

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 24 October 2023 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Phil Fellows (Chair); Councillors D Green, Austin, Bright, Britcher, Currie, Davis, Farooki, Garner, Kup, Paul Moore, Packman, Pope and Worrow

In Attendance: Councillor Whitehead

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor D'Abbro.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Packman made a declaration of pecuniary interest on agenda items 3 (Purchase of five Homes at Reading Street, Broadstairs for Affordable Rent) and 4 (Local Authority Housing Fund Round 2: Purchase of five Homes) as both items conflicted with Councillor Packman's work in the housing sector. Councillor Packman then left the meeting room.

3. PURCHASE OF 5 HOMES AT READING STREET, BROADSTAIRS FOR AFFORDABLE RENT

Ashely Jackson, Head of Housing and Planning introduced the report and made the following comments:

- Council had recently approved an accelerated affordable rented housing development programme of at least 400 new homes, constructed or acquired, by 2027;
- Officers were contacted by Millwood Homes, who were required to deliver five new affordable homes, as part of their development at Reading Street, Broadstairs;
- This requirement was set out in the Section 106 obligations for the development. They were however unable to secure an affordable housing provider to deliver these homes;
- The capital cost for the five homes is £800k and £50k for associated costs;
- On paragraph 2.5 there was a slight difference in the cash flow deficit from year one it should read £8.1k with a breakeven point in year 13;
- As the homes had been designated as affordable homes in the planning consent and section 106 agreement, they had been designed specifically for that purpose and accordingly were considered appropriate for the HRA;
- This was in line with the needs of households on the council's register or those living in temporary accommodation;
- There was a significant level of need for one bedroom homes, as well as for larger family homes. The unit sizes and the mix of dwellings were as follows:
 - one x one bed flat;
 - one x two bed flat;
 - Three x three bed houses.
- Officers were therefore proposing that the new homes be let in accordance with the Council's adopted Allocations Policy.

Councillor Whitehead, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing also made comments as follows:

- Members were being asked to consider and respond to the proposal that were going to be forwarded to Cabinet regarding the purchase of 5 homes at Reading Street, Broadstairs;
- The purchase of these homes was part of the Council's accelerated housing delivery strategy, ensuring that Section 106 homes were delivered;
- This was also to ensure that the social housing part of developments came to fruition and did not disappear, as this was much needed housing for the district;
- As this was a revenue strategy above else, it had already been established that the HRA would benefit from these acquisitions;
- The capital cost for these properties is £800,000, with 50,000 provided for associated costs and this provided one x one bed flat, one x three bed flat, three x three bed houses;

- Social housing in Thanet is often inaccessible for renters; property and rental costs in Broadstairs are significant, and acquiring social housing within Broadstairs is often challenging;
- It was important to ensure that all of the Isle is accessible to residents and that local individuals and families should be able to remain where their local connections were. Acquisitions such as this would support that aim;
- The Housing team had done some work relating to this proposal, being able to deliver genuinely affordable properties in an ever increasing property market, that would otherwise have been lost was essential;
- Being able to deliver affordable housing in an area that was often harder to access for those on lower incomes was incredibly important.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- These were good proposals. Why was it that the council was considering purchasing one bed dwellings and not dwellings for families?
- This development was of a high standard. How closely did the Council monitor housing standards during construction of these properties?
- Was there a timeline for delivery of these properties?

Ashley Jackson and Councillor Whitehead responded to Member questions and comments as follows:

- Currently the need for one bed dwellings was higher than for family dwellings on the housing waiting list;
- The growth of the Council's housing stock through the development of the 400 dwellings would mean recruiting additional officers for the housing team;
- These were properties built to a high standard and there were retentions built into the agreements. Officers also monitored development progress.

Members noted the report.

4. LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND ROUND 2: PURCHASE OF 5 HOMES

Ashely Jackson, Head of Housing and Planning introduced the report and made the following comments:

- In March 2023, it was announced that the Local Authority Housing Fund would be expanded by £250m for a second round of funding (LAHF R2);

- Thanet has been identified as eligible for capital grant funding with an indicative allocation of £694,000 in funding to purchase four homes for the resettlement element and 1 home for the Temporary Accommodation element;
- In order to utilise the grant, it was necessary to match fund the acquisitions with £788,860 of borrowing within the HRA capital programme and these proposals would be presented to Cabinet on 16th November. The properties had been identified and had to be purchased by 31st March 2024;
- Business plan modelling showed that the scheme generated a surplus from year one due to the grant subsidy. This surplus could be used to subsidise other parts of the Affordable Homes Programme;
- Officers were proposing that the homes were let at an affordable rent level, in line with the Council's approved Tenancy Strategy;
- Discussions had taken place with a local developer who was currently developing the Westwood Cross site to purchase five x three bed units. The units would be an 'off the shelf' purchase with no refurbishments or adaptations needed. They were nearing completion and would be ready soon;
- The developer had accepted a provisional offer, subject to approval of £1.4m and this was 80% of the market value;
- The proposed offer had been run through the Council's business plan modelling and the results indicated that the scheme generated a surplus for the HRA business plan from year one due to the grant subsidy;
- This proposal would be presented to Cabinet on 16 November 2023. The report would recommend that Cabinet approve the use of £694,000 of grant funding and £788,860 HRA match funding from the already approved HRA capital programme, to purchase five units for the LAHF R2.

