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BUSINESS AND HOUSING POLICY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 12 July 2023

Attendance:

Councillors
Batho (Chairperson)

Chamberlain
Miller

Prest
Scott

Apologies for Absence:

Councillors Eve and Isaacs

Deputy Members:

Councillor S Achwal (as deputy for Councillor Eve) and Councillor Horrill (as deputy for Councillor Isaacs)

Other members in attendance:

Councillors Wallace and Westwood

[Video recording of this meeting](#)

1. **APOLOGIES AND DEPUTY MEMBERS.**

Apologies for the meeting were noted as above.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS.**

No declarations were made.

3. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRPERSON FOR THE 2023/24 MUNICIPAL YEAR.**

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Chamberlain be appointed Vice-Chairperson for the 2023/24 municipal year.

4. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

The Chairperson welcomed all those present at the meeting and looked forward to a productive year ahead.

5. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 28 FEBRUARY 2023.**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 February 2023 be approved and adopted.

6. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.**

Councillor Wallace addressed the committee regarding the retrofit housing programme and made several points which could be summarised as follows:

1. That there were clearly benefits of implementing energy efficiency measures for households.
2. He welcomed and encouraged improvements to Council homes and private properties.
3. He advised of the UK Homes Efficiency Report 2022 statistics on roof, loft and cavity wall insulation and that simple measures could save households over a thousand pounds annually.
4. That there was a need to circulate the message to wider households.
5. He raised several questions regarding the baseline EPC rating change, cost analysis, and the councils plans for implementing measures.
6. He was concerned at the council's speed of implementation of energy efficiency improvements and wished to stress the importance of avoiding further delays and having a method to track progress.
7. He suggested that further information and scrutiny of the council's performance be provided.

David Chafe, on behalf of Tenants and Council Together (TACT), addressed the committee regarding the retrofit housing programme and made several points which could be summarised as follows:

1. That to date a limited number of people within TACT had seen these papers and that the information could be difficult to convey but that it was important to ensure those involved were well informed.
2. He welcomed that the council was considering these issues and he welcomed the proposed solutions.
3. That it would be possible for one property to be having works progressed whilst the next-door property may not and that residents needed to understand the reasons for this.

Councillor Westwood, Cabinet Member for Housing responded to both contributions as follows:

1. That the council's focus was on getting the fabric of the homes in place before working on heating systems.
2. That the officer presentation would explain the journey towards the target EPC rating.
3. The intention was to focus on those areas with the greatest benefit based on a survey of 806 homes.
4. That the plan was to quickly scale up improvements for surveyed homes to at least EPC band C.
5. That he was keen to track progress against the plan and to make that progress public.
6. He acknowledged the importance of effective communication and appreciated the potential issues between working on one property but not another. He intended to collaborate with the team to ensure proper and clear communication to all residents.

Councillor Wallace addressed the committee regarding the carbon credit trading proposal and made several points which could be summarised as follows:

1. He was concerned about the calculation process for carbon credits for home energy improvements.
2. He felt that there were potential flaws and inaccuracies in the carbon credit calculation system and that the risk of inaccurate calculations could reflect badly on the council.
3. He stressed the importance of avoiding double counting of benefits and ensuring the scheme itself prevented that from happening.
4. That carbon credit systems had the potential to hinder actual carbon emission reductions.
5. That there were ethical considerations regarding the council's association with carbon credit trading.

Councillor Westwood, Cabinet Member for Housing thanked Councillor Wallace for the points he raised which would be considered further.

7. **RETROFIT HOUSING PROGRAMME.**

Councillor Westwood, Cabinet Member for Housing; introduced the agenda item and set out the background and key proposals to the Retrofit Housing Program, the introduction included the following points:

1. There was a need to invest in the council's current stock of homes which formed around 10% of households in the district.
2. That as a responsible landlord, the council must ensure that homes were maintained to an acceptable standard.
3. That energy efficiency was a critical element for cost reduction and addressing the cost of living crisis.
4. That this programme would align with the council's core policy of Greener Faster and reducing carbon footprint.
5. That the retrofit program needed to scale quickly to benefit older and less thermally efficient homes.
6. The plan would be to improve the fabric of hundreds of homes in the coming year which would deliver warmer homes that were cheaper to run for residents.

