

CABINET

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2022 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Ash Ashbee (Chair); Councillors Pugh, J Bayford, R Bayford, Kup and D Saunders

In Attendance: Councillors Albon and M Saunders

872. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received at the meeting.

873. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

874. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Ashbee proposed, Councillor Bob Bayford seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on 17 November 2022.

875. DECARBONISATION OF THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING STOCK

Cabinet considered the decarbonisation proposals for the Council's housing stock. This included looking at the Journey to Net Zero strategy document. This was the strategy and approach that was intended to reduce greenhouse gas emission from the Council's social housing stock. It supported the government's aims for decarbonisation by achieving net zero by 2050 and linked into the Council's adopted Net Zero Strategy. This strategy would have a high impact on the tenants as it would reduce fuel consumption, making Council homes warmer and more comfortable using less energy.

The work that would be carried out would be disruptive for tenants, who would also need to learn how to use their homes and new technologies installed differently. This was already the case with the new build programme, where officers needed to ensure they could show tenants how to make the most of the features installed in their home. This document touched on the expectation of the performance of newbuilds but its main focus was on the Council's current housing stock that was less energy efficient.

The strategy has three objectives, these were to:

- Improve all properties to EPC C by 2030;
- Reduce energy consumption for residents; and
- Offset carbon emissions.

The objectives were underpinned by three principles, which were:

- Tackle the Council's Worst performing properties first;
- Fabric first, no regrets - this means that the Council would ensure that its homes were well insulated first and that the Council do not install new untested technology that had to be removed again later; and

- Meaningful resident involvement.

It was predicted that the overall cost of decarbonisation would be around £40 million. Therefore Cabinet was exploring different funding opportunities such as the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, Energy Company Obligation, Local Authority Delivery Scheme and Home Upgrade Grant. Plans were already in action as there was an opportunity to bid for funding in the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund in Wave 2.1.

The Council had applied for funding for retrofit works to five of the six tower blocks. The proposed works would see all flats in these blocks achieve an EPC rating of C or B. The bid, for around £4 million, would if successful, form part of an ambitious programme of refurbishment, with a total value of around £22 million, including further funding coming from Homes England for the replacement of external wall insulation and contributions from the Council's approved Housing Capital Programme.

Cabinet proposed to partner with Mears, appointed through a compliant procurement framework, for the delivery of the programme, and Mears had provided significant expertise to support the bid process. The early identification of a delivery partner also added weight to the bid submission and ensured the deliverability of the proposals. Mears were already the Council's partnering contractor for responsive repairs and had a track record of delivering decarbonisation projects.

If the Council was not successful with the Social Housing Decarbonisation bid, there was still a need to replace the External Wall Insulation, with funding from Homes England, but it would be far better, and more cost effective to complete these programmes simultaneously. Once the full scope of works for the programme was known, a further report would be considered by Cabinet, prior to entering into contract.

Councillor Jill Bayford proposed, Councillor David Saunders seconded and Cabinet agreed the following:

1. To approve the adoption of the Journey to Net Zero - A Decarbonisation Strategy for the Council's Housing Stock;
2. To note the submission of the bid for Wave 2.1 Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) bid and the proposed approach to project delivery, subject to a further report to Cabinet once the full scope of the works to the tower blocks is known.

876. HOUSING ESTATE; STRATEGY, POLICY AND STANDARDS

Cabinet considered the proposed Housing Estates Strategy that was drafted in part from the feedback received from Council tenants. Residents told Council that the condition of Council estates was very important to them. The Tenant and Leaseholder Services had used resident feedback from customer satisfaction surveys and two focus groups to develop these documents. The strategy was the vision they had for the estates and it described four objectives that they believed would enhance the Council estates as a place to live.

These were to:

- Promote Community;

- Improve estate appearance;
- Have better vehicle management; and
- Make the estates a safer place to live.

The strategy also described:

- how the Council would approach the estates to achieve the objectives, and
- how the Council would prioritise the estates for review and improvement works.

