

HOUSING AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE

21 July 2022 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Mrs Cooper (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Daniells, Mrs English, Gregory, Gunner (Substitute for Pendleton), Mrs Haywood, Hughes, Madeley, Needs and Yeates

Councillor Cooper were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

Apologies: Councillors Pendleton and Thurston

168. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

169. MINUTES

The Committee approved as a correct record the minutes of the Housing and Wellbeing Services Committee held on 8 June 2021

170. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair invited questions from members of the public who had submitted their questions in advance of the meeting in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

The Chair confirmed that one question had been submitted and this was read out by the questioner and responded to by the Chair. The questioner was then invited to ask a supplementary question and an answer was provided by the officers in attendance at the meeting.

(A schedule of full questions asked, and the responses provided can be found on the meetings webpage [here](#))

The Chair then drew public question time to a close.

171. FREEDOM LEISURE - LEISURE OPERATING CONTRACT - YEAR SIX REPORT

The Group Head of Wellbeing & Communities explained that the report before members provided them with an overview of the sixth year of the leisure operating contract (financial year 2021/22). He then introduced those in attendance from Freedom Leisure and they gave a detailed presentation to members that included an update on the initiatives, projects and programmes they have delivered in their shared vision of achieving their health and wellbeing objectives for the community (*to make Arun a better place to live, work and visit as well as delivering public services*). They also

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provided detail on the future challenges they would need to overcome and the plans in place for dealing with these such as, the continued recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, the current utility crisis (92% increase for electricity & 47% for gas), inflation and the cost of living crisis.

The Vice Chair in the Chair thanked Freedom Leisure for their presentation and invited members to ask their questions. A summary of the topics raised is below;

- Would the Friday night project be extended to Bognor Regis, given its success in Littlehampton? It was confirmed that the intention to extend this to Bognor Regis at the Arun leisure Centre was there. However, current resources were not where they need to be in order to support this right now. It was also commented that further funding would ensure the sustainability and viability of the services Freedom Leisure provide.
- It was commented that the sheltered housing project rolled out to sheltered accommodation sites would also be a good opportunity for general care homes and residential homes and was this something that Freedom Leisure had considered for the future. It was confirmed that yes, this was something in the future they would like to be able to provide.
- It was noted that membership numbers were 'down' or were not recovering as quickly as hoped. It was asked if Freedom Leisure had any intention of increasing or decreasing membership prices given the current cost of living crisis. It was confirmed that there was a very 'real' pressure on expenditure and the pricing would need to increase in some way. However, Freedom Leisure would ensure that there would be some concessionary access for those who would qualify. It was also stated that it's a difficult market to operate in and the need to generate more income was a priority.
- Discussion was had regarding the website and a suggestion of including details on if classes were for beginners or experts was made as well as making available the information on membership prices.

The Committee

RESOLVED

- a. to note the overall performance of Freedom Leisure for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022; and
- b. noted that the Dual Use Officer Group met on three occasions during the review period and agreed work priorities in accordance with its Terms of Reference

172. HOUSING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Interim Head of Housing explained the report provided Members with a review of the implementation of Civica CX; the new integrated Housing Management System. The report proposed changes to the approach, resources, and timescales for completion of the programme which were designed to ensure the most effective implementation, that supports the council's ambition to offer its residents the best quality and value for money services. He advised the councils business processes required 're-engineering' in order to create stronger resilience within its operational service. He also reminded members that the staff who were currently involved with the implementation of the new system were also the same staff who were providing the day-to-day services to the council's residents.

Members were keen to fully understand the breakdown of the additional monies being requested and were looking for reassurance that further project cost increases were being fully mitigated, where possible as the project was funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Clarification was also sought regarding the recruitment of 12 trainee posts and how long these posts would be retained.

It was confirmed by the Interim Head of Housing that the recommendations in the report had been put forward by the consultants who had reviewed the project timeline, and in order to have the new system implemented against its new timeline, those are the staffing numbers needed to be put in place on the project to ensure delivery. He also stated that one of the biggest risks the project faced currently was the number of staff absences alongside the difficulty in recruiting permanent staff. He explained that it was thought that by implementing a trainee programme that would run for 16 weeks, this would open the roles up to a wider range of candidates. The plan would be to have these individuals fully trained by the Subject Matter Experts (SME) in system and process before they were moved and integrated into the main service team.

An explanation was requested in terms of the original system implementation timeframe verse what members were now having reported to them. The Interim Head of Housing explained that the implementation of systems such as this can be lengthy and are normally broken down into stages, he provided examples of other authorities such as Enfield Council who were now at an implementation period of 6 years.

The Leader of the Council asked the Interim Head of Housing if he thought that the handling and implementation thus far required to be reviewed by the Audit & Governance Committee. It was explained that the Interim Head of Housing had completed an audit and because of this it was felt that it would be a duplication of work. He also stated that when the initial plans for the project were put together with the initial projected costs, they were not quite in line with the councils' ambitions as they were now. He confirmed that he believed the changes made would enable the council to better serve its residents.

