

BUSINESS AND HOUSING POLICY COMMITTEE

18 June 2019

Attendance:

Councillors
Hiscock (Chairperson)

Craske
Humby

Rutter
Scott

Deputy Members:

Councillor Horrill

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Weir (Cabinet Member for Local Economy)

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Gottlieb and Lumby

1. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRPERSON FOR THE 2019/20 MUNICIPAL YEAR**

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Rutter be appointed Vice Chairman of the Committee for the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

2. **DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Humby declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of items under consideration which may have a Hampshire County Council involvement due to his role as a County Councillor. However, as there was no material conflict of interest regarding these items, he had a dispensation granted by the Monitoring Officer to participate and vote in all matters which might have a County Council involvement.

Councillor Scott declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of agenda items due to him being a Council tenant. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, he remained in the room and spoke under the dispensation granted on behalf of the Monitoring Officer to participate in all matters related to the Council house rents.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting TACT representatives: Mrs M Gill and Mr M Fawcitt.

A Member asked whether consideration should be given to appointing the TACT representatives as full members of the Committee rather than as invitees.

4. **TO NOTE THE DATE AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THIS COMMITTEE**

RESOLVED:

That the timetable of meetings for 2019/20 be agreed as set out on the agenda.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Representations from the public are set out under the respective item where the Chairperson invited contributions from the public and TACT representatives.

6. **ECONOMIC STRATEGY - PRESENTATION**

The Cabinet Member for Local Economy and the Corporate Head of Engagement gave a presentation on the proposed framework for an Economic Development Strategy.

During Public Participation Ian Tait asked questions and also commented in summary that:

- How did the provision of housing fit in with the strategy?
- How the 15,000 students would be retained in businesses in the local area when there was insufficient affordable housing to retain them.
- There was a mismatch of appropriate accommodation to meet the needs of Winchester.
- Could the commuted sum for not providing affordable housing in the North Whiteley development be spent in the town

Members raised questions and also commented regarding the following:

Economic prosperity

- Recognition that most rural businesses rely on diversification.
- To have clear distinction between rural businesses and land based businesses.
- Improvement of salaries to reduce commuting out of the district.

- To encourage more visitor overnight stays.
- To attract large businesses, but to also recognise the needs of small businesses.
- To encourage start up businesses of all sizes.
- Winchester required business centres so as to not underperform in the M3 area.
- To recognise that other sectors were doing very well in addition to digital and creative sector.
- To reinvent the town area of Winchester which had large public service sectors including education and local authorities that were not so well paid in comparison to other sectors and to encourage large companies that provided better pay and a range of jobs. Better paid jobs would also discourage outwards commuting.

Housing

- That the living city centre be a place for the young, but also for the elderly who liked to be in close proximity to the centre as demonstrated by the success of the Chesil Lodge development.
- Reference to the Winchester District Local Plan and the opportunity to drive accommodation provision including smaller units and affordable homes.

Social factors

- Those residents of the town's more deprived wards should not be left behind.
- How could lower skilled employees be retained to live in the area.
- The Stanmore Planning Framework required refreshing to reflect the number of Houses in Multiple Occupation in the area and the high number of 18 – 24 year olds, which was now being experienced in other town Wards.

Transport

- Recognition of the Winchester Movement Study and its links to public transport, air quality, mobility and electrification.

Other

- Reference to the South Downs National Park Plan.
- Reference to education (University, Schools and apprenticeships) and how it drives economic growth.
- That the vision be for the District as well as Winchester town

- That a collaborative approach, both internally at the Council and externally with partnership organisations, would be welcomed.
- To be vibrant and carbon neutral and to define why Winchester leads in the digital and creative sector.

The Cabinet Member For Local Economy and The Corporate Head Of Engagement thanked Members for their input and stated that the detail would assist in developing the strategy.

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted.

7. **HOUSING COMPANY - PRESENTATION**

The meeting received a presentation from the Corporate Head of Housing and the Housing Finance and Resources Manager regarding Winchester District Housing Company – Governance Structure Considerations.

During Public Participation Ian Tait commented in summary that:

- The proposals were similar to proposals put forward in November 2017.
- He asked what was hoped to be delivered and who would be helped?
- The proposal would benefit the void that presently existed for those that missed out on affordable housing, but the numbers helped would be small.
- There was an aspiration to commit more resources in the future.
- He questioned whether there was merit in proceeding with £10mn proposed to be allocated.

Members raised questions or commented regarding the following:

Housing Revenue Account considerations

- The proposals for social housing provision were welcomed and it was key that tenants were involved.
- It was asked whether the proposals would compete for HRA sites or detract from the HRA.
- The proposals should not be at the expense of social housing and the HRA.

Purpose of the Company

- There needed to be a good understanding for whom the homes were being built for.

Process and governance arrangements

- Were there other Councils that could provide advice on finance and the legal aspects of establishing a Housing Company.

