



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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HOUSING COMMITTEE

07 December 2021

7.00 - 9.07 pm

Council Chamber

Minutes

Membership

Councillor Mattie Ross (Chair)

Councillor Paula Baker
Councillor Laurie Davies
Councillor Colin Fryer
Councillor Katrina Davis
Councillor Steve Hynd

*= Absent

Councillor Christopher Jockel (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Nicholas Housden
Councillor Jenny Miles
Councillor Lucas Schoemaker
* Councillor Lindsey Green *
* Councillor Loraine Patrick *

Officers in Attendance

Accountancy Manager
Principal Accountant
Housing Manager

Strategic Director of Communities
Head of Contract Services
Democratic Services & Elections Officer

Tenant Representatives

Mike Richter

HC.042 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Green, Hynd, Davis, Patrick and from the Tenant Representative Becky Adams.

HC.043 Declaration of Interests

There were none.

HC.044 Minutes

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2021 were approved.

HC.045 **Public Question Time**

There were none.

HC.046 **Housing Committee Budget Estimates – Revised 2021/22 and Original 2022/23 and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 – 2025/26**

The Accountancy Manager presented the above report and highlighted the main points which included:

The General Fund

- Table 1 on page 17 of the document pack set out the summary of the proposed budget changes.
- Table 2 on page 18 showed a breakdown of the proposed budget adjustments which totalled £94k.

The General Fund Capital

- The £500k budget that had been set aside for temporary accommodation was to be removed from the Capital Programme due to no longer being required.
- The Green Homes Local Authority Delivery Scheme (LADS) and Home Upgrade Grants for Sustainable Warmth budgets were to be increased in line with external funding.

HRA

- Dwelling rents and garage rents were to increase by 4.1% in line with both the budget strategy and the regulator of social housing.
- Table 6 on page 25 of the document pack showed the proposed changes. The £1.2 million of changes would cause the closing balances of the HRA reserves to be lower than the recommended minimum levels. The majority of those changes were short term and wouldn't severely impact the longer term.
- Graph 1 on page 26 showed the longer term forecast within which the balance of the HRA would drop well below the recommended minimum levels. The Accountancy Manager explained there would be intervention before it got to that level and these figures helped identify what changes needed to be put in place in order to bring the financial position back into a sustainable position.

HRA Capital Programme

- The retrofit works, recommended by Housing Committee on the 14 September, had now been included in the figures for Major Works.
- The Major works, New homes and Regeneration Programme and the Independent Living Modernisation Programme had all had their capital schemes re-profiled.
- The New homes and Regeneration Programme had seen a spend increase of £39k which was proposed to be covered from the 2021/22 contingency fund.
- £50k had been assigned to the May Lane site in Dursley to be appropriated from the General Fund to the HRA subject to a market valuation.
- The Independent Living Modernisation Programme had the same budget however, it was proposed for 3 schemes to be completed in 2022/23.

Councillor Fryer raised concerns regarding inflation and whether that would result in a significant drop in income. The Accountancy Manager confirmed there was always an uncertainty with inflation and explained to the Committee that should inflation rise above the proposed rental increases, it would add further pressure onto the HRA.

In response to questions the Accountancy Manager gave the following answers:

- A number of SDC properties had been identified for temporary accommodation use for families. This included 3 SDC properties and an additional 7 tenants on a short term licence, who could potentially take over tenancy of the properties they currently resided in.
- There were varied levels of risk. They used a broad level of risk to identify the budget strategy over the longer term.
- Service charges could be altered if the tenant was provided with 28 days' notice. This was not the usual process but could be considered by the Housing Committee if they felt it necessary.
- The costs surrounding the former Ship Inn site were included within the budget forecast and consisted of £1.83m.

Councillor Schoemaker proposed and Councillor Fryer seconded.

Councillor Housden stated that if the former ship inn site was removed from the HRA, there would be a net gain of £1.83m. The Councillors debated this topic at length.

