

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

25 March 2015

Attendance:

Councillors:

Miller (Chairman) (P)

Byrnes

Godfrey (P)

Deputy Members

Councillor Read (Deputy Member for Councillor Byrnes)

Other invited Councillors:

J Berry (P)

McLean (P)

Dibden

Scott (P)

Izard (P)

TACT representatives:

Mrs J Steventon Baker (P)

Mr D Chafe (P)

1. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Godfrey declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of agenda items due to his role as a County Council employee. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, he remained in the room, spoke and voted under the dispensation granted on behalf of the Standards Committee to participate and vote in all matters which might have a County Council involvement.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 4 February 2015 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked/statements made.

4. **ESTATE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME – WOOLFORD CLOSE**
(Report CAB2652(HSG) refers)

The Committee noted that the Report had not been included in the Forward Plan for March and under the Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules (Rule 15.1 General Exception), the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been informed. The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) explained that the previous report (CAB2534(HSG)) gave authority to proceed with the project, the tenders were now significantly over the original estimate and the additional recommendations were therefore required. There was no one reason for the increase in tender, although it was possible the original estimate had underestimated the complexity of the job requirements.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director confirmed that the possibility of splitting the improvements into separate tenders had been investigated but it was considered this would result in increased costs. The area around Woolford Close and Wilberforce Close had been identified in the Stanmore Planning Framework as offering potential for new homes delivery. The Assistant Director confirmed that the proposed improvement programme would not impact on these plans.

The Committee noted the environmental and social benefits for residents of the proposals and Mrs Steventon-Baker (TACT) confirmed their support.

As a Ward Councillor, Councillor Scott also supported the proposals and emphasised the significant benefits for residents. He also highlighted the consultation carried out with residents regarding the plans.

One Member requested an update on the general Estate Improvement Programme. The Assistant Director agreed to bring an update Report to the next Committee meeting and supply an update to Members outside of the meeting in the mean time.

The Committee also noted that further investigation was required into the Council's current process for generating estimates for work, in light of the fact that a number of tenders recently had been submitted over budget.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services requested an additional resolution to give authority to the Assistant Director to approve the acceptance of tenders and letting of the contract. This was agreed.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the increased costs of the project be noted and that the additional £80,220 required be funded from the base budget provision for Estate Improvements for 2015/16

2. That the impact the above decision has on the overall programme be reviewed and reported to the June 2015 meeting of this Committee.

3. That the Tender from CLC Ltd for the project be accepted and authority be delegated to the Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) to let the contract accordingly.

5. **WINNALL FLATS – EXTERNAL WALL INSULATION**
(Report CAB2680(HSG) refers)

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) outlined the background to the original proposal to introduce external wall insulation (EWI) as set out in the Report. In summary, within a few weeks of Cabinet (Housing) Committee approving the scheme (Report CAB2513(HSG) refers), British Gas (BG) withdrew their offer of a contribution of £0.392m ECO funding. Consequentially, although EWI would offer some savings to tenants of the flats in terms of lower energy bills, the cost to the Council was considered to be prohibitively high. There was also the risk that some leaseholders could challenge any requirement to contribute towards the scheme.

Members congratulated Officers on achieving a significant reduction in the cost of the new gas main installed at the flats (Paragraph 2.3 of the Report refers). In response to questions, the Assistant Director confirmed that every flat that had gas installed had their own separate gas meter.

In response to questions, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services explained that different leaseholders had different terms and conditions within their leases as these had been amended over time and emphasised that some had been issued around 30 years ago.

The Assistant Director advised that firms offering ECO funding tended to prefer working with larger local authorities where, for example, they could adapt a larger number of blocks of flats at the same time. However, the situation would be kept under review and should funding become available, a Report would be brought back to Members to consider.

During discussion, Members suggested that the funding earmarked for EWI could achieve better results if used, for example for PV panels. Other priorities, such as improvements to windows, kitchens and bathrooms were also highlighted. Some Members commented that tenants had experienced past problems with condensation in the flats and the Assistant Director advised that the new gas heating had improved this.

