



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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HOUSING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 27 June 2023

7.00 - 9.14 pm

Council Chamber

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Mattie Ross (Chair)

Councillor Stephen Davies
 * Councillor Katrina Davis
 Councillor Colin Fryer
 Councillor Lindsey Green
 * Councillor Jessie Hoskin
 * Absent

Councillor Lucas Schoemaker (Vice-Chair)

* Councillor Christopher Jockel
 Councillor Gary Luff
 * Councillor Jenny Miles
 Councillor Loraine Patrick
 * Councillor Rich Wilsher

Tenant Representatives

Becky Adams

Mike Richter

Officers in Attendance

Strategic Director of Resources
 Strategic Director of Communities
 Strategic Head of Housing
 Housing Manager

Principal Accountant
 Service Delivery Manager
 Asset Operations Manager
 Democratic Services & Elections Officer

Other Member(s) in Attendance

Councillors Bennett

HC.001 Apologies

The Chair welcomed the new Members of the Committee.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Davis, Hoskin, Jockel, Miles and Wilsher.

HC.002 Declaration of Interests

There were none.

HC.003 Minutes

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meeting held on 28 March were approved as a correct record.

HC.004 **Public Questions**

There were none.

HC.005 **Members' Questions**

There were none.

HC.006 **Canalside Site, A419, Stonehouse**

The Strategic Director of Resources introduced the report and explained that this report was formulated as a result of a Motion that went to Full Council in July 2022. He proceeded to highlight the following key points:

- The Council had appointed consultants to engage with the community and any stakeholders and to look at the strategic design options for the site.
- The anticipated cost for the consultation and additional work from the consultants would be £74k which would be paid from the General Fund Regeneration Fund.
- The report acknowledged the community interest in the site and its neighbouring sites along the canal corridor which had undergone improvements.
- The report asked the Committee to remove the site from the new build programme however the Strategy and Resources Committee would need to make the decision to appropriate the site and reinvest the value into affordable housing in the local area.

Councillor Davies questioned whether the sites current value in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) would differ from its market value. The Strategic Director of Resources explained that they were required to transfer the site at its full market value which would be calculated by external valuers. He also confirmed to Councillor Davies that this report was the first piece of work the consultants had completed and that the £74k budget would cover not only the consultation work but also the design options for the site.

In response to Councillor Green, it was confirmed that the last valuation of the site, taken place last year, was roughly £500k and would have taken into account all factors including the refused planning permission.

Councillor Fryer questioned whether the investment back into the area would include social housing. The Strategic Director of Resources explained that would be a decision for the Committee to make at the next Budget setting meeting provided that the Strategy and Resources Committee agreed to appropriate the site from the HRA and earmark the funding for affordable housing in the local area.

Ms Adams questioned whether there would be an opportunity for the site to be used for both the community and social housing. The Strategic Director of Resources explained that the Working Group would be considering different designs for the site.

Councillor Luff questioned how many housing units the site could accommodate and whether the reinvestment into the local area meant the district as a whole. The Chair confirmed that the last application was for 9 housing units and that the reinvestment in the local area would be for the Town of Stonehouse.

Councillor Schoemaker proposed, and Councillor Fryer seconded.

Councillor Schoemaker commended the report and echoed that Stonehouse needed more affordable housing. He further stated that this site would be an opportunity for Stonehouse to gain the benefits of the Canal.

Councillor Davies commended the report and questioned when it would be going to Strategy and Resources Committee. The Strategic Director of Resources confirmed they were aiming for it to go to the October Committee.

The Chair highlighted the negative impacts listed on pages 46 and 47 and asked the Committee to consider these when looking at reinvesting the funding should the site be appropriated.

After being put to a vote, the Motion was carried Unanimously.

RESOLVED To:

- a) **note the Common Ground Report at Appendix A and endorse the stepping stones set out on page 17 of the report as a basis for moving forward with the community.**
- b) **remove the Canalside site, A419, Stonehouse (former Ship Inn site) from the new build programme and**

**RECOMMENDED
TO STRATEGY
AND RESOURCES**

- c) **that the Committee considers appropriating the site from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) into the General Fund to enable an option to be granted to the community to transfer the site for community use; subject to a further report setting out the reasons for granting such an option and a timetable and conditions for doing so.**
- d) **that the capital funding allocated to the Canalside site, including the receipt to the HRA from an appropriation of the site, be earmarked for future investment in affordable housing in the local area.**

HC.007 Independent Living Strategy 2023 - 2027

The Service Delivery Manager introduced the report and explained that this Strategy would supersede the Older Persons Housing Strategy. She highlighted the main changes which included:

- The strategy had been linked to the Council Plan 2021-2026
- The strategy addressed the housing need as well as health and wellbeing.
- There had been many additions made to the strategy which were listed on page 50 of the reports pack.
- An action plan had been included which would be a live document that could be continually added to in response to changes.

