

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

22 March 2016

Attendance:

Councillors:

Horrill (Chairman) (P)

Byrnes

Miller (P)

Deputy Members

Councillor Read (Deputy Member for Councillor Byrnes)

Other invited Councillors:

J Berry (P)

Scott (P)

Dibden (P)

Tait

Izard (P)

Thacker

TACT representatives:

Mr D Chafe

Mr D Light (P)

Mrs M Gill (Deputy) (P)

Others in attendance who addressed the Committee:

Councillor Hiscock

1. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

On behalf of the Committee, Councillor Horrill passed on her best wishes to David Chafe (TACT) who had been suffering from ill health recently.

Councillor Horrill thanked all those who had supported and participated in the recent Tenants Conference which had been well-attended. It had been a worthwhile event which she would wish to continue in future years.

Finally, Councillor Horrill stated that a proposal to update the Registered Provider (RP) for Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing (HARAH) was underway and further details would be circulated to Housing Committee members and invitees outside of the meeting. In summary, the current RP had decided to end their arrangement with HARAH and a process of selecting a new partner was underway. In the future, it was proposed that there would be more than one partner RP. Approval for the new arrangements would be sought through the Portfolio Holder Decision Notice process.

2. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 3 February 2016 be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

4. **OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CHOICE BASED LETTINGS INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP (ISG)**

(Report CAB2795(HSG) refers)

Cabinet noted that the Report had not been notified for inclusion on the agenda within the statutory deadline. The Chairman agreed to accept the item onto the agenda as a matter requiring urgent consideration to enable its contents to be considered without delay.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Hiscock introduced the Report as Chairman of the ISG and stated that it had been established by The Overview and Scrutiny Committee to examine the way the Hampshire Home Choice scheme was operating and whether improvements were required. The findings were that the scheme was generally working well, accepting the constraints it operates within (i.e. shortage of available properties) and that applicants believed they were generally treated fairly. There were some issues raised regarding the Local Lettings Policy and Paragraph 5.3 of the Report proposed recommendations to address this.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Hiscock for chairing the ISG and for the helpful work produced.

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) clarified that the Report would usually have been submitted to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to being considered at this Committee but this had not been possible on this occasion. However, it would be submitted to a future meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

One Member commented that it would be useful to include the membership of the ISG within the Report. The Assistant Director confirmed this could be included when the Report was considered by The Overview and Scrutiny Committee. *NB Subsequent to the meeting, the membership of the ISG was confirmed as follows:*

*Councillors: Hiscock (Chairman), Bodtger, Gosling, Humby, Scott & Warwick
Officers: Richard Botham, Amber Russell, Olu Fajuyitan and Elizabeth Wallington (Hampshire Home Choice Project Coordinator)*

In response to questions, the Assistant Director advised that statistics on waiting time for properties for applicants in each Band were available and in general, it depended on the type of property being applied for. One of the ISG

recommendations was that this information was provided for applicants to assist their choice. Councillor Hiscock explained that the qualifications for each Banding level had not changed – there were more applicants within Band 2 due to external factors which consequently increased the waiting times.

In response to further questions, the Assistant Director advised that the Barton Farm Community Lettings Plan had not been specifically discussed but that there were no changes to the Plan previously agreed. Any new proposals for such Plans could be assessed under the proposals suggested in Paragraph 5.3 of the Report. Having a Local Lettings Plan in place did not exclude an applicant in high housing need who did not live in the area.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the outcome of the ISG review and its conclusion that the existing sub regional scheme of allocations and local City Council variations remain “fit for purpose”, be noted.
2. That the existing policy relating to the application of Community Lettings Plans be amended, as set out in paragraph 5.3 and 5.4 of the report.
3. That a Member Briefing on Hampshire Home Choice and the Allocations Framework be delivered in Summer/Autumn 2016.
4. That officers facilitate a continuous programme of raising awareness on the Allocations Framework and matters relating to Housing Allocations for applicants of Hampshire Home Choice and the wider general public.

