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BUSINESS AND HOUSING POLICY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 19 September 2023

Attendance:

Councillors
Batho (Chairperson)

Chamberlain
Eve
Isaacs

Miller
Prest

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Scott

Deputy Members:

Councillor S Achwal (as deputy for Councillor Scott)

Other members in attendance:

Councillors Porter, Thompson, Westwood and Lee

[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. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

No announcements were made.

4. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 12 JULY 2023**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 12 July 2023 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

David Chafe on behalf of Tenants and Council Together (TACT) and Councillor Lee addressed the committee, and their contributions were summarised within the following agenda items.

6. HOUSING STRATEGY 2023 – 2028

Councillor Westwood, Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the agenda item regarding proposals for the Housing Strategy 2023 - 2028, ([available here](#)). The introduction included the following points.

1. Despite the challenges faced in recent years, the housing market in the district functioned effectively.
2. There were high levels of housing completions, and property values remained resilient despite economic fluctuations.
3. There were challenges to address in providing affordable housing options for residents.
4. Winchester's reputation for high cost of living reflected in housing costs necessitated the creation of more affordable housing for rental, ownership, or shared ownership.
5. A key objective was to offer opportunities for younger individuals to either stay or relocate to the area.
6. There was a need to improve the quality and management of rented accommodation, including those in the private housing sector.
7. Meeting the climate emergency and managing higher energy costs required the development of highly energy-efficient homes contributing to a carbon-neutral district.
8. Specific segments of the community, including the elderly and those with disabilities or special needs, needed housing tailored to their unique requirements. This need was exacerbated by an ageing population.
9. Some neighbourhoods encountered challenges related to anti-social behaviour, prompting initiatives to collaborate with residents and create sustainable, enjoyable living environments.
10. The housing needs in the district were diverse and intricate, demanding ongoing reviews and updates to the housing strategy.
11. There was a commendable track record of achievements during the 2018-2023 period.
12. The presentation marked the inception of the review process, and he welcomed feedback from the committee.

Gilly Knight, Corporate Head of Housing provided the committee with a presentation ([available here](#)) and following an introduction, provided members with details on the following elements of the strategy.

1. The National Policy and Context.
2. The Local Policy and Context.
3. The objectives of the Strategic Housing Marketing Assessment (SHMA).
4. The Achievements of the Housing Strategy 2018-2023.
5. The Evidence Base.
6. The Challenges.
7. The Strategy Vision, Mission, and Objectives.
8. The Monitoring and Review Strategy.
9. The Delivery Plan.

Councillor Lee addressed the committee, and made several points that could be summarised as follows:

1. There had been an increase in demand for housing services in the past four years, with a 36% rise in service approaches in 2020-23, and he asked if staffing levels were sufficient for the current and future demand.
2. That there was an absence of self-build or custom-build options in the housing strategy, missing opportunities to diversify the housing market and meet consumer choices. Self-build was notably absent from the housing strategy's evidence base and achievements for 2018-2023.
3. He suggested that support for self-help or custom build housing through funds like the UK Social Prosperity Fund or the Rural Prosperity Fund to foster diversification.
4. There had been reports of a significant influx of individuals moving from London into the area in recent years, raising questions about the council's data collection regarding residents' origins and residency duration in the district.
5. That a substantial number of younger residents were priced out of the local housing market, resulting in their relocation from the district. He asked about the council's data collection regarding resident departures the reasons behind such moves, and whether such data should be considered in the future.

David Chafe on behalf of TACT addressed the committee and highlighted the following points.

1. He acknowledged that the housing strategy was a live document and had undergone changes.
2. He asked about the housing list and whether individuals specifying areas they had an association with or wish to live in could potentially limit where new housebuilding could take place and whether this created a potential conflict.

The committee was recommended to comment on the proposals and proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. Understanding the use of the term "affordable" in the presentation and its definition, especially concerning the high property costs in Winchester, which may disadvantage young adults.
2. Acknowledging the representation of rural areas and the concern about escalating house prices, particularly in market towns like Alresford, where the construction of new Council homes was limited.
3. Addressing the declining, private rental market in rural areas, where private landlords were selling properties, and residents were grappling with the challenge of finding affordable housing.
4. Clarification regarding the accommodation of Ukrainian families in the district, possibly through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and evaluating whether their unique housing needs were incorporated into the strategy.
5. Clarifying the plan for areas that do not meet the criteria as exception sites that may encounter housing-related challenges.

