

ENTERPRISE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 10th October, 2017

Present:-

Councillor Sarvent (Chair)

Councillors Perkins
D Collins
Derbyshire
Dyke

Councillors Bagley+
Dickinson++
Simmons++

Alison Craig, Housing Manager +
Joel Hammond-Gant, Democratic and Scrutiny Officer
Brian Offiler, Democratic and Scrutiny Officer ++
Michael Rich, Executive Director ++

+ Attended for Minute No. 20

++ Attended for Minute No. 21

18 DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' AND OFFICERS' INTERESTS RELATING TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

No declarations of interest were received.

19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Caulfield and V Diouf.

20 CABINET MEMBER FOR HOMES AND CUSTOMERS

The Cabinet Member for Homes and Customers, and the Housing Manager attended to provide members with an update on the position of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan.

Members were advised that legislation which was formally introduced in 2016 set out national policy changes, including a 1 per cent rent reduction for all social housing tenants in each of the four consecutive years, beginning in April 2016.

This policy change had to be accounted for within the HRA Business Plan, and was forecasted to reduce income to the Council from Housing Service by over £10 million over the first four years, and by £172.4 million over the full 30 years of the HRA Business Plan.

The Housing Manager reported that a series of recommendations were presented to, and approved by, Cabinet in May 2016 that aimed at mitigating the financial impact of the rent reduction and other policies. These related to a number of areas within the housing business plan including the responsive repairs budget, disposal of land and assets, and reviewing contracts and tenant repairing obligations.

An additional recommendation was made to carry out this work in partnership with tenants, cross-party elected members and officers, which led to the establishment of the HRA Business Plan Steering Group.

It was reported that the Steering Group had been split into separate Working Groups to take a more focused review of services and strategies. This resulted in a number of recommendations made to Cabinet and Corporate Management team on a number of areas, including:

- A 52 week rent year (commencing April 2018) to make paying rent as manageable as possible for tenants when Universal Credit is rolled out
- Updated rent recovery letters and processes aimed at promoting a payment culture
- Improved desirability of hard to-let properties through decorating and carpeting
- The use of 'Rightmove' to advertise hard to-let properties
- A reduced repairs budget, updated repair response times and proposed changes to tenants' obligations in respect of household repairs
- Proposed changes to the Tenancy Agreement

The Housing Manager advised that Cabinet had recently approved the proposed changes to the Tenancy Agreement (subject to consultation with tenants) and the introduction of a 52 week rent year, and that the use of 'Rightmove' had recently commenced.

Members were also made aware that over 60 per cent of the HRA budget was being spent on repairs, with responsive housing repairs equating to approximately £1K per property each year, compared to a national average of £850 per property each year.

In attempt to reduce spending, it was proposed that tenants be asked to undertake some of the minor 'DIY' repairs within their household, such as changing light bulbs and shower curtains.

The criteria for the response times of repairs had also been revised both help with managing tenants' expectations and the resources of Housing Services. The classifications for appointments were revised to: 'within 24 hours', 'within 3 days', 'within 7 days' and 'up to 30 days', with the latter option offering tenants a specific appointment date at the point of first contact.

It was reported that Housing Services were in the process of undertaking a significant piece of consultative work with tenants across Chesterfield to explain all of the proposed changes to the Tenancy Agreement, including a number of drop-in sessions for members of the public who want to discuss their queries and concerns in person. Members were informed that Severn Trent would be in attendance at all drop-in sessions to provide tenants with advice on how to reduce and manage their water bills from April 2018 onwards, from when the Council will no longer collect water rates on behalf of Severn Trent.

Members heard that Savills, a firm of Chartered Surveyors, had recently concluded a Housing Stock Condition Survey on behalf of the Council. The report showed that 100 per cent of properties met the decent homes standard; this is expected to save the Council approximately £20 million in capital expenditure over the next 30 years.

The Housing Manager concluded by advising members that the HRA Business Plan will be monitored and updated during the year in continued partnership with tenants and elected members on the HRA Steering Group, and that there would be a continued monitoring role for some of the Working Groups of the HRA Steering Group.

Members raised concern over the impact that the revised repairs policy within the Tenancy Agreement would have on the more financially vulnerable households in Chesterfield.

In response, the Housing Manager advised that the Council had consulted with a number of other local authorities before proposing the changes, and affirmed that the changes were in line with the policies of neighbouring authorities. The Council had also asked tenants to specify

any vulnerabilities that they felt could inhibit them from following the proposed revisions of the repairs policy. Housing Services planned to use this information to ensure that the appropriate support is still provided to the tenants and households that need it.

Members asked if the consultation would provide tenants with any proposed, updated costs.

The Housing Manager responded by informing that the consultation questionnaire was planned to make tenants aware of the costs incurred by the Council and of the savings that need to be met through the proposed changes.

RESOLVED –

That the update be noted.

21 SCRUTINY PROJECT GROUPS

Development of the old Queen's Park Sports Centre site

The Lead Member of the Scrutiny Project Group, Councillor Simmons, attended the meeting along with; the Assistant Cabinet Member, Councillor Dickinson; Executive Director, Michael Rich; and Democratic and Scrutiny Officer, Brian Offiler, to update members on the progress made by the Project Group.

Councillor Simmons made members aware that he had met with Mike Piet of FMG Consulting to discuss a range of potential options for the site.

Michael Rich advised that FMG Consulting had also met with Historic England following this, and were now working with the Council to construct a full business case. It was planned that the draft investment proposal be completed in the near future.

Councillor Dyke asked about the range of leisure and sport opportunities that were being considered to be made available at the site.

Councillor Dickinson echoed the importance of maximising the opportunity to provide inclusive services that attract a number of people

from different age groups, and to produce an effective income that can help to further support the economic growth of the borough.

The members were informed that, if the desired timescales and deadlines for the business proposal are met, there may be a need to arrange an additional meeting of the Committee prior to its next scheduled date in December.

Play Strategy

The Lead Member of the Scrutiny Project Group, Councillor Derbyshire, updated members on the progress made to develop a new Play Strategy. It was advised that a draft strategy had been produced and that consultation with the Planning Department had commenced.

It was informed that a wider consultation relating to the draft strategy with all Council members was intended to be in place before the end of the calendar year.

RESOLVED –

1. That the update on the progress of the Scrutiny Project Group for the Development of the Old Queen's Park Sports Centre, be noted.
2. That the update on the development of the Play Strategy be noted.

22 WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme was considered. The Vice-Chair noted that 'Procurement of the Council's Waste Contract' was discussed as an item to come to committee on 10 October. It was instead proposed to add the item to the work programme to come to committee at the next suitable meeting date.

RESOLVED –

1. That 'Procurement of the Council's Waste Contract' be added to the Work Programme.
2. That the Work Programme be approved.

23 MONITORING SCHEDULE

The Monitoring Schedule was considered.

RESOLVED –

That the Monitoring Schedule be approved.

24 CORPORATE WORKING GROUPS

Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Steering Group

The Chair confirmed to members that the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Steering Group was updated on by the Cabinet Member for Homes and Customers, and the Housing Manager within Minute No. 20 of the Enterprise and Wellbeing Committee 2017/18.

RESOLVED –

That the update be noted.

25 FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan was considered.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

26 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 July, 2017 were presented.

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes be accepted as a correct record and be signed by the Chair.