

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

4 February 2015

Attendance:

Councillors:

Tait (Chairman) (P)

Godfrey

Miller (P)

Deputy Members

Councillor Warwick (Deputy Member for Councillor Godfrey)

Other invited Councillors:

J Berry (P)

McLean (P)

Dibden (P)

Scott (P)

Izard (P)

TACT representatives:

Mrs J Steventon Baker (P)

Mr D Chafe (P)

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Weir

1. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 26 November 2014 be approved and adopted.

2. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked/statements made.

3. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2015/16 BUDGET AND BUSINESS PLAN 2015/16 TO 2044/45**

(Report CAB2652(HSG) refers)

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) introduced the Report and clarified that further information was expected from the DCLG on the actual

benefit expected for the Council from the pooling of right to buy receipts (paragraph 5.2 and 5.3 of the Report refers).

With regard to Paragraph 6 (Repairs and Renewals), the Assistant Director highlighted one of the key items related to the proposal for external wall insulation of Winnall flats.

The Assistant Director explained that the proposed key priorities within the Business Plan were set out in Appendix 6 of the Report. He confirmed these included the maintenance of existing stock and continuation of the new build programme. It was intended that an all Member briefing be arranged for June 2015 to discuss further the way forward in relation to the management of the Council's housing stock in terms of future repairs and improvements etc. The results of this briefing would be brought back to this Committee, hopefully in July 2015.

The Assistant Director and Head of New Homes Delivery responded to a number of detailed questions on the Report, as summarised below:

- The Committee had previously agreed at its 1 October 2014 meeting a 30 year programme of investment in housing stock (Report CAB2619(HSG) refers). This had approved an age limit for replacement of 30 years for kitchens and 40 years for bathrooms;
- Tenders for works at Woolford Close had been received but were over budget and a further report would be brought back to the next Committee meeting on a way forward;
- The restructure of the Estate Management Service was nearly complete and a briefing note outlining the changes and new staffing structure would be supplied to Councillors shortly.
- The importance of examining different ways of increasing the supply of affordable housing was acknowledged. The Head of New Homes Delivery drew Members' attention to a recent Government report which examined such matters and any resulting proposals would be reported to a future Committee meeting.
- The Assistant Director advised that more garages were now rented to Council tenants than privately and agreed to supply exact figures outside of the meeting. He emphasised that in addition to alleviating parking problems on housing developments, rental of garages generated £850,000 income to the HRA which was used to support its work.
- It was a condition of the garage rental licence that garages were used for the purposes of vehicle storage. Resources were not currently available for Council Officers to monitor usage, but action would be taken if the Council became aware of any infringement of the licenced usage.
- There was a programme of garage improvements in place.
- All new Council builds were built to a lifetime home standard with adequate storage, including a shed and cycle storage.
- The Business Plan included a training programme for tenants to assist with accessing online services, together with investigating possible improvements to the necessary IT hardware. Online access for tenants to their accounts and online repair reporting would be launched shortly.

- All new build bathrooms would include both baths and showers. Refurbishments of existing bathrooms did not include fitting showers as standard, although this would be examined further as an element of the proposed Heating Policy.
- All new builds would incorporate Solar PV panels where the property alignment enabled this. Some Councillors commented that the Council should also seek to speed up installation on existing properties, where suitable. The Assistant Director confirmed that initial investigations had estimated this would cost approximately £3 million, but acknowledged that there was a resulting long term income to the Council. This option would be discussed further at the Member Training session in June referred to above.
- It was intended that the Tenants' Handbook would be updated during 2015/16, following discussions with Councillors and tenants. The possibility of this primarily being available online would also be examined.

A number of invited Councillors raised potential issues regarding rent levels for new builds and the Assistant Director confirmed that a date for the next Housing Rents Informal Policy Group (IPG) would be set shortly. Some Councillors expressed concern about the affordability of rents proposed for new schemes, including the new Radian scheme in Stanmore. It was believed that the proposed rents could be unaffordable for local people who were working and not in receipt of benefits. They queried whether the Council could seek to influence Registered Providers (RPs) regarding levels set. The Head of New Homes Delivery advised that RPs set rent levels according to their own policies. The Assistant Director emphasised that the Council's current rent setting policy did not automatically result in higher rents for all new schemes as it broadly depended on the scheme cost. The Chairman acknowledged comments made and suggested these be discussed further at the next IPG meeting.

The Committee agreed to the following for the reasons set out above and outlined in the Report.