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It was asked when it was envisaged that the council, staff and residents would see the benefits of the system. The Interim Head of Housing explained that within the systems implementation there were 3 products (stages), each would land a different times. He explained that for the overall benefits to be seen, it would be 6 months either side of the May 2024 date. To bring that date forward in anyway would be that compromise would need to be made to the Training element and it was his opinion that this would be a mistake.

Additionally, it was asked if the new system would be more accessible for those with additional needs. It was explained that whilst there was a technical element to the question. The work for the system to be as accessible as it can be for as many residents as possible was in the detail of the councils processes and ensuring that the data behind these processes were input into the system early on. It was also confirmed that residents would be involved in the journey of the upgrade to the new system, as a survey would be sent out to obtain feedback.

The recommendations were proposed by Cllr Gregory and seconded by Cllr English.

The Committee

RESOLVED

1. that the revised schedule for the housing management system implementation programme be approved, and
2. that an increase in the programme budget from £1,208K to £1,820K subject to Policy and Finance/Full Council confirmation of finance available be approved.

173. DECARBONISATION STRATEGY

The Decarbonisation Project Manager advised members that the last weekend had shown and refocused everyone on the importance of climate change and global warming. The council has a zero carbon strategy for its own properties which produces over 400 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year. Heating and lighting the housing stock of the council produces 20 times as much carbon. This decarbonisation strategy is about helping achieve zero carbon and low carbon housing within the 2050 timeframe that the government is committed to. The first opportunity to do that is to apply for the social housing development grant which is a match funded by the government. The focus that the council has chosen for its grant application was for fabric improvements to reduce the demand for heating and energy in the homes that the council is able to address

promptly and quickly within the timeframe of the grant. There are 300 houses that the council have highlighted it would like to improve. He then reminded members of the recommendation before them in the report.

The vice-chair thanked the Decarbonisation Project Manager for his report and then asked members for their comments and questions.

Clarification was sought regarding paragraph 1.4 of the report where it said '*our housing stock generates twenty times as much CO2 as the rest of the Council's estate*'. It was confirmed that all of the properties that are included in the 2030 net zero target include, libraries, leisure centres, council buildings and properties that are owned or are run by the council. Those properties produce directly around 400 tonnes of co2 a year. The social housing stock produce 8,000 tonnes of co2 a year.

Discussion was then had regarding the financial implications of the quoted £20,000 per property. Specifically, it was asked what did the HRA bank balance look like, as there had been no update to the committee on this detail. The Interim Head of Housing advised that the council's operational costs last year was higher than its operational income. The way the council plans to resolve that is to manage our stock more efficiently, increasing the value for money. The work that was documented in the report was a part of this. He also advised that the council needed to balance its investment into things that would reduce responsive costs e.g. if you increase your planned maintenance works, that then has a knock on effect to your responsive repairs work. A rebalancing of the council's capital expenditure was needed to reduce revenue costs whilst driving efficiencies and improving the. He went on to explain that the council needed to look at other businesses of the same size that have sustainable business models as it should be reflective of these.

It was then asked that as this strategy was to be seen as an investment, what was the expected return on this? The Interim Head of Housing explained that in terms of savings and efficiencies what it was expected to see was to save officer time when executing processes. E.g., when an officer is attending a property visit, they should be able to enter the data results through one time device update, rather than completing several different forms and or spreadsheets.

It was stated by a member that the decarbonisation strategy was still a project that was required to be match funded by any grant. It was expected that this would be £3 million, and this would be a drain on the HRA and inhibit other projects. It was also stated that the rent increase on rents could only be 1% plus CPI and therefore this would not cover the ever increasing spend.

A query was raised regarding the EPC rating for properties and would residents be aware of their own properties rating. It was confirmed that the strategy would focus on those properties with the lowest EPC rating, i.e. they are the most inefficient properties to heat and or light. It was confirmed by the Interim Head of Housing that the council would be as transparent as it could be when selecting the properties that would see improvements. The Decarbonisation strategy project manager also confirmed that residents can request their EPC rating at any time, each property would have its own EPC certificate also.

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The Leader of the Council brought the conversation back to the financial aspect and asked was the council clear on what the HRA bank account would look like in April/May 2025? The Interim Head of Housing advised that if the council continued to run at its current operating parameters, then by May 2025 it would have serious challenges with what was left as the balances would be depleted by that time.

It was then asked if that included the payment of £3 million spend for this project. It was confirmed that it was being explored as to how this project could be funded by the HRA, however it was expected that these would be capital projects and would be funded by borrowing. The budget for debt payment is currently showing as underspend and that is where the council sees the opportunity to resolve some of the revenue issues that the council are currently facing. It was then queried if the Civica project had been included in the forecasted HRA balance. It was confirmed that the Civica project was mainly capital funded.

It was asked when the interim HRA report would be received by the committee and it was confirmed that this would be expected towards the end of this financial year or at the start of the new financial year 23/24.