Chris Scahill, Asset Manager and Preshanta Burbidge, Energy Manager provided members with a detailed presentation concerning "Retrofit Programmes to Council Homes" ([available here](#)). The presentation discussed the following matters:

1. Council Homes and the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) Bandings.
2. The average running costs of different home energy systems.
3. The planned works for 2023/24 and associated measures, costs, and delivery programme.
4. The potential EPC uplift as a result of measures taken.

5. The procurement challenges and solutions associated with the programme.
6. The engagement/advice/information undertaken and planned.

The committee was asked to review the information provided and to provide the cabinet member and officers with their comments. The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised:

1. Clarification was sought regarding the council's statutory obligations and expected deliverables and the methodology for determining the number of properties in the programme.
2. The funding source beyond the initial two years of the programme.
3. The impact of resident demand for window retrofits on project planning and bidding structure.
4. The possibility of involving private homes and landlords in the project.
5. Comparing savings between gas and electric systems and ensuring consistent baseline calculations.
6. The potential for multiple visits and coordination among contractors once work commences.
7. The importance of tenant engagement and finding effective ways to communicate the proposition.
8. Engaging with energy providers during bill distribution as a means of resident communication.
9. Managing expectations and staging of the retrofit program if it became successful.

These points were responded to by officers accordingly and were noted by Councillor Westwood, Cabinet Member for Housing.

RESOLVED

The Chairperson summarised the views of the committee as follows:

1. That the council had set a challenging target to be carbon neutral by 2030.
2. That the presented program demonstrated the council's dedication to achieving this target.
3. That communication with residents was crucial for their understanding of the program and its impact on their properties and lives.
4. That there was a need for careful project management, including considering potential mitigations and contingencies.
5. That in general terms, members of the committee expressed support for the programme.

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

8. **CARBON CREDIT TRADING - REPORT REF BHP43**

Councillor Westwood, Cabinet Member for Housing; introduced the report, ref BHP43 which set out proposals regarding Carbon Credit Trading, ([available here](#)), the introduction included the following points:

1. This was a discussion paper on generating credits through the retrofit program.
2. He wished to obtain the committee's comments and support for further work in order to present a report to Cabinet in September 2023.
3. He clarified that carbon credits could offset emissions in the council's carbon footprint or generate funds for retrofit work, community value, or fuel poverty initiatives.
4. He advised that this was not a new concept, with approximately sixty other authorities having similar policies and schemes.

The committee was asked to note and comment on the scheme and whether it would support further work and due diligence to enable a report to be presented to cabinet at its September 2023 meeting.

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

1. Clarification regarding the option of retaining carbon credits rather than selling them and the forecasted impact on the council's position.
2. Further information was requested concerning existing case studies and experiences of other councils regarding carbon credit trading.
3. Concern was raised regarding the potential difficulty of becoming carbon neutral if credits were sold and the risk of double counting.
4. The ethical concerns about the concept of credits, urging careful consideration of the council's values and integrity in pursuing this approach.
5. Understanding the history and reliability of the proposed organisation and reassurance that other authorities had already joined the scheme.
6. Clarification regarding the option to reinvest the money generated from credits back into the retrofit scheme.
7. Questioning the time and effort involved in the scheme compared to other priorities.

These points were responded to by officers accordingly and were noted by Councillor Westwood, Cabinet Member for Housing.

RESOLVED

The Chairperson summarised the views of the committee as follows:

1. There was an opportunity presented by the retrofit program and the potential for trading and generating credits and it was acknowledged there was a need to explore the option and weigh the costs and benefits.

2. That some concerns had been expressed about the process and the scheme and that a degree of caution was suggested.
3. That further discussion was required to consider how the credits generated would be utilised.
4. There should be an emphasis on maintaining the good reputation of Winchester City Council.
5. There was recognition of the value and incremental benefits that could be generated from such a scheme.

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

9. **TO NOTE THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2023/24.**

Councillor Horrill suggested that further discussion was required in order to clarify whether other items of council business would be processed through this committee or via the Cabinet committee: Housing.

RESOLVED:

The current work programme was noted.

10. **TO NOTE THE DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS OF THIS COMMITTEE.**

RESOLVED:

That future dates and times of committee meetings were noted.

The meeting commenced at 18:30 and concluded at 20:25

Chairperson