6. The allocation of housing for diverse demographics, encompassing students, the elderly, and families across the district, and exploring the utilisation of downsized residents' properties.
7. The mechanisms for residents to provide feedback and input regarding housing plans and the location of new housing developments.
8. Addressing the issue of housing for the elderly, particularly in well-established areas like Whiteley, and the significance of retaining residents within their existing communities.
9. Exploring proactive approaches to identify exception sites, moving beyond reliance solely on Parish Councils, and encouraging potential sites to come forward.
10. The development of relationships with registered providers in objectives one and three, recognising their role in implementing the Council's development strategy and enhancing the quality and management of the private housing sector.

These points were responded to by Karen Thorburn, Service Lead - Strategic Housing, Gilly Knight, Corporate Head of Housing and Andrew Palmer, Service Lead - New Homes Delivery accordingly and were noted by Councillor Westwood, Cabinet Member for Housing. The Chairperson summarised the views of the committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the presentation were noted.
2. That the Cabinet Member and officers note the comments of the committee as outlined above.

7. UK SHARED PROSPERITY AND RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUNDS PROGRAMME UPDATE.

Councillor Thompson, Cabinet Member for Business and Culture introduced the agenda item regarding the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), ([available here](#)).

The introduction included the following points.

1. The UKSPF began in the last financial year with an allocation of one million pounds from central government, and the presentation would provide an update on progress, current expenditures, and plans for the upcoming financial year.
2. The REPF was a two-year fund initiated this year, obtained through a successful bid to central government. The focus of the REPF was on projects within rural communities, and efforts were being made to collaborate with market towns to identify suitable projects for fund allocation.

Susan Robbins, Corporate Head of Economy & Community provided the committee with a presentation ([available here](#)) and following an introduction, the presentation provided members with details on the following elements of the funds. 19:30 Susan Robbins presentation

1. UKSPF Fund Approval and Governance Overview.
2. UKSPF Finance & Location Overview.
3. UKSPF Investment split.
4. UKSPF 22/23 Overview of Delivered Projects.
5. UKSPF 2023/24 – Approved Projects.
6. UKSPF 24/25 – Look Forward.
7. Rural England Prosperity Fund.

The committee was recommended to comment on the proposals within the presentation and proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. That there was appreciation for the diverse range of activities funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and a desire to understand the success factors and quantifiable returns on investment for completed or partially completed activities.
2. A question was raised about the possibility of the UKSPF being repeated in the future, considering it is a two-year fund, and whether there might be future government initiatives.
3. Regarding the Market Town Improvement, there was a query about the focus being primarily on Central Winchester markets and whether there were plans to extend similar improvements to market towns like Alresford.
4. It was emphasised that the three areas for investment (people and skills, local business, and community in place) should not be viewed as distinct but interconnected. Improving skills could benefit local businesses, which, in turn, enhances the sense of community and place, ultimately creating a positive cycle.

These points were responded to by Susan Robbins, Corporate Head of Economy & Community and Andrew Gostelow, Service Lead - Economy & Tourism accordingly and were noted by Councillor Thompson, Cabinet Member for Business and Culture. The Chairperson summarised the views of the committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the presentation were noted.

That the Cabinet Member and officers note the comments of the committee as outlined above.

8. **WINCHESTER CITY STREET MARKET MANAGEMENT CONTRACT AND OPERATING POLICY (REPORT REFERENCE: CAB3427)**

(Cover sheet for report to Town Forum)

Councillor Thompson, Cabinet Member for Business and Culture; introduced the report, ref CAB3247 which set out proposals regarding the Winchester City Street Market Management Contract and Operating Policy, ([available here](#)). The introduction included the following points.

1. That the current market contract had expired several years ago, and it was now time to procure a market operator for an initial three-year term.
2. That the Retail Group's 2022 report contained several recommendations for market improvements, including better signage, branding, and expansion of the market with early evening and themed markets.
3. That there was an opportunity to incorporate these recommendations into the new contract and operating policy, especially with the availability of funds for rebranding.
4. There was the potential for themed markets like a Makers Market to leverage the creative sector and a Young Person's Market to encourage student and young entrepreneur participation.
5. The importance of a vibrant market in the city centre to enhance footfall, support local businesses, encourage startups, and promote small businesses' growth.

Councillor Lee addressed the committee, and made several points that could be summarised as follows:

1. That regarding the tender exercise, whether other issues beyond price, such as environmental factors should be given greater prominence. For example, only 10% of the evaluation weighting was allocated to environmental considerations, and whether these percentages should be increased.
2. He referred to the United Nations Environment Programme's draft Global Plastics treaty highlighting the potential to reduce single-use plastics in the street market.
3. That there was a need for clarification on waste and packaging considerations within the evaluation process.