Mrs Steventon Baker (TACT) stated that TACT agreed that EWI was not currently viable for the Council to independently fund, but would wish the situation to be kept under review, particularly to ensure that the heating improvements at Winnall flats were addressing the condensation problems. The Committee agreed to the following for the reasons set out above and outlined in the Report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the scheme be set aside and the funds re-directed to other higher priority projects.
2. That the Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) submit a Report to a future Committee meeting confirming where the funds originally ear-marked for this scheme will be used.

6. **HOMELESSNESS IN WINCHESTER**
(Report CAB2681(HSG) refers)

The Committee noted that the report has not been included in the Forward Plan for March and under the Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules (Rule 15.1 General Exception), the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been informed. However, the Homelessness Prevention and Gold Standard Reserves were included as part of the overall General Fund budget.

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) advised that at its meeting on 23 March 2015, The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had endorsed all the recommendations of the Homelessness Informal Scrutiny Group (Report OS121 refers).

In response to questions, the Assistant Director advised that the Council dealt with approximately 20-30 potential homeless cases on a weekly basis. The aim was to assist people at an early stage and prevent them becoming homeless. This included providing assistance with the Choice Based Lettings process and likely timescales, providing advice on accessing private rented accommodation and on sustaining current accommodation.

One Member requested that a Report on reviewing options for addressing the gaps in stage 2 and 3 accommodation within the District be brought as soon as possible. The Assistant Director confirmed that he intended to do so as soon as the situation regarding the County Council's Supported People Funding had been confirmed, hopefully to the June 2015 meeting.

Members highlighted the successes outlined in the Report and thanked the Head of Housing Options and National Support National Practitioner Support Service Manager and the Housing Options team for their work.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the General Fund spending plans for 2015/16 and associated releases from the Homelessness Prevention Earmarked Reserve be approved, as set out in Appendix 1 of the Report.

2. That the General Fund spending plans for 2015/16 and associated releases from the Gold Standard Programme Earmarked Reserve be approved, as set out in Appendix 2 of the Report.

3. That it be noted that the progress of the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Action Plan directly linked to the homelessness grant will be monitored by the Homelessness Forum and updated in a Cabinet report later in 2015.

4. That the outcome of the Homelessness Informal Scrutiny Group, detailed in the body of the Report, be noted.

5. That it be noted that Winchester had applied for the first two of the Gold Standard Challenges and was in the process of applying for a further challenge.

7. **2014/15 PERFORMANCE MONITORING Q3 UPDATE – HOUSING SERVICES**

(Report CAB2677(HSG) refers)

In response to questions regarding the length of time before it was deemed necessary for a kitchen or bathroom to be replaced, the Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) explained that this had been outlined in detail in the previous Report to Committee on achieving the Decent Homes Standard (report CAB 2619(HSG)). He stated that an all-Member briefing session would be arranged to consider choices to be made as to where funding should be allocated. For example, it was possible that the funding previously allocated for EWI (Report CAB2680(HSG) above refers) could be allocated to replacing kitchens and bathrooms if Members wished.

One Member highlighted the work in progress under the New Homes Team. The Assistant Director confirmed that tenders had now been received for both Springvale, Swanmore and Westman Road, Weeke.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director confirmed that work with Registered Providers (RPs) was ongoing and he could bring an update Report to a future Committee. Members noted that there was a meeting with RPs on 21 April 2015 to discuss how best to increase the number of affordable houses available. This could include discussion of affordable rents. The Committee also noted that the next meeting of the Housing Rents Informal Policy Group was scheduled for 21 April 2015.

One Member requested more information on the reasons why 801 properties had been reported as non-decent from the Stock Survey (Appendix 2 of the Report). The Assistant Director agreed to provide this outside of the meeting.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director stated that Chichester Careline had been providers of alarm monitoring to other local authorities for a number of years.

The Committee noted the continuing reduction in the number of days taken to re-let a void property and congratulated the Assistant Director and Team for this achievement.

Mrs Steventon Baker confirmed that TACT were happy with the content of the Report and also congratulated Officers for the reduction in void times.

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

RESOLVED:

That the performance information contained within the Report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 11.25am

Chairman