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BUSINESS AND HOUSING POLICY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 29 November 2022

Attendance:

Councillors
Bronk (Chairperson)

Cramoysan
Isaacs
Radcliffe

Scott
Small

Apologies for Absence:

Councillors Fern and Miller

Deputy Members:

Councillor Batho (as deputy for Councillor Fern) and Councillor Horrill (as deputy for Councillor Miller)

Other members in attendance:

Councillors Ferguson, Thompson and Westwood

[Audio and video recording of this meeting](#)

1. **APOLOGIES AND DEPUTY MEMBERS**

Apologies for the meeting were noted as above.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Radcliffe declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest concerning agenda item 6, Emerging Housing Strategy – Scoping report, in that the report referred to Airbnb and that he was an Airbnb host outside the district.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairperson provided an update on items discussed at the previous meeting, which included the following.

1. The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy (report BHP31)
2. The Shared Prosperity Funds
3. Global Entrepreneurship Week
4. Winchester District Street Markets Review (report BHP37)

4. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 6 OCTOBER 2022**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 October 2022 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Ian Tait addressed the committee and a summary of the matters raised were as follows.

1. He advised that he regularly undertook housing advocacy work and had recently visited a flat in Black Swan buildings, Southgate Street, Winchester. He understood that the property was owned by Winchester the City Council and managed by VIVID Housing Association and that the tenant may be considered vulnerable. The property he visited had several defects, for example, a broken window and evidence of dampness and mould in the bathroom. He understood that the window had been broken by the tenant and so the landlord was only obliged to secure the property and not to replace the window. He asked whether the council or the Housing Association could review these issues. He wished to emphasise that his comments were not a criticism of the council.
2. He asked that the council reconsider the advice it provided to tenants regarding ventilation, heating and the drying of clothes; considering the recent case in Rochdale and whether the wider issues surrounding dampness and mould could be addressed in the emerging housing strategy work.

The chairperson thanked Mr Tait for his contribution, Councillor Paula Ferguson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community and Housing and Gillian Knight, Corporate Head of Housing responded to Mr Tait's points, which could be summarised as follows.

1. The council did take issues concerning dampness and mould very seriously. The council did not receive a lot of complaints concerning dampness and mould, but officers were aware of some.
2. The council was looking to put in place additional monitoring equipment and ventilation measures that would help to prevent dampness and mould as part of its retrofit programme.
3. Officers were currently compiling a report concerning the level of dampness and mould in council properties and private sector properties.
4. In its own properties, the council was tackling issues of dampness and mould and tenants' living habits/behaviour but there was always more it could do.

5. Regarding Black Swan Buildings, this was not a property within the council's Housing Revenue Account but a commercial property which was leased between the council's estates team and VIVID Housing.

Officers would contact Mr Tait following the meeting to follow up on the specific concerns he had raised.

6. **EMERGING HOUSING STRATEGY- SCOPING REPORT**

Councillor Ferguson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community and Housing introduced the report, ref BHP39 (available here) which set out proposals for preparation of the Emerging Housing Strategy. Councillor Ferguson advised that the proposals were being brought to the committee at an early stage so that the committee's comments could be fully considered as the strategy was prepared.

The committee was recommended to:

Provide comment on the proposed and emerging priorities for the Housing Strategy 2023-2028.

1. Access to decent homes for all, across all of the tenures.
2. Responding to the housing need of an ageing and growing population.
3. Access to mixed tenure affordable family accommodation.
4. Access to affordable energy-efficient accommodation.
5. Responding to the Social Housing White paper.
6. Commitment to supporting persons seeking sanctuary in the Winchester District.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. That the strategy should address the problem that rural communities were heavily reliant on private sector rented properties for their affordable homes and that these were increasingly being sold.
2. That the "Rent Setting Policy" be added to the list of policy documents on page 23 of the report, under the heading of "Scoping the Strategy".
3. The references in the report to "Winchester" be reviewed to clarify whether this relates to the Town or the district.
4. That it was important to include a reference to the council's work in accommodating Syrian refugees as well as Ukrainian and Afghanistan refugees.
5. That reference is made to City Lets so that the role and effectiveness of the scheme could be understood.
6. Whether there were any learnings from the development at Queens Gate that would support the homes for life priority.

7. Regarding sheltered, extra care provision, that data regarding the different provision and the location of that provision was important.
8. Regarding the decent homes' standard, it was important to aspire to an "Excellent" standard throughout the district.
9. That it was important to understand the aspirations of all the local higher education institutions, i.e., the Colleges and Universities and how they may impact the local housing market.
10. Regarding consultation on Emerging Strategy itself, that the role of the Cabinet Committee: Housing needs to be clarified.
11. Whether the strategy could address the loss of family accommodation to Houses of Multiple Occupation.
12. Regarding priority 4, that access to affordable and energy-efficient homes should be given a very high priority.
13. Regarding consultation on the strategy, how do we ensure we gather views and comments from the wider resident base in the district?
14. How did having 40% of the district within the South Downs National Park affect this strategy and would the consultation include the National Park Authority?
15. Some rural communities want additional housing, but it can be much harder to deliver, how do we overcome this in these situations?
16. How were we determining the ranking of the priorities of the strategy?
17. Housing tenures do not appear to be referenced in the strategy, should they be?
18. Were the activities within the draft timetable on page 24 on track?
19. Was there an intention that the strategy returns to this committee as a draft version before it was agreed?
20. Should the strategy reflect the capacity of care homes within the district?

