

Runnymede Borough CouncilHOUSING COMMITTEE8 September 2021 at 7:30pm

Members of the Committee present	Councillors J Gracey (Chairman), J Hulley (Vice-Chairman), A Alderson, A Balkan, J Broadhead, T Burton, M Cressey, M Nuti and P Snow  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 R Bromley, R King

**178 NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

The Groups mentioned below had notified the Chief Executive of their wish that the changes listed below be made to the membership of the Committee. The changes were for a fixed period ending on the day after the meeting and thereafter the Councillors removed would be reappointed.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Remove</u>	<u>Appoint instead</u>
Lib Democrat RIRG	Cllr S Whyte Cllr I Mullens	Cllr T Burton Cllr A Alderson

The Chief Executive had given effect to the change to Committee membership in accordance with section 16(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

**179 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 June 2021 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

**180 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

None received.

**181 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None declared.

**182 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2021-2026**

As the Housing Business Unit increases its development activity to achieve an initial aspiration of 125 units over 5 years, the Head of Housing and Business Development advised that a Development Strategy was necessary to define the aspirations and processes within which development would be initiated, approved, financed and delivered.

The strategy would ensure that HRA developments and acquisitions were identified, progressed, and delivered within parameters approved by Housing Committee, and would

include making sure all new properties would be built or refurbished to an approved standard and value for money was achieved on all schemes.

In response to why young people and the elderly took up a lot of one bedroom places, the Head of Housing and Business Development replied that the figures would always naturally be distorted by homelessness and downsizing.

**Resolved that –**

**Members approved the Housing Revenue Account Development Strategy 2021-2026.**

### 183 **OLDER PEOPLE STRATEGY**

Further to approval to go out to consultation at the previous Housing Committee, the Corporate Head of Housing confirmed that 108 responses were received in relation to the older people strategy, with the results demonstrating that residents were generally happy with the vision, whilst some amendments would be made to reflect feedback.

One of the drivers to updating the strategy was there were embryonic signs of low demand within some of the retirement living accommodation, which is something the department was keen to nip in the bud and ensure that the service provided was of good quality and there was a clear pathway into older people accommodation.

A sizeable investment was being requested from Committee, but this would improve the quality of the offer for older people and modernise the support service and provide an offer the Council could be proud of.

The Committee Chairman was pleased that officers were boosting engagement, adding that there was no one size fits all policy. Furthermore, where no clear results were evident further consultations would be undertaken.

The Corporate Head of Housing went on to explain the consultation method, advising that officers had written to lots of individuals and organisations and held a series of events to try and gauge genuine feedback. However, the approach to consultations was being developed, and a report on tenant engagement strategy was on the forward plan for a future meeting.

The issue of consultations would be discussed at an upcoming Constitution Member Working Party, that would see all Members informed of all consultations, as well as a webpage dedicated to consultations.

The Corporate Head of Housing confirmed there was lots of dialogue and cross-working with Planning and Economic Development, looking at housing needs changes and how that was reflected in new developments.

**Resolved that –**

**Members approved the Housing Service – Older People Strategy recognising that this work alongside Decent Homes work – will lead to a significant upgrade in the quality of accommodation Runnymede Borough Council provides for older people living in our Independent Retirement Living.**

### 184 **HOUSING TECHNICAL SERVICES DAY-TO-DAY POLICY**

Further to the draft policy coming to the previous Housing Committee, the Head of Housing Technical Services advised that a consultation took place over the summer, with over 400 different stakeholders notified and 37 responses received.

The draft policy had been discussed at length at a recent Member Working Party.

The existing policy had not been updated for some time and lacked specific detail. Some of the aims of the new policy would see new repair timescales for emergency and routine works, appointments listed as morning or afternoon, and greater detail around who is responsible for what repair.

Budget provisions were already in place, with no increase in staff or budget required.

