

Runnymede Borough CouncilHOUSING COMMITTEE10 March 2021 at 7:30pm via MS Teams

Members of the Committee present	Councillors J Gracey (Chairman), S Lewis (Vice-Chairman), J Hulley, I Mullens, M Nuti, A Neathey, P Sohi, P Snow and S Whyte Mrs J Hill (Runnymede Council Residents' Association Representative – co-opted non-voting member)
Members of the Committee absent	Councillor S Mackay
Non Members of the Committee present	Councillors D Clarke, C Howorth and J Olorenshaw

479 NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

None.

480 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 6 January 2021 were accepted as a true record.

481 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

482 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

483 HOUSING STRATEGY STATEMENT 2021-2026

The Corporate Head of Housing advised that a series of documents would be presented to Members during the meeting, adding that the Housing Strategy Statement was the highest-level strategic document, and linked in to the Council's Corporate Plan. Other documents presented later in the meeting all fed into the strategy statement.

The objectives of the strategy statement were to:

- Ensure good quality housing was available to local people.
- Support local people to access appropriate housing.
- Increase the provision of affordable housing.
- Identify local housing needs to plan effectively for the future.

These objectives would be reported to Committee annually, and involved a number of other Council services, such as Environmental Health and Community Services.

Furthermore, there would be a strong emphasis on cross-departmental working, and the strategy statement would be presented to Planning Committee to ensure Planning Committee members were aware and supported the strategic housing objectives for the next five years.

In response to a Member's concern, the Corporate Head of Housing confirmed that profiling data would be studied to ensure that services were being delivered in a non-discriminatory way. Both a development strategy and revised adaptations policy would be brought to future Committee meetings to further support this.

Furthermore, all S106 affordable developments had a requirement for wheelchair access. The Housing team were constantly scanning the register and considering how properties would be built to the adaptations they require rather than retrofitting them after build.

RESOLVED that –

Housing Committee supported the strategic aims outlined within the Housing Strategy Statement and noted the delivery mechanisms for a number of the aims can be identified within the Housing Business Centre Plan.

484 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2021-2051

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning explained that the two functions of the HRA Business Plan was to enable Members to approve the objectives and aspirations for the Housing landlord service and to set out and seek approval for the financial plan that will underpin these services.

Furthermore, whilst legally the Council was required to publish a 30 year Business Plan there could only be confidence in some of the assumptions for the first five years due to financial elements such as inflation and the Government's ability to set rents which could significantly impact future finances.

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning added that the plan included £42m to improve the quality of the Council's properties over the next five years and £25 million to deliver additional affordable homes.

The planned activity has been detailed under 5 themes with the broad operational approach to these, the detail will be incorporated into the annual Business Centre Plan.

- Optimising Income and Efficiencies
- Good Quality Housing
- New Council owned homes
- Review and modernise provision for older tenants
- Well managed neighbourhoods

Resources had been identified within the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan to support two additional posts, for tenant and leaseholder engagement and the development and review of housing policies.

It was felt that the two roles would be sufficient and were accurately graded. The appointments would be joining an existing team who already perform some of the roles in their job description rather than coming into a brand-new role.

The Corporate Head of Housing admitted that the fire safety work might require additional resources in future, however with an abundance of new upcoming legislation the position was currently unclear. The Committee would be kept informed of the need for any additional resources.

In response to a query around providing a minimum of C-grade energy efficiency, a review would be undertaken as part of the Asset Management Plan. The Council could potentially benefit from Government grants that would mean the work could be delivered as part of the Decent Homes standard and not included in the identified £42m.

Responding to queries about what a co-operative approach with residents would look like, the Head of Housing and Business Services confirmed that a large number of events would be held and surveys conducted. An older person's strategy would soon commence, which would be done very much in consultation with residents and be presented to Committee in September 2021.

RESOLVED that –

- i) **Housing Committee approved the HRA Business Plan, the objectives identified for the Housing service and noted the assumptions within the plan around rent income growth, bad debt provision, void levels, interest rates etc;**
- ii) **Members approved an annual review of the plan, including performance to date and continued validity of its financial assumptions; and**
- iii) **Members approved an HRA Supplementary revenue estimate of £84,800 to cover the additional staffing resources.**

485 **HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN**

The Corporate Head of Housing advised that the Asset Management Plan expressed the Council's investment plans over the next five years, and was set into six themes.

- Good quality homes
- New Council homes
- Environmental sustainability
- Properties that are safe where risks are managed
- Investment into retirement living accommodation
- Wider review into assets

Within those themes there would be the development of a Runnymede Quality Standard, which would reflect the decent homes standard, the government's emerging homes standard, along with the Council's aspirations.

Additional resources might need to be identified to support investment into areas not yet mentioned in the plan, such as estate paths and communal walls. However, the plan would be reviewed on an annual basis and Members kept apprised. An update would be provided to Members at Housing Committee in September 2021.

A Member felt that the map for the prudential borrowing limit still had capacity for more building of housing, and whilst the asset management plan was welcomed, there still needed to be more aggression with the Council's plans for building more social housing.

Officers pledged to research the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI), which was a government financial incentive to promote the use of renewable heat and had attractive payback opportunities.

In response to the Council Residents' Association Representative, the Head of Housing Services and Business Planning advised that the initial work planned for IRLs a year ago involving redecorating that was halted due to the pandemic was now expected to be superseded by more structural and wiring work to maximise the technology available. However this remained subject to consultation, and officers would be writing to IRL residents advising them on next steps.