5. **DEVELOPING A HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**
(Report CAB2791(HSG) refers)

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) drew Members’ attention to some of the key proposals outlined in the Report as follows:

- Disposal of housing assets and clarification of definition of “high value” as proposed in Paragraph 2.7;
- The two possible additional disposal criteria included in Paragraph 2.9 of the Report as follows:
 - Where dwellings become vacant in villages where the Council only retain 5 or less Council dwellings;
 - Where flats become vacant where the leasehold interest of 70% of units in the block has already been disposed of.
- Possible circumstances where the Council might consider acquisitions set out in Paragraph 3.3.
- A recommendation in Paragraph 4 of the Report that a review of the suitability for development of all garage sites be undertaken.

During discussion, some Members expressed concern about the proposal to dispose of vacant dwellings in villages where the Council only retains 5 or less dwellings. They believed that it could be argued more Council housing should be provided in such locations. The Assistant Director acknowledged this but highlighted that it could also be argued that the marginal costs of maintaining such properties in areas, which might not be well served by public transport, could not be justified.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director advised that whilst it might be a quicker process for the Council to acquire new units, it would generally be a more expensive option than new build.

Following discussion, the Assistant Director agreed that in the criterion referring to the percentage of the leasehold interest of units in a block which had been sold off, the percentage figure should be increased from 70% to 75%. He commented that it was expected that very few blocks of flats would be impacted by such a policy.

With regard to the levels for "high value" properties proposed in Paragraph 2.7 of the Report, the Assistant Director advised that these were a suggested starting point and would have to be adjusted for house price inflation. In addition, it was not proposed that every Council property over the values stated would necessarily be disposed of. However, this was dependant on the finalisation of Government proposals for a national High Value Sales policy. The Assistant Director advised that the Council had made representations to the DCLG that properties outside the "right to buy" scheme should not be subject to the new proposals of high value sales. High value bungalows might fall within any such exceptions. However, he noted that demand for bungalows generally tended to be lower.

One Member suggested that the proposed policy on acquisitions in Paragraph 3.3 of the Report be expanded to include situations where site assembly might be facilitated. This was agreed.

In response to questions, the Head of New Homes Delivery advised that some landlords of former Council properties which had been converted to Houses in Multiple Occupation had contacted the Council regarding the possibility of the Council re-purchasing. However, the current market prices of such properties would preclude this in most cases.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director confirmed that the financial impact of loss of garage rental income would be included within the appraisals for any proposals to develop garage sites. It was acknowledged some sites would be unsuitable for housing and the Council would then consider either garage improvements or alternative uses, such as open parking areas. The Head of New Homes Delivery confirmed that the Council's Engineers were consulted about any development proposals and this included the impact on neighbouring highways of the removal of garages.

Members also considered the Property Repairs, Maintenance and Improvement Works Recommended Priorities as set out in Appendix 1 of the Report. The Assistant Director advised that a number of the items contained had been previously considered by the Committee and others had been discussed at Member Briefings.

Mrs M Gill stated that in general TACT did not object to the proposals and welcomed the change to move kitchens to a 20 year replacement cycle (from 30 years). However, TACT did have some concerns about the Council no longer carrying out internal decorations and asked that it consider continuing this in exceptional circumstances (such as for elderly or disabled tenants).

Whilst noting these concerns, the Assistant Director highlighted that the stopping of the Discretionary Works Scheme (which included internal decorations) had been agreed at a previous Committee meeting (Report CAB316(HSG) refers). The Council had sought to prioritise expenditure on matters of the most importance to tenants, which had been shown to be kitchen and bathroom renewals. During discussion, it was suggested that the Council provide information on contractors who could undertake decorations/small repairs for tenants. The Assistant Director highlighted that a Handyman Service, which was subsidised, was already in place although take up was relatively low. One Member also stated that Age Concern had Village Agents with lists of approved handymen. It was suggested that a task and finish Informal Group be established, including TACT representation, to discuss this matter further and gather information on currently available schemes.