An estate policy was a regulatory requirement. It applied the rules around how the strategic objectives would be delivered, letting all stakeholders know the part they play and their responsibilities. The estate standard let Council tenants know what work the Council would do to maintain and take care of the communal areas in and around its blocks of flats. This work included, communal cleaning, communal repairs, grounds maintenance and car parks. It let residents know what they were responsible for including the storage of belongings in communal areas and the disposal of refuse.

Councillor Jill Bayford proposed, Councillor Kup seconded and Cabinet the following:

1. To approve the adoption of the Housing Estates Strategy, Policy and Standard;
2. To give delegated authority to the Acting Corporate Director of Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing to execute minor amendments to the documents.

877. HOUSING SERVICES STANDARDS; REPAIRS AND LETTINGS

Cabinet received a report on the proposed Housing Service Standards. Service Standards were a set of commitments to Council tenants. They give information about the level of service tenants could expect from the Council. These standards also guided officers to the level of service they should be providing. Residents were involved in the development of these standards. The Repairs Service Standard described the service that was delivered by Council partnering contractors Mears and Gas Call. It gave information to residents about what to expect from Council repairs service, for example:

- the different ways in which they can report a repair;
- how long different categories of repairs will take to be carried out, and
- how an appointment will be made.

Much of this standard was dictated by the contracts that were currently in place. Residents had the opportunity to feed into the standards of behaviour expected from the operatives and call centre staff. The Lettings Standard advised residents what they could expect when they moved into one of the Council homes. It let them know what would happen when they signed a tenancy agreement, what information they would receive and what standard to expect their new home to be in when they move in. To ensure this document was relevant to new tenants, a survey was completed with new tenants from the previous six months. Their feedback informed this service standard.

Councillor Jill Bayford proposed, Councillor Pugh seconded and Cabinet agreed the following:

1. To approve the adoption of the Repairs Standard and Lettings Standard;

2. To give delegated authority to the Acting Corporate Director of Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing to execute minor amendments to the documents.

878. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT Q2: 2022/23

Members considered the budget monitoring report for the second quarter of 2022/23. This was the second budget monitoring report for this year. Cabinet was forecasting an overspend of just over £1.9 million against the General Fund revenue budget. One of the main factors causing this overspend was the additional demands in the housing service with more homeless placements. In response to this, the Council had reviewed and was delivering its homelessness strategy action plan. Cabinet was regularly monitoring the levels of homelessness and had been recruiting more staff and commissioning new services to address the increasing need for support.

Other financial pressures that were detailed in the report included additional agency staffing requirements in the waste and recycling service, higher gas and electricity costs and income shortfalls. Cabinet was determined to improve the commercial performance of the Council and was pleased to recommend that the appointment of two property surveyors, who would be tasked with increasing the Council's property income streams.

Cabinet was assured that Council could primarily fund the forecast overspend of £1.9m from applying a £1.1m expected surplus from our retained business rates income. However, the Cabinet remained committed to ensuring the Council had a sound financial footing and this had been at the front of Cabinet's mind when developing next year's budget. The General Fund Capital Programme was showing a substantial underspend. This was in part due to the phasing and timing of a number of grant funded projects, some of which were recommended to be slipped into later years of the programme. Cabinet was pleased to report that the HRA was forecast to largely come in on budget. Cabinet was asked to approve a number of budget adjustments that were detailed within the Cabinet report.

Councillor David Saunders proposed, Councillor Pugh seconded and Cabinet agreed the following:

1. To notes the following:
 - i) The General Fund revenue budget 2022/23 forecast position;
 - ii) The General Fund Capital Programme 2022/23 forecast position;
 - iii) The Housing Revenue Account position.
2. To approve a £100,000 General Fund revenue budget virement to the Community Safety budget to facilitate the continued provision of showers, toilets and utilities for the traveller community currently located on land at Ramsgate Port and to fund associated legal costs, to be funded from a corresponding reduction in the corporate contingency budget;
3. To recommend to Council that a supplementary General Revenue Budget of £48,000 for the appointment of two interim property surveyors be approved, to be wholly funded from an associated increase in property income streams; and
4. To the 2022/23 Capital Programme budget adjustments, numbered i to ii, as set out in section 6.4 and Annex 1 to the Cabinet report.

Meeting concluded: 7.18 pm