

**CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE**

**6 July 2017**

Attendance:

Councillors:

Horrill (Chairman) (P)

Brook (P)

Miller (P)

Other invited Councillors:

Berry (P)

Scott (P)

Elks (P)

Tait (P)

TACT representatives:

Mrs M Gill (P)

Mr M Fawcitt (P)

Others in attendance who did not address the Committee:

Councillor Weir

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1. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 22 March 2017, be approved and adopted.

2. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 2016/17 OUTTURN AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

(Report CAB2930(HSG) refers)

The Chairman highlighted that the Report generally indicated a good level of performance, including for the building of new homes. She stated that the planning application for approximately 70 new Council homes at The Valley, Stanmore would be considered by the Planning Committee later in July.

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) advised that as set out in the Report, the HRA achieved a surplus of £1.88m in 2016/17 leaving a working balance at the end of the financial year of nearly £9m. This was significantly higher than the minimum level of reserves required but he highlighted that

there were two significant developments currently on site requiring ongoing resources. The Assistant Director advised that the Report had been considered at The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 June 2017 (Report OS167 refers) and Members had not requested any changes.

Monica Gill (TACT) thanked the Head of Housing Finance for attending TACT meetings and explaining the accounts. She welcomed the significant savings in addition to good levels of performance.

During discussions of the Report, Committee Members and other invited Members raised a number of questions and made comments, as summarised below:

#### Chesil Lodge

- The Assistant Director confirmed that Officers were generally pleased with progress on the Extra Care Scheme. The budget had increased but the quality offered had also increased, in addition to the sales value of units. Officers were robustly monitoring and challenging costs and the current estimate presented a worst case scenario.
- Some of the increased costs were due to planning conditions (for example, increased expenditure on windows to improve noise insulation). Experience gained on this development would assist Officers in progressing other new build projects in the future. The high quality of the building contractors on site was noted.
- The overall budget included a contingency of 10% and the projected costs were within this. The project had been audited by Internal Audit and was also being monitored by the Homes and Community Agency (HCA).
- An open day on shared ownership units had been very well attended and there was a great deal of interest from prospective buyers.
- The catering contract had been awarded and the restaurant would be open to non-residents.

#### New Build Scheme (in general)

- The Council Strategy included a target of an additional 300 new homes and the New Homes Team had been enhanced to assist with this aim. The Council would continue to look for additional sites and also to access any available Government grants.
- The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) noted the comment that it was important to ensure the quality of fixtures and fittings offered to existing tenants was the same as for new builds.
- One Member expressed concern about whether the off-site affordable housing provision of the promised 350 new homes as a result of the North of Whiteley MDA could be achieved. The Chairman noted these concerns and emphasised that once the Section 106 Agreement had been finalised the Council would seek to maximise the amount of affordable housing provided working with partner organisations.

#### Pay to Stay and High Value properties

- The mandatory 'pay to stay' had been removed from the Government programme. However, the Assistant Director advised that "pay to stay"

measures would be examined alongside a more general review of tenancies, including examination of flexible tenancies.

- The Government had not made any announcements regarding High Value sales and therefore it was still necessary to make preparations. The Council were meeting with the DCLG in August to request further information.

#### Homelessness

- The Assistant Director noted concerns regarding the public perception about the number of rough sleepers and beggars in Winchester. He explained that the “Gold Standard” achieved by the Council was acknowledgement that there were appropriate measures in place to deal with homelessness issues. This included joint working with other agencies such as the Police and Mental Health teams.

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

#### RESOLVED:

1. That the HRA Outturn figures for 2016/17 be approved as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 of the Report.
2. That the carry forward items from 2016/17 be noted and the 2017/18 HRA Re-forecast Budget be approved as detailed in Appendix 3.
3. That the capital programme budget carry forwards identified in Paragraphs 10.11 to 10.13 of the Report and detailed in Appendix 6 be supported.
4. That the HRA Service Performance data and the key performance indicators detailed in Paragraphs 11.1 to 11.5 and Appendices 7 to 9 inclusive be noted.