The Assistant Director highlighted that one of the changes proposed was to make it clearer to prospective tenants at the Choice Based Letting stage what they could expect from the Council in terms of repairs and renewals. The Council was reviewing and updating the Tenants' Handbook in 2016 and one suggestion was that the maintenance elements be separated out into a separate document stating clearly what the Council would and would not do. Following a suggestion from a Member, it was noted that this could include highlighting tenants' responsibility for fencing. In general, it was emphasised that the Report contained a large number of changes which would need to be communicated to tenants.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services advised that Recommendations 3, 4, 5 and 7 of the Report should be referred to Cabinet for approval as the Committee did not have the necessary authority.

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

RESOLVED:

That it be recommended to Cabinet:

- 1. That the definition of "High Value be set in accordance with paragraph 2.7 of the Report.**

2. That two additional disposal criteria be added to the policy as set out in 2.9 of the report as follows:

- Where dwellings become vacant in villages where the Council only retain 5 or less Council dwellings
- Where flats become vacant where the leasehold for 75% of units in the block has already been disposed of.

3. That the approach to future property acquisitions as set out in paragraph 3 of the report be endorsed, subject to the policy being expanded to include acquisition where this facilitates site assembly.

4. That, until further notice, any funds generated from future disposals in accordance with this policy be retained to meet any “High Value Sales” levy applied to the Council.

That the following be agreed:

5. That the proposals and recommendations for the Council’s Repairs Programme as set out in the Appendix to the Report be supported.

6. That the continuation of the previous policy regarding the disposal of vacant dwellings against the following criteria be supported:

- High value properties of non-standard stock which have a high asset value compared to a relatively low income stream which no longer make a significant positive contribution to the Council’s housing strategy aims or community development priorities, reviewed on a case by case basis.
- Other HRA dwellings with exceptional maintenance liabilities including cases where costs exceed £50,000 (the estimated cost of grant needed to support the building of a new dwelling) or where the very rare event of the Council not being able to get a property up to the Decent Homes Standard occurs.

7. That a review of all garage sites be completed as detailed in paragraph 4 with priority being given to the potential for Housing development.

8. That a detailed HRA Asset Management Strategy be prepared for consideration by the Committee in October 2016.

6. **PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL STRATEGY 2016-21**
(Report CAB2789(HSG) refers)

Under the Council’s Constitution Access to Information Procedure Rules (Rule 15.1 – General Exception) this was a key decision which was not included within the Forward Plan. Under this procedure the Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been informed.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) clarified that inspection of mobile home sites did not include inspection of individual mobile homes. The general approach adopted with private landlords was to achieve compliance and/or introduce improvements to properties through negotiations rather than taking enforcement action. However, the Council had various enforcement powers available to it, should this become necessary.

The Assistant Director confirmed that the Strategy applied to the whole Winchester District and references within the document would be amended to clarify this.

One Member queried whether the Strategy should include reference to the Article 4 Direction for Stanmore. The Assistant Director advised that this was a planning control issue rather than a private sector housing matter.

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

RESOLVED:

That the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2016-21 attached as Appendix 1 to the Report, be approved, including Priorities 1-8 within the draft Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2016-21, as being the fundamental areas of work to be undertaken by Housing Services in respect of the private sector housing function in the Winchester District.

7. PRIVATE SECTOR EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY
(Report CAB2790(HSG) refers)

Under the Council's Constitution Access to Information Procedure Rules (Rule 15.1 – General Exception) this was a key decision which was not included within the Forward Plan. Under this procedure the Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been informed.

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) confirmed that all Parish Councils had been contacted for information regarding any empty properties in their areas. A register of empty homes had been introduced and Officers within the Private Sector Housing Team were working with their other Housing colleagues and Benefit colleagues to keep this up to date.

One Member expressed concern that the operation of the Strategy should not involve officers in a large amount of additional work. The Assistant Director emphasised that the first year would primarily involve gathering information regarding the number of empty properties in the District. A review on outcomes was proposed for March 2017.