The Service Delivery Manager gave the following answers in response to questions asked from Councillors:

- The Survey at appendix D was sent out to all tenants between the ages 40-55 as they were previously identified to be potential new Independent Living Tenants. However, this was not entirely inclusive and was planned to be addressed as part of the action plan. They would like to target all tenants as well as tenants from other housing providers.
- They had a small team of Enabling Officers who worked closely with Adult Social Care with tenants when required.

In response to Councillor Davies, the Service Deliver Manager explained that there were a few Independent Living Schemes that had expressed an interest to remove the communal area in order to reduce service cost however there was a larger piece of work to be completed to consult on other factors before that decision could be made.

In response to Councillor Schoemaker it was:

- Agreed to provide the percentage of Independent Living residents who were originally Council Tenants outside of the meeting.
- It was confirmed that approximately 10% of tenants that had been referred through Adult Social Care were not receiving the support they needed. This led to many multiagency meetings and the Enabling Officers often picking up a more supportive role.
- It was hoped that going forward an assessment would be completed after the initial viewing of accommodation to ensure that the correct support was in place in order to sustain a tenancy.

Councillor Luff questioned the response rate from the survey and its accessibility. The Service Delivery Manager confirmed it had a very low response rate and they would be looking into other options for the survey in the future.

Councillor Green questioned the benchmarking figures on page 74 of the reports pack and whether they should be more aligned. The Strategic Head of Housing confirmed that the benchmarking data was comparable with other authorities with similar housing stock.

The Chair suggested the following friendly amendment:

c) Delegate to the Strategic Head of Housing to make minor amendments to the action plan in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair.

Councillors agreed to the friendly amendment.

Councillor Luff proposed and Councillor Fryer seconded.

Councillor Davies offered his assistance as a County Councillor to support Officers with any communication with Adult Social Care.

The Chair and Councillor Fryer commended the Officers for the report.

After being put to a vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED To:

- Adopt the Independent Living Strategy 2023-2027 and Action Plan.**
- Agree a review date of 2 years from adoption of the strategy.**
- Delegate to the Strategic Head of Housing to make minor amendments to the action plan in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair**

HC.008 Housing Revenue Account Outturn 2022/23

The Principal Accountant introduced the report and highlighted the following areas:

Housing Revenue Account

Underspend of £330k which was transferred reserves, earmarked to support the damp and mould strategy, compliance, admin support and training.

HRA Capital Programme

Underspend or Slippage of £4,695k which was outlined in table 5 on page 166 of the reports pack.

Councillor Davies asked whether the deadline (30 June 2023) listed on page 168 under the decarbonisation Project would be met. The Head of Assets & Investment (Council Housing) confirmed that they were on target for the grant funding to be spent by 30 June 2023 and the match funding from Stroud District Council had until the end of September to be used.

Councillor Green queried the overspend on Repairs and Maintenance and whether the overspend would have been close to £1m had the council been fully staffed. The Principal Accountant explained that, had the council been fully staffed then they would not have required the same number of contractors and therefore savings would have been made elsewhere.

In response to Councillor Green, the Principal Accountant confirmed that he would look into the figures of acquisitions from previous years outside the meeting.

The Chair, in response to Councillor Green, reminded the Committee that opportunities for the community land trust budget should be sought from the community with the assistance of the Council.

Councillor Schoemaker proposed, and Councillor Fryer seconded.

Councillor Davies debated whether the Council was ambitious enough with its acquisitions.

The Chair commended the report.

After being put to a vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED To note the Housing Revenue Account revenue and capital outturn position for 2022/23.

HC.009 District Heating Service Charges

The Principal Accountant introduced the report and explained that there were 5 Independent Living Schemes which utilised the district heating systems. These were listed on page 175 of the reports pack. He further explained that this report detailed the decision to reduce the service charges for tenants in these schemes for the following reasons:

- The Government announced that the Energy Price Guarantee would be set at £2,500 until June 2023, rather than the £3,000 that was expected.
- On 25 May 2023 Ofgem, the energy regulator, announced that the energy price cap for the period 1 July to 30 September 2023 would equate to a typical annual bill of £2,074. This was an indicator that gas prices would be reduced.
- Those announcements were used to predict the costs for the coming period and therefore a reduction was recommended.
- It was not possible to determine if the gas usage was lower (or higher) than the estimates however it would be monitored throughout the year.

Ms Adams, Tenant Representative, commended the breakdown of the cost and asked if the information was available for tenants to see. The Service Delivery Manager explained that a letter would be sent out imminently to the affected tenants however it could not predetermine the decision of the Committee.

In response to Councillor Luff, it was confirmed that the amount the tenants were being charged was roughly equivalent to what a typical customer would pay for their gas bills, this had been worked out by the finance team using the floorspace area.

Councillor Schoemaker proposed, and Councillor Fryer seconded.

Councillor Davies commended the report for the good news and thanked the Officers for acting rapidly.

Ms Adams, Tenant Representative, echoed Councillor Davies comments and thanked the Officers for their support with understanding how the charges were applied.