### 3. **DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY** (Report CAB2935(HSG) refers)

The Chairman stated that the Report had been considered by The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 19 June 2017 (Report OS169 refers) where a number of useful comments were made. Table 2 at Paragraph 6.5 of the Report provided a response to these comments. The Strategy had also been considered at an all Member Briefing which had included TACT Members.

Monica Gill (TACT) welcomed the involvement of TACT in the Member Briefing on the Housing Strategy and requested that further joint briefings be arranged if possible.

The Head of New Homes Delivery advised that the Housing Strategy built on the Council Strategy but remained a high level document. Page 9 of the Housing Strategy included a diagram linking the Strategy to other, more detailed plans and strategies.

In response to questions, the Head of New Homes Delivery outlined the work ongoing to try to maximise the delivery of new homes. He confirmed that the Council was considering different forms of construction, such as pre-fabricated or modular builds, and assessing whether they are as good quality, no more expensive and quicker to construct than more traditional builds. In addition, he confirmed that the Strategy advocated cohesive communities with a mix of tenures, age of tenants and employments etc.

The Head of New Homes Delivery advised that work would also take place on improving the communications around the Strategy, including the general understanding of affordable housing.

In response to questions, the Chairman stated that the Council had written to the Government regarding relaxing the debt cap to assist with financing of new homes build and were meeting the DCLG in August 2017 where this matter would be raised.

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

**RESOLVED:**

That the draft Housing Strategy be approved.

**4. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT  
(Report CAB2937(HSG) refers)**

The Head of Housing Options and Allocations emphasised the positive impact of the additional Disabled Facilities Grant funding allocated by Government as summarised in the Report. The changes necessitated an update to the policy and procedure and this was included as Appendix 1 to the Report.

In response to questions, the Head of Housing Options and Allocations advised that support could be provided for people having difficulties completing grant applications. Where appropriate, it was also possible to be flexible in approach to enable a speedy response, for example to assist people returning home from hospital.

Members commented that it was essential that the availability of grant funding was publicised as widely as possible. The Head of Housing Options and Allocations acknowledged this point and advised that this might tie in with a Hampshire wide campaign.

One Member mentioned that St John's Winchester Charity had benefited from the grant scheme and suggested other voluntary housing providers might also be interested, such as the Hospital of St Cross.

Monica Gill (TACT) stated that TACT had not considered the Report prior to the meeting but she welcomed any increase in grants available.

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

**RESOLVED:**

That the Disabled Facilities Grant policy and procedure and the associated spending plans for 2017/18 and 2018/19, as set out in the Report, be approved.

**5. TENANT SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS**  
(Report CAB2936(HSG) refers)

The Chairman highlighted that the full survey results were available on the Council's website:

<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/assets/files/30579/CAB2936-HSG-Background-Document.pdf>

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) highlighted that the survey demonstrated improvements in areas where issues had been raised in previous surveys. It was acknowledged that there were further improvements required and further discussions would take place based on the current survey results.

Michael Fawcitt (TACT) welcomed the survey but queried what measures would be taken to address the fact that a number of tenants did not have access to the Internet. He also questioned whether the survey should take place more frequently than every two years.

The Assistant Director confirmed that discussions were taking place regarding internet access, for example examining whether the Hampshire Home Choice service (which is accessed on-line) creates barriers for some people. It was considered that two years between surveys was an appropriate timescale as it offered a good measure of trends over time.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director confirmed that the lower satisfaction rates from younger respondents was in line with national trends. Further investigation would take place into further understanding younger tenants' expectations and how communications could be improved.

One Member highlighted the popularity of the former discretionary grants payment scheme to tenants and queried whether the possibility of this being reintroduced could be investigated further. The Assistant Director confirmed

that this matter would be brought to the Committee for decision later in the year as part of the Business Plan process.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the results be noted.
2. That the recommendations for action be translated into actions as part of the business planning timetable.

The meeting commenced at 4.05pm and concluded at 6.00pm.

Chairman