These points were responded to by Councillor Paula Ferguson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community and Housing, Gillian Knight, Corporate Head of Housing and Karen Thorburn, Service Lead - Strategic Housing accordingly and were noted by Councillor Ferguson and officers.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Cabinet Member and officers note the comments of the committee.

7. **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY - SCOPING PLAN**

Councillor Lucille Thompson, Cabinet Member for Business and Culture introduced the report, ref BHP38 which set out proposals for the Sustainable Tourism Strategy, ([available here](#)). Councillor Thompson also brought members up to date regarding the latest position concerning the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and that Councillor Wallace had contacted her to endorse the strategy.

The committee was recommended to.

1. Review and comment on the approach outlined which would underpin the process to deliver a Sustainable Tourism Strategy.
2. Note the planned resources to enable development and delivery of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy.
3. Note the timeline for delivery and opportunity for input from the Policy committee.
4. Note the next steps.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report and in summary, the following matters were raised.

1. The importance of a decent and reliable public transport service across the district to minimise car journeys relating to tourism.
2. Further details were requested concerning how this strategy supported and/or linked to the City Council's cultural strategy.
3. The potential for conflict between this strategy and the housing strategy, particularly if the housing needs for residents were competing with housing needs for tourists.
4. The South Downs National Park (SDNP) was a key driver of visitors to the district, and it was important that the council be alert to the activities of the SDNP so it could synchronise and liaise closely.
5. Concerning the diagram on page 32, should the Winchester Town Forum action plan fit within this?
6. Concerning the list of festivals shown on page 46, table 7, when compared to other similar cities, were there gaps in terms of either theme or location?
7. Regarding the festivals that were taking place, was there a scorecard for their social value and/or sustainability, as well as the economic benefit?
8. For future agreements with festival organisers, could we include a requirement to collect visitor feedback?
9. Were there any examples of where the council had rewarded low-carbon business practice as referred to in the Destination Management Plan on page 70?
10. Were council resources across several teams sufficient to deliver this strategy?

These points were responded to by Councillor Lucille Thompson, Cabinet Member for Business and Culture and Andrew Gostelow, Service Lead - Economy & Tourism accordingly.

RESOLVED:

1. That there was general support for the draft strategy.
2. That the Cabinet Member and officers note the comments of the committee.

8. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS

Councillor Paula Ferguson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community and Housing; introduced the report, ref BHP36 which set out proposals for the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), ([available here](#)). In addition, Richard Botham, Strategic Director advised funding for DFG comes from central Government as part of the Department of Health and Social Care's Better Care Fund. The council was aware of potentially conflicting advice concerning the use of this fund that needed to be clarified and this would be confirmed within the final version of the report.

The committee was recommended to comment on the updated policy and in particular to comment on:

- a) The proposed introduction of new discretionary grants in the form of:
 1. welfare grant
 2. heating grant
 3. relocation grant
 4. top-up grant.
- b) The proposal that the discretionary grant level was capped at a maximum of £100k.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. If the grants in previous years had been split into the four areas identified in a) above, do we know how the overall grant spend would have been divided?
2. Within the discretionary category in b) above what level of grant had previously been provided and for what purpose?
3. Plans for ensuring the optimal take up of the discretionary grant.
4. How were grant applications prioritised and managed; and could urgent cases be given priority, for example, to free up NHS resources?

5. Concerning the heating grant, could that be used to provide home insulation measures?
6. Further explanation concerning the use and operation of a local land charge, particularly where a property was privately rented.
7. Clarification regarding the treatment of any recovered monies.
8. Further explanation concerning the purpose of the service charge and what was the trade-off in reducing the service charge from 12% to 10.5%.
9. Whether the council had sufficient resourcing to deal with the volume and complexity of grant requests to ensure all available grant funding was utilised?
10. Could the appeal process be adjusted to reflect the sensitive nature of the grant requests?

These points were responded to by Karen Thorburn, Service Lead - Strategic Housing, Rhiannon Riley, Senior Disabled Facilities Grant Case Officer, Kevin Reed, Senior Private Sector Housing Officer and Richard Botham, Strategic Director accordingly and were noted by Councillor Ferguson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community and Housing.

RESOLVED:

1. That there was unanimous agreement to a reduction of the service charge to 10.5% and also the cap of £100,000; and general agreement to the draft policy as a whole.
2. That the Cabinet Member and officers note the comments of the committee.

9. **TO NOTE THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2022/23**

RESOLVED:

1. That the workplan be noted.
2. That the committee wished to undertake a review of the council's policy regarding restrictions on the installation of showers within its housing stock.
3. That the committee wished to have an opportunity to review the draft Housing Strategy before it is finalised.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.35 pm

Chairperson

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