One Member suggested that increased Council Tax rates for empty properties could act as an incentive for owners to either bring them back into use or dispose of. In addition, the Council could investigate partnership working and discussions at a national level, such as through the Empty Homes Network, to share information and good practice.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the Empty Property Strategy (including Priorities 1 – 5 as the basis for addressing empty properties in the District, and the Action Plan for implementing the Strategy) as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be endorsed and approved.
2. That a further report reviewing outcomes from the Empty Property Actions be considered by Cabinet (Housing) Committee in March 2017.

8. **PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS FUND**
(Report CAB2788(HSG) refers)

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) drew Members' attention to Appendix 1 of the Report which set out expenditure proposals, including additional provision for support (including at Milford House). In addition, a maximum of £5,000 was proposed for promoting the relaunch of the "Spare Change for Real Change" campaign as outlined in Paragraph 3.10 of the Report.

During discussion, it was clarified that it was intended that the "Spare Change for Real Change" campaign would be a partnership exercise with Winchester BID who would match-fund the relaunch. It would include publicity to educate the public that donations would be better utilised by homeless charities rather than giving directly to people begging on the streets.

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 2016/17 and associated releases from the Homelessness Prevention Earmarked Reserve, as set out in Appendix 1 to the Report, be approved.
2. The additional provision set out in the Report to fund support to residents of Milford House be approved, subject to the property being purchased (in accordance with the approval by Council in February 2016).

3. That the remaining uncommitted funds from the original Gold Standard grant, of up to £642,500, be transferred to East Cambridgeshire District Council with immediate effect.

9. **AUTHORISATION FOR FINAL APPROVAL TO CONSTRUCT HOUSING SCHEME: HILLIER WAY, WINCHESTER (LESS EXEMPT APPENDICES)**
(Report CAB2796(HSG) refers)

Cabinet noted that the Report had not been notified for inclusion on the agenda within the statutory deadline. The Chairman agreed to accept the item onto the agenda as a matter requiring urgent consideration to enable its contents to be considered without delay.

The Chairman stated that Councillor Hiscock (a local Ward Member) had been unable to remain in the meeting for this item, but had confirmed his support for the proposals.

The Head of New Homes Delivery advised that planning consent for the scheme was granted on 4 February 2016 and Planning Committee Members were keen for the 13 new homes to be exclusively for affordable rent (rather than shared ownership or outright sale). The tenders received (as contained within the exempt appendices to the Report) indicated that this would be achievable.

In response to questions, the Head of New Homes Delivery emphasised the consultation undertaken with nearby residents, including Symonds Court, to date and confirmed that regular liaison and updates for residents would be provided once work on the scheme commenced.

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 to construct 13 new homes at Hillier Way, Abbots Barton, Winchester, as set out in Exempt Appendix 1 to the Report.

2. That in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 6.4, capital expenditure, as set out in Exempt Appendix 1, be approved.

3. That the Head of Estates be authorised to negotiate and agree terms for easements, wayleaves and related agreements with utility suppliers, telecom/media providers and neighbours in order to facilitate the development.

10. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

RESOLVED:

1. That in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

2. That the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business because it is likely that, if members of the public were present, there would be disclosure to them of 'exempt information' as defined by Section 100I and Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

<u>Minute Number</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Description of Exempt Information</u>
##	Authorisation for final approval to construct housing scheme: Hillier Way, Winchester (exempt appendices)) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). (Para 3 Schedule 12A refers)

11. **AUTHORISATION FOR FINAL APPROVAL TO CONSTRUCT HOUSING SCHEME: HILLIER WAY, WINCHESTER (EXEMPT APPENDICES)**

(Report CAB2796(HSG) refers)

Cabinet considered the contents of the exempt appendices which included the tender report and financial viability summary (detail in exempt minute)

The meeting commenced at 4.00pm and concluded at 6.35pm.