The Decarbonsisation Strategy Project Manager also confirmed in response to a question asked that the council was not planning on completing works on building blocks during the first phase as this provides additional complexities and as of yet there is no timeframe set in terms of dealing with these types of properties.

The recommendations were then proposed by Cllr Yeates and seconded by Cllr Needs.

The Committee

RESOLVED

- 1) The adoption of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Strategy and action plan (Appendix 1) (which will be subject to final presentational revisions)
- 2) Approved officers to make an application to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Grant (run by the Department for Business, Enterprise, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)) for £3,000,000 to improve SAP ratings of 300 properties to achieve a minimum C Rating which will involve match funding of £3,000,000 from within the existing HRA business plan, and to then apply that to the programme of retrofit works over 2023- 2025.

174. PRE-CONSTRUCTION WORKS RELATING TO CANADA ROAD & ELLIS CLOSE, ARUNDEL AND WESTLOATS LANE, BOGNOR REGIS

The Interim Head of Housing explained the report sought authority to enter into a Pre-Construction Service Agreement with Beard Construction, to enable Arun to evaluate the best use of the three sites, at Canada Road and Ellis Close, Arundel and Westloats Lane, Bognor Regis. He also advised members that he had had discussions with the building's services team and the advice from them was due to current market volatility, it would be best for the council to retain these sites for now.

Members questioned the advice to retain the sites stating that the market could stabilise in 6 months' time. The Interim Head of Housing explained that the council could not know for certain that would happen. He also stated that by retaining the sites, the council would undertake work to ensure a good value for money outcome. He added that at the current time there was not an appetite from developers either.

The recommendations were proposed by Cllr Gregory and seconded by Cllr Gunner.

The Committee

RESOLVED

1. that the award of the Pre-Construction Services Agreement contract goes to Beard Construction for £122,470 (exclusive of VAT). Note: A fully costed report to be presented to a future committee detailing the various options to develop the sites

175. INFORMATION & ADVICE CONTRACT PROCUREMENT REPORT

The Group Head of Wellbeing and Communities reminded members that the Housing and Wellbeing Committee resolved on 22 July 2022 to procure a countywide Community Advice and Support Contract with West Sussex County Council and the West Sussex District and Borough Council's. The contract had been tendered and the report seeks authority to enter into a new Community Advice and Support contract.

The recommendation was proposed by Cllr Gunner and seconded by Cllr Yeates.

The Committee

RESOLVED

1. that the Group Head of Wellbeing and Communities and the Council's Section 151 Officer enter into a contract, together with West Sussex County Council and the other West Sussex District and Borough Councils, for the provision of a Community Advice and Support contract for up to

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seven years following the completion of a procurement exercise for this service.

176. OUTSIDE BODIES - FEEDBACK FROM MEETINGS

The vice-chair provided members with a verbal update regarding the meeting of the LCN that was held on 23 June 2022. She explained that localised and targeted work to identify health and equality issues due to the cost of living crisis was being undertaken. She advised that she would provide the committee with a more detailed update at its October meeting.

177. WORK PROGRAMME

The Interim Head of Housing advised members that discussions had been had and it had been agreed that there was capacity to bring an update on the sheltered housing accommodation to committee. He explained that a stock condition survey would be completed and that would inform the council and provide officers with an understanding of what its maintenance plan would look like. Additionally, he said that a review of the councils' service charging regime was needed to understand what services are being provided and to ensure that the council was charging for those services appropriately.

It was queried by one member queried why there was not a Safer Arun Partnership update on the work programme until October given the concerns of residents relating to the issues that had been seen with the traveller community in the recent weeks. And given the recent spate of anti-social behaviour causing damage to a local café in Littlehampton and further safety and security concerns relating to Bognor Regis Town Centre. It was confirmed that there had been an update provided at the last meeting of the committee and Sussex Police were in attendance and they would be in attendance at future meetings of the committee also.

It was requested that a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) update be added to the work programme along with the items in minute 65 from the last meeting of the committee to be updated. The Interim Head of Housing confirmed that officers were in discussions and planning where this work would sit on the programme.

The committee noted its work programme.

178. EXEMPT INFORMATION

The recommendation was proposed by Cllr Gunner and seconded by Cllr Hughes.

The Committee

RESOLVED

That under Section 100a (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and accredited representatives of newspapers be excluded from the

meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act by virtue of the paragraph specified against the item.

179. BUSINESS RATES INSOLVENCY WRITE OFFS OVER £10,001

The recommendation was proposed by Cllr Gunner and seconded by Cllr Gregory.

The Committee

RESOLVED

1. That the outstanding business rates totalling £14,056.76 which are unable to be collected by recovery action be written off.

180. COUNCIL TAX INSOLVENCY WRITE OFFS OVER £5,001

The recommendation was proposed by Cllr Gunner and seconded by Cllr Gregory.

The Committee

RESOLVED

2. That the outstanding council tax charges totalling £14,407.64 which are subject to insolvency action, preventing the council from pursuing the debtor for payment be written off.

(The meeting concluded at 8.17 pm)