RESOLVED that –

- i) **Housing Committee supported the aspirations set out within the Asset Management Plan and the investment identified to support delivery; and**
- ii) **Members identified the actions contained within the plan and recognised that they had been translated into actions within the Housing Business Centre Plan 2021/2022.**

486 **APPROVAL OF HOUSING UNIT BUSINESS PLAN**

The Corporate Head of Housing set out details of the work plan, highlighting aspects of the plan discussed under separate agenda items such as the review of the HRA business plan and asset management plan.

Furthermore, the proposed Corporate key performance indicators were put forward. A new indicator would be introduced advising Members on the length of time to re-let empty Council homes. There would also be additional service indicators around support planning, anti-social behaviour and case management in order to expose more areas of the service to Member scrutiny.

RESOLVED that –

- i) **The 2021/22 Housing Business Unit Plan was approved; and**
- ii) **Members recommended indicators H1-H8 inclusive and the associated targets were included in the corporate set of KPIs.**

487 **STEPDOWN ACCOMMODATION PILOT**

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning advised that the proposed pilot would see the Council participate in a scheme to provide interim accommodation for patients who were “bed blocking” and could be moved to a “step down” situation prior to returning home.

The pilot was fully funded for a year by the ICP, and the proposal would see the Council utilise two self-contained, fully furnished one bed flats within the Floral House Independent Retirement Living scheme.

The Committee was very much in favour of the pilot, although there was slight disappointment that only two beds would be made available as part of the pilot. The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning confirmed that the intention of the pilot was to confirm the need for the service, and should it be successful there would be the opportunity to increase the number of properties once the pilot concludes.

RESOLVED that –

Members approved either the leasing of two Independent Retirement Living properties to Spelthorne Council or an RBC company as part of a one-year pilot partnership with the Integrated Care Partnership to create “step down” accommodation for patients who no longer need acute medical care and can be discharged to an interim bed in the community with support.

488 **UPDATE ON COMMUNICATION WITH THE REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING**

The Head of Housing Technical Services reported that monthly meetings with the Regulator continued, and there was acknowledgment from the Regulator at the previous meeting of the effort put in to achieve compliance with the notice.

Furthermore the compliance monitoring IT had now been fully implemented, providing officers with key information such as asbestos surveys, lift maintenance and electrical certification, which was now over 80%. All outstanding cases had now been issued to contractors. Fire prevention works at Surrey Towers had now commenced.

Members were pleased with the progress made, and following a question from the Committee the Corporate Head of Housing confirmed he would raise the issue about lifting the Notice at the next meeting with the Regulator.

489 **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, Q3 RESULTS AND CORPORATE KPIS FOR 2021/22**

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning provided the performance information for the quarter ending 31 December 2020, revealing that void performance remained a concern and would continue to be closely monitored.

Whilst rent arrears figures was slightly above target, it was clear that the vast majority of residents had prioritised rent payments despite the impact of the pandemic.

The Head of Housing Services and Business Planning went on to praise the contribution of the Salvation Army in supporting vulnerable adults, and their emergency homeless pods were now in situ for temporary use.

A number of actions relating to FRAs remained outstanding, which were being managed though the day-to-day contractors or tenders for packages of specialist works. The Regulator of Social Housing had been kept informed of developments and was supportive of the timescales involved.

RESOLVED that –

Q3 KPis results noted, and agreed Corporate Key Performance Indicators for 2021/22 to be reported to Corporate Management Committee.

490 **AMENDED DECANT POLICY**

Following Housing Committee's approval of a new Decant Policy in September 2020, the Head of Housing Services and Business Planning reported that a proposed amendment was required that enabled the use of licences and subsistence payments in order to facilitate major works programmes where some residents may need to leave their homes temporarily.

In response to a Member's concern about whether the subsistence allowance was sufficient, it was confirmed that the figures would be reviewed annually and uplifted where appropriate. It was added that it would be extremely rare for a resident to be decanted to a location that did not have cooking facilities.

RESOLVED that –

- i) The amended Decant Policy enabling the use of Licences to occupy for short term decants was approved by Committee;**
- ii) the daily subsistence allowances of £15 per day per adult and children over 13, and £7.50 per child aged 1 to 12 where a temporary decant accommodation has no cooking facilities were approved; and**
- iii) The level of subsistence payments to be within the Decant Procedure and to be kept under review by the Corporate Head of Housing to ensure they are in line with inflation.**

491 PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENT WITH REGISTERED PROVIDER

The Head of Housing and Business Services advised that the HRA required a strategy to manage void homes on part of an estate in New Haw which will facilitate the Council's development plans.

Officers recommended a proposal to lease a tranche of 3-bedroom houses on the estate to a Registered Provider who would carry out the necessary works and then manage and maintain the properties until such time as the Council required vacant possession.

There was currently no strategy for the development of the location, and all options on the future use of the site would be subject to resident consultation.

All occupants of the properties would go through the same process as those who would apply for social housing elsewhere in the borough, meaning that the process would only benefit Runnymede residents.

RESOLVED that –

Members approved the lease of a portfolio of 3-bedroom houses to a Registered Provider to facilitate long term development plans and ensure continued use of family homes for local people until vacant possession is required.

(The meeting ended at 9:47pm)

Chairman