low number of rough sleepers. The previous rough sleeper count had observed only 1 person. The scheme also provided an array of outreach support for the complex difficulties faced by rough sleepers and single homelessness.

Resolved: That

- a) the key achievements in supporting rough sleepers in the Sevenoaks District as a result of receiving Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) funding in 2021-22, be noted; and
- b) the latest round of funding announced by the Government for the RSI and to outline the Councils submission bid for 2022 - 2025, be noted.

63. Homelessness out of hours service update

The Chief Officer - People and Places presented the report which gave an update to the Committee on the Council's contract with Centra to deliver the Council's homelessness out of hours service. Since October 2019, 135 calls were taken by the Out of Hours team which released increasing pressure on the Housing Advice team and provided continued support to residents out of office hours to find immediate emergency accommodation in line with legislation. The CCTV team took a weekly log of calls which were recorded for monitoring purposes along with internal Officer meetings. An on-call Housing Officer could be contacted by Centra in an emergency. The log was sent to Centra and the CCTV team in case of emergency.

Members expressed the importance of the out of hour's safety net. In response to questions Officers confirmed that during the initial months of the scheme in 2019, communications problems were identified but had been resolved since. Mental

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health and social services support provided a challenge, but it was emphasised that from a homelessness perspective the scheme was working well.

In response to Member queries The Chief Officer - People and Places advised that any issues with the service should be reported to the team and would be looked into. Officers would review the reported incident and the contact information for the service in light of Member queries.

Action 1: For the Chief Officer - People and Places to report back to the Committee with an update on an incident reported by a member on 22 May 2022 relating to a homelessness gentleman, which could not be resolved due to CCTV being unable to contact the homelessness out of hours service or on call housing officer.

It was confirmed that the Housing team would pick up the problems from the Out of hours homelessness service during office hours and the two operated in unison. Discretion was used once users had been checked and their validity assessed for placement in accommodation.

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 an extension to the current contract with Centra for a further three years to deliver the Council's homelessness out of hours service, be approved.

64. To note minutes of the Health Liaison Board

Resolved: That the minutes of the Health Liaison Board held on 25 May be noted.

65. Work Plan

The Work Plan was noted with the following additions:

September 2022

- Health and wellbeing action plan 2022/23
- Mental Health update
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9:09PM

CHAIRMAN