- The proposal of the Strategic Directors and the responsible Cabinet Member to consider development opportunities was the correct approach.
- The Board of Directors required officer support at the highest level and to be subject to independent scrutiny, with an external Company Secretary appointed, and financial and legal advice to allow it to operate as a commercial company.
- It should aim to be self financing after the initial seed money was spent.
- The Company appeared difficult to establish and would the administration and associated costs justify the outputs.
- A small number of schemes could be carried out and the scheme then be reviewed.
- It gave the opportunity for the Council to act further as an exemplar landlord.
- Was the Housing Company required when the cap on borrowing had been lifted?
- What would be the skills set of the Directors and the cost of staffing; how would the success of the Directors be measured and be held to account and what would be the metrics employed to assess return on performance.
- The approach of an 'ethical landlord' was supported.

The TACT representatives commented that TACT had considered the proposals in March 2019 and were in favour of them. Tenants would wish to see value for money if Housing Revenue Account money was used.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the presentation be noted.

8. **PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY**
(Report BHP004 refers)

The officers provided responses to questions raised by Members in respect of:

- The operation of the Gold Standard for homelessness prevention to ensure that people were not excluded because they fell outside of the Housing Strategy.
- The actions taken to mitigate against reductions in central government grants in service provision, including those affected by substance abuse.
- The eligibility classification for 'homeless'.
- How the large number of priorities identified would be taken forward and given focus.
- The importance of partnership working with Hampshire County Council and other partners.

The TACT representatives asked questions regarding people who preferred to be rough sleepers and preferred not to go into housing. The officers responded that this was where the Housing First model applied.

RESOLVED:

That the key priorities and action plan set out in the draft Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy be supported.

9. **MUTUAL EXCHANGE POLICY**
(Report BHP005 refers)

The officers provided responses to questions raised by Members in respect of:

- Were tenants that wished to mutually exchange given a full interview to assess their financial circumstances, as was the case of those subject to a regular tenancy.
- If tenants did not meet the financial requirements why did the letting proceed and was it possible to refuse an exchange to a property which had one bedroom more than their assessed bedroom need following the financial assessment.
- That downsizing should be promoted.

The TACT representatives commented that TACT had been involved as part of the focus group that developed the policy. Questions were also asked on what constituted 'exceptional circumstances'.

A Member registered a strong objection to the recommendations on the grounds that the policy could take away a bedroom from tenants in greater housing need for such a bedroom and there should be the option to refuse applications on the grounds of financial circumstances. In addition, the definition of exceptional circumstances was unsatisfactory.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposed amendment to the Mutual Exchange policy which currently allows tenants to move to a property which has one bedroom more than their assessed bedroom need be noted.
2. That the proposal that consent be refused for exchanges where the accommodation is more extensive than is reasonably required by the tenant be supported unless one or more of the following conditions apply:
 - i. The tenant is downsizing;
 - ii. The tenant is exchanging to older persons accommodation;
 - iii. The tenant has a confirmed medical or welfare need for a property which is larger than their assessed bedroom need;
 - iv. There are other exceptional circumstances as determined by the Council.

10. **ESTATE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME**
Report BHP007 refers)

The officers provided responses to questions raised by Members in respect of:

- Could more be spent on estate improvements to meet the Council's strategic priorities, including reducing carbon emissions?
- The involvement of wider tenant participation to generate ideas for improvements, in addition to those forthcoming from TACT.
- Were there alternatives to car parking schemes to reduce costs (which were the substantial part of estate improvement costs), for example schemes to promote cycling for residents.
- Was there an over emphasis on car parking schemes at the expense of other environmental improvements.
- The methodology undertaken by officers and Members on prioritising improvement schemes.
- Working with Hampshire County Council and other partners who were making a significant investment in cycling and walking and making improvements to free up the movement of buses that might otherwise be delayed due to inconsiderate car parking.

The TACT representatives commented that this matter would be better considered by the full TACT group rather than its committee due to its impact on the Housing Revenue account (HRA). Comment was also made as to whether better use could be made of Council garages.

RESOLVED:

1. That the ongoing achievements of the Estate Improvement programme be noted.
2. That the increasing of the provision in the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan to £400,000 from £250,000 for 2019/20 be supported.
3. That increasing the benchmark cost per parking bay to £4,000 be supported.
4. That the Programme consider improvements to promote cycling (including electric bikes and cycle stores) and electric charging points for vehicles to make a greater contribution to the Climate Emergency action plan.

11. **TO NOTE THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2019/20**
(Report BHP001 refers)

It was suggested that items on the work programme be brought forward in groups of a similar theme in order to aid consideration at the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the inclusion of the Decent Homes Standard Policy and the Hampshire Home Choice Policy, the Work Programme for 2019/20 be approved.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 9.30 pm

Chairman