Councillor Whitehead also made comments as follows:

- Members were being asked to consider and respond to the proposals going forward to Cabinet regarding the purchase of five properties using the Local Government Housing Grant;
- This was a grant that had been presented to Members before. The Council applied for and were granted £1.19 million in the first tranche of this Grant to provide homes for those who arrived in the country via the following approaches:
 - The Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (including eligible British Nationals under this scheme) (ACRS);
 - Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP);
 - Ukraine Family Scheme (UFS);
 - Homes for Ukraine (HFU);
 - Ukraine Extension Scheme (UES).
- In this tranche of funding the Council had been granted £694,000. Through this the Council intended to provide five homes. Four had to have at least three bedrooms and one was required to be used for temporary accommodation;
- As with the previous tranche of funding, the timescales around this funding were extraordinarily tight. Therefore, in order to deliver the homes required in the period given, direct purchase was the only realistic way forward. This aspect of funding limited the Council's creativity with how it could better provide housing using this grant;
- However, the net result remained the same which was that the grant enabled the Council to support households who needed support at an incredibly difficult time, for the allotted time that they were allowed to remain in the UK by central government;
- The funding also enabled the Council to grow its general portfolio as well as supporting the growth of its housing overall;

- These homes were significant not just in what they could achieve in supporting those who had experienced war and displacement, but also in what they could do to support other vulnerable residents;
- Due to the scale of this grant and its provision of 46% of the overall cost, the rental of these properties produced a surplus from year one, as demonstrated by the provided graph;
- This was especially significant as part of the Council's strategy, as it provided a revenue stream to not only offset borrowing to produce the 400 plus properties planned for general usage, but also to support further housing acquisition and production;
- It was rare that both moral and financial benefits to align and this was one of those rare cases;
- Life often calls on society to do the right thing for others. This moral imperative ran through every decision that was made by the Council and was especially pertinent in this case. To be able to provide for even more residents, specifically through fulfilling the moral duty was a circumstance that rarely appeared in local government. This strategy provided such an opportunity;
- The Portfolio Holder thanked Ashley Jackson and her team for all the work in putting together these proposals that were before the Panel.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Members thanked officers and Members who had managed to put these proposals together and secured the funding for housing development for Thanet;
- Another Member asked whether the dwellings were in one location or scattered across the district as this had implications for the community integration of residents to occupy these new homes;
- Did the Council have a liaison officer to assist the new families coming into the district to settle in their new homes?
- Members welcomed this project and were particularly full of praise for the approach to get the homes grouped together to enable the new residents to live as a community that would settle in well with the local residents.

Ashley Jackson responded to Member comments and questions as follows:

- The new residents would occupy new homes that were all grouped together and that way they would make a community;
- There was a funded post for a Ukrainian Liaison Officer working with the incoming families.

Members noted the report.

5. EXTENSION TO THE ALCOHOL PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER

Jo-Anna Taylor, Community Services Manager introduced the report and made the following comments:

- Officers were seeking a nine-month extension of the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) which regulates alcohol consumption in the district. The PSPO had been in place since 2017 and was renewed in 2020;
- The PSPO was introduced to tackle anti-social behaviour and public disorder related to alcohol consumption in public places and was requested by Kent Police;
- This included street drinking, public intoxication and disturbances caused by alcohol-related activities. The PSPO had been successful in reducing these issues and improving the safety and well-being of the community;

- However, the COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges in ensuring compliance with the PSPO. With the relaxation of lockdown measures, there had been an increase in the number of people gathering in public places and this had led to more incidents of anti-social behaviour and public disorder related to alcohol consumption, over the last three years;
- Since January 2023 the Police had issued 23 Fixed Penalty Notices under the Alcohol PSPO. This may seem a small number which may lead to querying the need of a PSPO. However, this Order had powers for conducting education, confiscating and disposing alcohol without the need of a fine;
- In order to continue to address these challenges, officers were requesting an extension of the PSPO for a further nine-month period; this short period of nine months would then bring it in line with the Anti-Social Behaviour PSPO. In July 2024 we would be considering coming up with a Combined ASB and Alcohol PSPO;
- During this time, we would continue to monitor the effectiveness of the Order and assess the potential for any necessary adjustments to ensure it remained an effective tool in regulating alcohol consumption in public places;
- The Council would also continue to work closely with the Police, (who were responsible for issuing the fixed penalty notices) and other partners to ensure consistent enforcement of the Order;
- The Council was committed to creating a safer and healthier community for its residents and visitors and believed that extending the PSPO would support this goal and ensure that people enjoyed public spaces without fear of anti-social behaviour or public disorder.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- One Member asked if there was any data about the number of individuals worked with;
- Another Member asked what constituted minor amendments that were going to be delegated to the CEx to make on the new PSPO;
- One Member asked whether fixed penalty notices were issued to underage drinking;
- Another Member said that the PSPO was also about how many people had been dissuaded from anti-social behaviour as a result of the presence of the PSPO;
- They further asked whether the presence of officers who could issue penalties was more helpful than the previous model. They also asked if CCTV footage could be used in evidence;
- The Member also asked if there were the number of complaints sporadic in nature or they came from known areas;
- Council the Council use move the benches as a way of preventing anti-social behaviour in certain locations?

Jo-Anna Taylor responded to Member questions and comments as follows:

- How the Council and Kent Police was dealing with individuals under the PSPO was not going through the formal process and therefore there was no data recorded;
- Minor amendments included making changes to locations for the area covered by the PSPO;
- Fixed penalty notices were issued to incidents that were linked to anti-social behaviour and not necessarily underage drinking. Underage drinking was dealt with using different approaches like using outreach workers, youth services or speaking to parents;
- The model that used beat officers was much more effective in enforcing the PSPO as they also got to know the people. CCTV footages could be used in evidence;

- Complaints were mostly received from Margate, Ramsgate and to a certain extent Broadstairs;
- The council would usually look at all the options to stop anti-social behaviour including moving benches.

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 7.34 pm