

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

11th October 2012

PRESENT:-

Conservative Group

Councillor Lemmon (Chairman), Councillor Hewlett (Vice-Chairman) and Councillors Ford, Harrison, Mrs. Hood, Smith and Watson (substitute for Councillor Murray).

Labour Group

Councillors Dunn, Mrs. Heath, Mulgrew, Rhind, Shepherd and Stuart.

In Attendance

Councillors Atkin, Harrison and Mrs. Plenderleith (Conservative Group)

HCS/25. **APOLOGY**

An Apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Murray (Conservative Group).

HCS/26. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 30th August 2012, were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

HCS/27. **REPORTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE. FUNDED VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION REVIEW.**

A Funded Voluntary Organisations Review had recently been undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and it had been identified that £100,000, set aside as a result of an earlier review of voluntary sector support by the District Council, had not been distributed. This was a one off sum in addition to the Council's existing support for the sector.

A proposal for a scheme to distribute this funding to the voluntary sector had been developed, and was included as an annexe to the report. Criteria had been based upon the need to address the Council's aims and objectives, as well as locally identified needs within the community. It was proposed to use an amended version of the existing mechanism to assess applications and administer grant payments.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That, proposals for a scheme to distribute the £100,000 of revenue funding identified during the Funded Voluntary Organisation Review, be approved.***

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

HCS/28. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – ADDITIONAL SERVICES.

A report was submitted which considered an overview of the up to date financial position of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and how the service could incorporate additional projects into future spending plans.

The Council had prepared extensively for the onset of the new HRA self financing regime, However, since the business plan was written, several potential variables had now been confirmed as actuals. An 8 page supplement to the HRA was issued in June 2012, and the key significant change, compared to the original plan, was that the lower than projected interest rates helped free up resources, particularly in the medium term. A graph was included within the report that showed the balance on the account after all costs and current planned expenditure was taken account of.

Although resources remained restricted in the earlier years of the plan, it was suggested that members could now afford to be bolder with plans and ambitions for the service, which initially would be delivering pilot and targeted projects rather than District-wide schemes. With this in mind, a series of visioning workshop sessions with staff, members and tenants were held over the summer period.

A number of proposals were detailed within the report and were considered to be the initial council response to the summer workshop sessions. These were;

- additional affordable housing
- decorating and gardening schemes for the elderly to incorporate training and work experience for tenants and their families
- parking and environmental improvements
- budgeting skills and debt counselling for tenants
- a handyman scheme
- additional youth and dream scheme activities

These proposals would be considered in more detail and additional work would include fully itemising the costs involved.

It was also highlighted that the housing service staffing structure needed to be reviewed. It was set up to run at very low cost, with all staff being wholly or largely operational with a front facing role. This significantly affected the department's ability to service new initiatives and programme development. A list of posts that had been taken out of the current structure were included within the report, and it was proposed that a full housing services restructure report be bought before the committee at a future Meeting. One of the key aims of which would be to include the need for more capacity to deliver new and additional projects.

RESOLVED:-

(1) That, the outcome of the stakeholder workshops be noted, and that items be incorporated in 2013/14 spending plans, as detailed in section 4 of the report.

(2) That the current Housing Revenue Account position be noted.

HCS/29. PROGRESS REPORT: FIVE YEAR MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMMES FOR COUNCIL HOUSING 2012-2017

A report was submitted which provided members with an update on progress to date on the approved 5 year maintenance and improvement programme. The updated stock condition survey and HRA business plan indicated a spend requirement of £26.5 million over the 5 year period 2012-2017. The programme for 2012/13 was to spend £4.6 million, excluding disabled adaptations. To date £1.5 million had been spent. Details of expenditure were contained within the report.

Full details of the procurement plan for the 5 year period were included within the report and included, amongst others, the planned external maintenance contract, the replacement kitchens and bathrooms contract, the current central heating programme and the shower upgrade programme. A table was also included which showed spend to date on all of these items and included actions for under/overspends.

In addition, full details were provided on proposed alterations to the approved procurement plan for the 5 year period, and a table included within the report showed potential projects that might be accelerated to achieve the 2012/13 original project allocation.

Further details were provided on the shower replacement scheme, and information was requested on the specification of these improvements.

An update was also provided on the pilot scheme shortly being proposed for sprinkler systems.

RESOLVED:-

(1) That progress to date of the approved 5 year maintenance and improvement programme 2012 – 2017, be noted.

(2) That amendments to the approved procurement plan, to ensure works are procured in the most effective and efficient manner, that allows the Council to fulfil the spend commitments in the originally allocated budget for 2012/2013, be approved.

HCS/30. ADDITIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A report was submitted to consider the potential mechanisms for delivering additional affordable housing in the District.

A number of Government initiatives combined, provided circumstances whereby there was a rationale for Local Authorities to build new, and acquire existing, vacant homes. The Government was encouraging Local Authorities to build not only to meet the high demand for additional affordable housing, but also to play their part in generating economic activity. Each additional affordable housing unit built or long term empty property acquired was worth approximately £10,000 to the general fund in new homes bonus over a 6 year period.

Full details on demand for affordable housing was provided, and details on new affordable housing supply and the wider economy were also detailed.

Delivery options for new affordable housing were considered, and in their simplest form, there were 3 options of how new provision could be delivered. These were summarised as:

- ***The District Council could make their resources available to an RP (Housing Association) and they would utilise them to provide new housing association properties in the District.***
- ***The Council could develop its own additional supply.***
- ***A mixture of the first two options such as sharing a development process with an RP and resultant properties to be owned in the proportion to the funds invested by each organisation. These options were detailed fully within the report.***

Becoming a provider of new additional affordable homes had significant financial risk implications, and the proposals in the report needed much more detail and analysis before the financial implications could be fully itemised. The initial report on potential new build affordable housing had approved a budget of £20,000 to progress to the next stage. This resource had not yet been used and a report had been put together utilising the collective knowledge of in house officers and external agencies. It was requested that the £20,000 now be used to commission an independent report on how to maximise the resources available for new build for the benefit of the community, in terms of additional affordable housing and wider economic growth.

It was requested that before any future report was submitted to this committee, members were invited to a seminar at which they could participate and fully air their views.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) ***That a partnership approach be progressed with the intention of providing additional affordable housing in the District. The partnership to primarily be focused on new build, but would also seek to acquire existing properties, subject to set criteria.***
- (2) ***That a partnership model be developed in detail over the next 3 months, with a report back to this Committee, with recommendations, in the new calendar year.***

HCS/31. **WORK PROGRAMME**

Members were asked to consider the updated work programme and review its content where appropriate.

RESOLVED:-

That the updated work programme be approved.

HCS/32. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

RESOLVED:-

That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the Meeting as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that there would be disclosed exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Act indicated in brackets after each item.

MINUTES

The Exempt Minutes of the Meeting held on 30th August 2012 were received.

J. LEMMON

CHAIRMAN