**Resolved that –**

**Members approved the Housing Technical Service Day to Day Repairs Policy.**

## 185 **REQUEST TO APPROVE PROCUREMENT ACTIVITIES**

The Head of Housing Technical Services advised that the purpose of the report was to provide detail about the procurement activity to bring the Council up to decent homes standard. The report listed proposed activity for the following 12-18 months.

Some of the work expected for the next five years included the replacement of over 2,000 boilers and two commercial boilers, as well as re-wiring contracts, roof and window replacement, Surrey Towers roof replacement and fire door replacement.

A range of procurement methods would be under consideration, including framework providers, but this would depend on the type of contract.

The Chair of the Committee emphasised that this was in principle rather than final sign off, and where applicable the Committee's approval would always be sought.

Whilst praising the officers' work, a Councillor voiced frustration of continuing to use contractors who had not previously provided value for money. Officers advised that whilst the team were building up competence and expertise in-house, using external consultants was sometimes unavoidable, although they would be used as little as possible.

Furthermore, Committee approval had previously been received for a managed service provider to deliver works over the next five years, which would pick up much of the work described in the report. This would soon be going out to tender, and an extremely thorough procurement exercise was underway, and each bidder would be asked to explain how they would support local businesses as part of that exercise.

In response to the number of fire doors not fully compliant, Members were advised that whenever changes were made to a door or it became damaged, it was more cost effective to replace the entire door than repair it.

Members were keen to see environmental issues taken into account as part of all future procurement exercises, which officers would follow up on. Furthermore it was expected that the Council's existing pipework infrastructure was already hydrogen ready.

**Resolved that –**

**Members approved in principle the procurement of the new contracts listed within the report.**

## 186 **UPGRADE OF HOUSING IT SYSTEM**

Following the initial report on the IT upgrade at June's Housing Committee, the Corporate Head of Housing advised that since that meeting work had been undertaken to understand how resources were being spent, as well as associated costs.

Furthermore it was felt that the sizeable sum being requested was to make up for a significant underspend in the area over the past twenty years.

The Corporate Head of Housing added that he felt there was over £1m cashable efficiencies and considerable non-cashable efficiencies to be made associated with this, which had now been articulated in the report following feedback from the recent Service & Digital Transformation Member Working Party.

To demonstrate how badly needed the upgrade was, the Committee Chairman advised that following the Regulator of Social Housing notice in October 2019, the Housing department were unaware whether they were meeting data as opposed to not meeting it – such was the siloed and disparate nature of the systems currently in place.

A Member added that having a cloud based system helped to prevent against cyber attacks, and also suggested benchmarking the required capital costs against a percentage of the revenue – this would help understand the extent of the IT costs.

**Resolved that –**

**Members approved and recommended to Corporate Management Committee the following:**

- i) A supplementary capital estimate in the sum of £116,694 to be used to procure and implement essential new modules within the ongoing Housing NEC system upgrade.**
- ii) A supplementary revenue estimate in the sum of £13,500 for support and maintenance of new mobile capabilities within the recommended phase 2 project.**
- iii) A supplementary capital estimate in the sum of £129,688 to be used to recruit additional internal resources for the implementation.**
- iv) A waiver to contract standing orders to permit the additional services not contracted for in the original contract with Northgate as the uplift required for additional services is greater than 10% of the original contract value.**
- v) Subject to approval of the procurement strategy; authorise the Corporate Head of Law and Governance to enter or execute under seal any contractual documentation to fulfil the change contract being recommended.**

## 187 HOUSING STAFFING RESOURCES

The Head of Housing and Business Development confirmed that the report covered a number of proposed changes within the Housing staffing establishment to reflect changes in duties and responsibilities.

This was subject to HR agreeing and benchmarking all of the proposed job descriptions.

The Committee Chairman added that this would help build on the internal skillset, and also reward the staff who were performing well. Some posts would go across bands so the Council were not fixed to paying higher rates, but would also reflect experience and expertise.