RESOLVED:

That it be recommended to Cabinet and to Council:

- 1. That the HRA Revised budget for 2014/15 and the Budget for 2015/16 as set out in the Appendices 1 and 2 to the Report be approved.**
- 2. That the HRA business plan as set out in Appendices 3 and 4 to the Report be approved.**
- 3. That the Housing Capital programme as set out in Appendix 5 to the Report be approved.**
- 4. That the 2015/16 Maintenance Programme as set out in Appendices 5 and 8 to the Report be approved.**

5. That authority be given to incur capital expenditure of £7.930m for the Maintenance, Improvement and Renewal Programme as outlined in this report and in Appendix 8 to the report, in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 6.4. (noting that within this, for any schemes in excess of £100,000 a financial appraisal will be approved in accordance with the scheme of delegations).

6. That the Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer), following consultation with the Chief Finance officer, be given delegated authority to make adjustments within the overall Maintenance, Improvement and Renewal programme as set out in Appendices 5 and 8 to the Report, including the flexibility to substitute projects and re-balance expenditure within and between the different elements/schemes in order to meet operational needs, changing priorities and commitment targets, with any changes being reported to Committee at the earliest opportunity.

7. That the Business Plan priorities as set out in paragraph 4 be noted and the key service priorities as detailed in Appendix 6 of this Report be approved.

4. AUTHORISATION FOR FINAL APPROVAL TO CONSTRUCT HOUSING SCHEME: WESTMAN ROAD, WEEKE

(Report CAB2653(HSG) refers)

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Weir (a Ward Member for St Barnabas) addressed the Committee and welcomed the progress on the scheme. In summary, she recognised that there were different opinions within the Council regarding the appropriate rent levels for new builds and acknowledged that the design level of new builds offered tenants savings in terms of reduced running costs. She suggested that the savings in running costs be emphasised to potential new tenants.

The Head of New Homes Delivery confirmed that a design development budget of up to £100,000 was proposed to cover potential risks highlighted by Southern Water in relation to adequacy of existing provision for foul sewage drainage. If this sum was not required then the overall scheme costs would be reduced accordingly.

With regard to the Financial Viability Summary (Appendix 1 of the Report), the Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) advised that the loan repayment period of 28 years could alter (up to 30 years) depending on the final scheme costs and rent level set.

In response to questions, the Head of New Homes Delivery confirmed that £50,000 had been allowed for mitigation of lost open space. Negotiations were ongoing with the local community as to where this money should be allocated.

The Committee noted that the proposed contractor, FE Chase had also carried out construction of schemes at Itchen Abbas and Otterbourne to a good standard.

The Committee agreed to the following for the reasons set out above and outlined in the Report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) be authorised to enter into a design and build contract with FE Chase to construct 12 new council houses on the Westman Road, Weeke site for the sum of £1,568,490.84.

2. That in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 6.4, capital expenditure of up to £1,962,926 be approved.

5. **REVIEW OF DESIGNATION OF SHELTERED HOUSING**
(Report CAB2657(HSG) refers)

The Assistant (Director (Chief Housing Officer) highlighted that there had previously been an over-provision of sheltered housing within the District which had led to the redesignation of some properties as general need. The aim of the review was to clarify the different types of housing provided by the Council. In addition, the requirements for extra care housing were increasing and the Council were in discussions with the County Council as to how these could be met.

Some concern was expressed by Councillors about the proposed removal of communal areas and the risk that this would result in increased isolation of tenants. The Assistant Director emphasised that nine possible conversions were being suggested, with an eight year programme commencing with the least utilised areas. The conversions that had been undertaken to date had been of unused communal areas (for example at Albert Court) and enabled the Council to offer new accommodation at a social rent. The Assistant Director confirmed that if a communal area was being well-used, it would not be converted and the Council would seek to promote its use further.

Mrs Steventon Baker emphasised that although the TACT Committee had been consulted on the proposals, wider TACT membership had not yet been informed. She was aware of some residents' concerns and requested that a full consultation was undertaken before any common rooms or guest bedrooms were converted.

The Assistant Director explained that another reason for the proposed changes was to standardise the charges paid by tenants for grounds maintenance services. The Housing Estates Team, together with tenants, would continue to monitor the level of service provided by the contractors.

The Committee agreed to the following for the reasons set out above and outlined in the Report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the designation of properties as shown in Appendix 2 to the Report be adopted.
2. That the recommended level of service at Bungalows/Over 60s Schemes and general needs schemes, as set out in the Report, be approved.
3. That all future vacancies at general needs sites (including Monks Road, Bartholomew Close, and King Alfred Place), go immediately to general needs applicants.
4. That the programme to convert facilities at general needs sites, as shown in Appendix 3 to the Report, be approved.
5. That the standard service for grounds maintenance, as currently delivered at general needs sites, be extended to all sites, as detailed in section 4 of the Report.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.55am

Chairman