After being put to a vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED To reduce service charges for district heating systems by 21% from 7 August 2023, from an average of £23.41 per week to £18.49 per week.

HC.010 Damp & Mould Self-Assessment

The Strategic Head of Housing introduced the report and explained that the report was to complete a damp and mould self-assessment for our own social housing stock. Damp and mould wasn't a new issue but there was an increased focus following the tragic death of a child in Rochdale in 2020. The Social Housing Ombudsman had released a report which required all social housing providers to complete a self-assessment against their 26 Point Plan. Stroud District Council had seen an increase of damp and mould reports since November 2022 when the coroner's report of the child's death was released, and the cause of death confirmed. The self-assessment was one of the precautions that the council had introduced to ensure the approach was fit for purpose and that it safeguarded the wellbeing of residents. The Strategic Head of Housing explained that the different steps taken would feed into a new policy for damp and mould which would be brought back to Committee later this year.

In response to Councillor Green, the Strategic Head of Housing highlighted that the initial working group had been Officer focused, following this he stated that he was happy for Members to be involved and would welcome any nominations. Councillor Green offered her support.

Ms Adams, one of the Tenant Representatives, stated that the Strategic Head of Housing had taken the time to speak to the Tenant Representatives and had listened to their views. It was felt that the onus had previously been placed on the tenants and it was refreshing to be included in the production of the new strategy.

In response to Councillor Patrick, the Strategic Head of Housing stated that damp and mould was one of several types of repairs. Officers would utilise a triage approach to identify urgent reports with immediate risk to health and anything lower priority would be scheduled in at an appropriate time. The working group had been looking at the different types of properties owned by Stroud District Council and identified which properties hadn't had a repair in the last 2 years to enable staff to visit those properties to identify any issues.

Councillor Davies received the following answers in response to their questions:

- The original damp and mould policy was signed off by the housing committee in 2017.

- There were further changes to regulations coming, not just damp and mould, and there was a proactive plan to ensure homes were safe and habitable.
- The action plan had been worked on for several months and any changes that could've been implemented had been. This included training for operatives and new and enhanced systems to record damp and mould.

Councillor Davies further questioned whether the Strategic Head of Housing was confident that staff could report urgent cases of damp and mould to him. The Strategic Head of Housing confirmed that staff had attended training on how to identify signs of mould and had already approached him regarding a few cases.

Following Councillor Green's question regarding an individual case, the Strategic Head of Housing stated that he would be happy to look into this case outside of the meeting. Councillor Green asked for confirmation that once a recommendation was made to carry out specific works, it would be prioritised. The Strategic Head of Housing confirmed that if an Officer had identified work to be carried out due to a tenant's health and wellbeing it would be prioritised.

The Strategic Director of Communities stated that the triage system that had been brought into place was robust and consistent. The data analysis system would assist with getting ahead of damp and mould issues and other repairs before they became a serious problem.

In response to Councillor Green, the Strategic Head of Housing confirmed that the new policy would be presented later in the year, and this would include regular review points.

Proposed by Councillor Fryer and seconded by Councillor Schoemaker.

The Head of Assets and Investment confirmed that as part of the retrofit assessment the entire property including the ventilation was assessed. Councillor Davies suggested increasing the priority of the worst offending properties for damp and mould on the retrofitting programme in order to combine the two programmes.

Councillor Luff stated that he believed retrofitting would resolve some of the damp and mould issues. Gas cookers created moisture which could be adding to the issue.

Councillor Schoemaker proposed an amendment to include '**which is an essential and urgent part of the councils work and duties.**' to the end of the resolution.

Councillor Green seconded.

Councillors agreed to the amendment.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED To note the content of the self-assessment which is an essential and urgent part of the councils work and duties.

HC.011 Performance Monitors

Councillors Lindsey Green, Stephen Davies and Trina Davis were appointed as performance monitors.

HC.012 **Tenant Representatives**

Mr Ritcher, Tenant Representative, echoed the earlier comments from Ms Adams that they had met with the Strategic Head of Housing regarding the Damp and Mould Strategy. He further informed the Committee that they were booked to attend a course with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service TPAS in mid-July and would be reporting back on this at the next committee.

HC.013 **Progress update on Key action plans (Cleaner Estates & Service Standards and tenant engagement)**

A report was circulated prior to the Committee as part of the reports pack.

The following responses were given:

- The Officers were planning to put a report together which detailed all the achievements over the previous years as a result of the strategy.
- There wouldn't be a huge loss to residents from the Services that were recommended to be removed from the strategy as due to capacity issues they were currently not offered. The garden waste collections had been addressed by the Community Services Team, this was no longer an issue.
- They would be working to address alternative bike storage options.

HC.014 **Performance Monitoring**

A report was circulated prior to the Committee as part of the reports pack there were no comments.

HC.015 **Draft Work Programme**

There were no questions or comments on the Work Programme.

The meeting closed at 9.14 pm.

Chair