The Head of Housing and Business Development spoke of the challenges of recruitment given the lack of skillset in the area and the fact that Runnymede is a small authority which means less scope for progression, and was close to London but not offering London wages.

**Resolved that –**

- i) Approval for the recruitment to the post of Housing Maintenance Inspector (Empty Homes) at grade 9**
- ii) Approval to the recruitment to the Repairs Manager role at grade 10**
- iii) The Allocation Team Leader post was regraded to 9/10 to reflect the supervisory responsibility and attain parity with other roles in the section.**
- iv) Approved the creation of an Estate Services Team Leader at Grade 9/10 to manage the Council's Estate Wardens.**
- v) Permission granted for the roles of Housing Services Manager and Homelessness, Housing Advice and Allocations Manager to be regraded. Pay scales may change from SMA to SMB.**
- vi) Approved a supplementary revenue estimate in the sum of £69,700 (at top of scale and including on-costs) as follows: General Fund £8,500, HRA £61,200.**
- vii) Corporate Management Committee be requested to approve a supplementary revenue estimate in the sum of £8,500 for the general fund element.**

**188 SURREY TOWERS UPDATE**

The Head of Housing Technical Services reported that progress on works at Surrey Towers in conjunction with the passive fire and kitchen and bathroom upgrades had progressed well since commencement of the contract, notwithstanding a slower than anticipated start due to lack of materials.

The addition of kitchen and bathroom upgrades had increased the time required to 52 weeks, with an expected completion date of December 2021. The project was currently on time and on budget.

Further to the discovery of cabling issues in one of the apartments, additional doors, frames and finishing works were found to be unsatisfactory at the time of installation, and additional, urgent work was required to provide a fix due to the fire risk.

Given the nature of the findings approval would be sought from Procurement Board to fully replace the relevant doors, at an expected cost of £260k. This remained with budget, and whilst the safety of tenants was being prioritised, legal options were being considered to address the historic works.

Officers would change the layout of the appendix to include overall programme, key dates, project price and variations.

**189 PURCHASE OF SITE FOR DEVELOPMENT**

The Head of Housing and Business Development updated Members on the acquisition of a site in Chertsey for HRA development.

This land was being purchased from Network Rail, and two outstanding matters remained prior to completion involving the removal of slow worms on the site in line with the ecology requirements, and obtaining title documentation from Network Rail.

The purchase was still in the conveyancing stage, and the legal work had been outsourced to an external company. Officers reassured Members they were in regular contact with the company.

## 190 HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Corporate Head of Housing advised that the report related to an annual review of the plan following Committee's approval in March 2021.

The plan was primarily focussed on achieving Decent Homes standard and ensuring health and safety obligations were being adhered to.

Some of the key parts of the report highlight where there is a change in forecasted additional spend, such as for the older people strategy and lift maintenance. However, Committee approval would always be sought for considerable additional expenditure.

The intention would be to continually review the plan as intelligence was received, and keep coming back to Committee to finesse it. Furthermore, the Corporate Head of Housing admitted that historically the Council had not fully utilised available grants to fund development, but this was continually being looked into for additional grants that could be exploited.

### **Resolved that –**

- i) Members supported the aspirations set out within the plan and investment identified to support their delivery.**
- ii) Members acknowledged the progress made against the actions contained within the plan and consider the additional actions required for effective long-term delivery of the plan.**

## 191 CONSULTATION ON THE GYPSY AND TRAVELLERS PITCH ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Corporate Head of Housing informed the meeting of the development of a new draft Pitch and Plot Allocation Scheme for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople for the pitches and plots allocated in the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan.

Permission was being sought from both Housing and Planning Committee to go out to consultation.

The item had also been discussed at the recent Housing Member Working Party, and a review of where these pitches had been allocated had been suggested, whilst concerns were raised at the prospect of sub-letting.