Andrew Gostelow, Service Lead - Economy & Tourism provided members with an update and the committee was asked, prior to the Cabinet meeting on Tuesday, 17 October 2023 to:

1. Comment on the proposed council vision for the Winchester City Street market and the draft Winchester City Street Market Operating Policy.
2. Comment on the market trader selection process and assessment criteria; and
3. Comment on the framework communications and transition plan.

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

1. The importance of ensuring alignment between the council's vision and the current operator's capabilities and whether excessive rules might hinder their effectiveness.
2. That consideration be given to affordability as part of the qualitative assessment to maintain the traditional role of markets as places for affordable shopping.

3. A question was asked about the feedback and readiness of current market traders regarding the proposed rules and guidelines.
4. That there were potential barriers to business startups and innovation posed by the application process and whether steps could be taken to enable innovation.
5. Regarding the communication and engagement plans for the transition, including how the tendering process would be conducted to procure a new or the same operator under the new terms and conditions.

These points were responded to by Andrew Gostelow, Service Lead - Economy & Tourism. and were noted by Councillor Thompson, Cabinet Member for Business and Culture. The Chairperson summarised the views of the committee.

RESOLVED:

The committee resolved that the cabinet consider the following points as part of its consideration of the report on 17 October 2023.

1. The importance of flexibility in the relationship between the city council and the market operator while adhering to set conditions.
2. The importance of encouraging startups and the possibility of relaxing criteria for new businesses to lower overheads.
3. That within the market trader selection process, there should be an emphasis on green credentials and alignment with the council's net zero objectives.
4. That there was a desire to provide a range of market options addressing both quality and affordability for residents.
5. That there were no significant comments on the framework, communications, and transition plan.
6. That the Cabinet Member and officers note the comments of the committee

9. NUTRIENT MITIGATION PROJECT (PRESENTATION)

Councillor Westwood, Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the agenda item regarding proposals for the Nutrient Mitigation Project, ([available here](#)). The introduction included the following points.

1. That there were existing pollution issues in local rivers and chalk streams.
2. That nitrate neutrality was already required for new housing schemes, and now phosphate neutrality was required for developments in the River Itchen catchment area.
3. That the City Council had budgeted for upgrades to two water treatment works to deliver cleaner water and enable its new homes program.
4. That further investigations into a second phase of upgrades were ongoing.
5. That these upgrades would improve water quality and generate nutrient credits, allowing affordable housing programs to restart more cost-effectively.
6. That comments and feedback on the proposed plans were welcome.

Andrew Palmer, Service Lead - New Homes Delivery provided the committee with a presentation ([available here](#)) and following an introduction, provided members with details on the following elements of the project.

1. The Background & New Homes Approach – September 2022.
2. The Affected Areas.
3. The Credits Required in The Short Term.
4. The Forward Programme for 2024/2025 & Estimated Nutrient Requirements.
5. Winchester City Council Owned Sewage Treatment Works (STW).
6. Septic Tanks and Replacement Package Plant.
7. The Initial Investigations of Two Schemes.
8. The Project Plan.
9. Priority Sites for Further Investigation.
10. The Related Risks and Rewards.

Councillor Lee addressed the committee, and highlighted the following points:

1. He asked regarding nutrient credits generated to offset affordable housing programme requirements and whether these credits would be used for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) similar to retrofit credits.
2. He was concerned about a net cost to the HRA if credits could not be monetised and asked about the worst-case scenario and potential funding sources.
3. That he was keen to promote a wider upgrade program for all off-grid households and whether this could be factored into the project.

The committee was recommended to comment on the proposals and proceeded to ask questions and debate the item. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. Understanding the comparison between the Northington and Gooden's facilities, particularly the difference in the presented figures regarding capacity and costs.
2. That there was a request for clarification on the process of how the council determines the amount of improvement made and the subsequent generation of credits.
3. Whether it was an option to involve private developers in the mitigation work to earn credits and improve water quality.
4. That there was some concern about the concept of mitigation and credits and a suggestion to think more strategically and long-term about changing systems and infrastructure to address water pollution in a lasting way.

These points were responded to by Simon Hendeby, Strategic Director, and Andrew Palmer, Service Lead - New Homes Delivery accordingly and were noted by Councillor Westwood, Cabinet Member for Housing. The Chairperson summarised the views of the committee.

RESOLVED:

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

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

The chairperson advised the committee that two papers would be brought to the November meeting: HRA business plan and high-level budget options, and the Festival and Events Programme Policy. The final meeting in February 2024 would review the Older Person Accommodation Strategy, a review of the Hampshire Home Choice Allocations Policy, and the Green Economic Development Strategy Action Plan for 2024 to 2027. Members were advised of the process to suggest additional items for consideration.

RESOLVED

That the current work programme was noted.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 9.15pm.

Chairperson

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