The next stage of the consultation would see the Council working alongside individuals and groups who had existing relationships with those affected to ensure a sufficient cross-section of views. Members asked for it to be made clear as part of the consultation that it focussed on how allocations were made rather than where they will be.

### **Resolved that –**

**Members approved the draft Pitch and Plot Allocation Scheme for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople for public consultation for a period of six weeks.**

**192 URGENT ACTION TAKEN UNDER STANDING ORDER SO42**

The Head of Housing and Business Development updated Members on a successful application made to MHCLG's Rough Sleeping Initiative to fund a housing led scheme for rough sleepers, personalisation budgets and the appointment of full-time staff.

The funding was to be used to introduce rough sleeping initiatives that immediately intervene in and reduce rough sleeping.

**193 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, 2021/22 Q1**

The Head of Housing and Business Development advised that void performance continued to be poor as the team worked through the backlog of empty properties left by the previous contractor.

The results for quarter 3 were expected to improve significantly. The actual number of void properties had reduced and work was ongoing to improve our own internal processes and maximise use of IT.

Work remained ongoing around gas safety certification, whilst there were minor issues with tenants refusing access or abandoned properties that need to go through the correct process to recover.

The electrical certification was now 93% and the team were working to get into the remaining properties following the summer holidays and multiple attempts to gain access. The next stage would be notifying residents legal proceedings would commence should an appointment not be made.

Some actions for fire assessment works were now overdue, although a contract had been awarded for the urgent actions.

**194 UPDATE ON COMMUNICATION WITH REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING**

The Head of Housing Technical Services advised that the Regulator had been informed of the Council's Decent Home percentage of 61%, and had been informed of the five year plan to bring the submission up to 100%.

A health & safety audit took place earlier this year, and following a recent six month review a better grading had been obtained, with lots of good practise in evidence. This would be shared with the Regulator at the next meeting.

**195 AFGHAN LOCAL EMPLOYED STAFF RELOCATION SCHEME**

Further to the signing off of the SO42 to accept three households into the borough as part of the Afghan Locally Employed staff, the Corporate Head of Housing advised that the arrival of the first household into the borough had been delayed, but they were expected imminently. Government funding was in place to fund the scheme.

Lots of work had gone on to ensure as smooth as possible transition and provided with appropriate support and the necessary facilities such as GP, dentists, etc.

The households would initially be put in temporary accommodation whilst work was ongoing to allow them to set up national insurance and benefits, with a longer-term view to help them seek employment, which might see them remain in the borough or move further afield.

The Corporate Head of Housing confirmed that the families would not be joining the household register or be placed into social housing.

Some Members were keen to see Runnymede take more than three households. The Committee Chair confirmed that three families – regardless of size of family – would be taken on an initial basis with a view to increasing the numbers further down the line, subject to a review on the success of the first phase.

**Resolved that –**

- i. Members noted the imminent arrival of the first household with Runnymede Borough Council.**
- ii. Members noted that additional households would be received during September.**

#### 196 **ADDITIONAL HOURS FOR DISABLED ADAPTATIONS TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS**

Further to the approval of Community Services Committee to a 30 hour per week Surveyor post to provide the technical functions required for administration of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), the Head of Housing and Business Development advised that the report proposed to increase the post to 37 hours.

The additional cost would be paid from the Housing Revenue Account to facilitate applications for aids and adaptations from Council tenants who were not covered by the DFG regime.

The level of adaptations to HRA properties had reduced as the Council were no longer adapting properties where the tenant was under-occupying the home, but a resource would be required. Sharing this resource with Community Services would increase flexibility.

**Resolved that –**

- (i) The current DFG Surveyor role be extended to 37 hours from 30 hours, with the additional cost, currently £9,087 to be funded by the Housing Revenue Account.**
- (ii) An HRA Supplementary Revenue Estimate be approved for future budget years.**

(The meeting ended at 9:57pm)

Chairman