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

- RECOMMEND TO STRATEGY & RESOURCES AND COUNCIL** That:
- a) The revised General Fund Housing revenue budget for 2021/22 and original budget 2022/23 are approved; and
 - b) The Fees and Charges listed in Appendix A are approved; and
 - c) The revised HRA revenue budget for 2021/22 and original budget 2022/23 are approved; and
 - d) The movement to and from HRA balances and capital reserves as detailed in Appendix C and section 11 are approved; and
 - e) That from 1 April 2022:
 - i. Social rents and affordable rents are increased by 4.1% (CPI +1%), in line with national rent guidance
 - ii. Garage rents are increased by 4.1%
 - iii. Landlord service charges are increased by 4.1%
 - f) That the General Fund Housing Capital Programme, as detailed in Section 4, be included in the Council's Capital Programme; and
 - g) That the HRA Capital Programme for 2021/22 to 2025/26, as detailed in Appendix D, be included in the Council's Capital Programme; and
 - h) To delegate authority to the Strategic Director of Resources to appropriate land and buildings at 11/11A May Lane (as shown on the plan at Appendix E) into the HRA and the New Build Programme from the General Fund, once a market valuation has been received; and
 - i) To delegate authority to the Head of Property Services to continue work on progressing this site with land to the rear of Parsonage Street, Dursley, including opening negotiations to acquire land from 3rd party private owners.

HC.047 **Budget Monitoring Report 2021/22 Quarter 2**

The Principal Accountant introduced the report and gave an overview of each section which included:

General Fund Revenue Budget Position

He drew the Committees attention to table 1 on page 46 of the document pack and confirmed that there was a projected overspend of £10k.

General Fund Capital Programme

The Principal Accountant highlighted a few key points regarding table 2 on page 47 of the document pack, these included:

- There was a small error with the totals. The Revised Budget total should have read '2,531' which would in turn alter the Outturn Variance total to be '(181)'. This was due to a last minute amendment not pulling through to the totals.
- The large variance for the Green Homes LADS project due to previous allocations of funding being brought forward into the current year.
- The temporary accommodation budget of £500k had been removed from the programme due to the reasons explained earlier by the Accountancy Manager.

He also drew attention to Table 3 on page 48 which showed the HRA revenue summary and highlighted the key variances which included:

- Total Income showed a loss of £336k, which was mostly due to a higher number of void properties than expected.
- Supervision and Management showed a £372k underspend, this was due to a number of posts being vacant, and £107k of that was set aside for IT software which has been delayed into later on in the year.
- Repairs and Maintenance had an £480k overspend again due to the pressures of voids. This also included £167k overspend in Property Care for specialist roles e.g. roofing and drainage.

Finally, he drew the Committees attention to Table 5 on page 51 of the document pack which showed the current breakdown of the Capital Programme and highlighted the key projects which included:

- Major works
- Other Capital Works such as the new Housing IT system
- New Build and Regeneration
- Independent Living Housing Modernisation
- Acquisitions.

Councillor Baker questioned what the Housing IT system would be used for and when it was likely to be implemented. It was confirmed that they were due to go out to tender that month for the IT system and it would be used for tenancy management, Repairs and Maintenance and Property Care Services. The system would likely not be ready for implementation for the next 9 months.

After a question raised by Councillor Housden, the Accountancy Manager agreed to get back to him with the figures surrounding the loss of income from empty dwellings and how many of those had been empty for over 4 weeks.

In response to questions, the Strategic Director of Communities confirmed the extra £250k was set aside for additional resources for void properties. Although they were more efficient with this process this year than in previous years, there was still a huge backlog that needed to be worked through from the Covid lockdown period.

Councillor Baker proposed and Councillor Davies seconded.

Councillor Housden debated whether performance had improved due to the lack of the figures requested.

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

RESOLVED To note the outturn forecast for the General Fund and HRA revenue budgets and the Capital Programmes for this Committee

HC.048 Council Plan and Performance Indicators relevant to this Committee

The Strategic Director of Communities introduced the report and explained that the report related to key priorities of the New Council Plan which was approved by Council in October 2021. He further explained that although they couldn't alter the key priorities as these had already been approved, they needed to look at how they would measure the progress of the Council against those priorities.

The Strategic Director of Communities informed the Committee that there had been a session organised to explain how they would be monitored and further training would be provided to the Performance Monitors of the Committee.

In response to Councillors the Strategic Director of Communities agreed to the following:

- To amend CW2.3, first bullet point to include homelessness relief
- To report back on investment and the County wide bid for the accommodations of chaotic single people as a report of progress rather than them being made into specific targets.
- Item CW2.4, could be amended in the future to have a specific target rather than just 'increase'.

Councillor Housden received the following answers in response to questions:

- There was a training session due to take place the following week regarding HomeseekerPlus and how it worked.
- Homelessness prevention was measured from the intervention of the Council between the time that a person informed the government that they would become homeless and when they were actually classed as homeless (requiring temporary accommodation).

In response to Councillor Davies, the Housing Manager confirmed in item CW2.4 on page 60 of the document pack, the first bullet point was missing 'tenant events' at the end of the sentence.

The Strategic Director of Communities drew the Committees attention to EC3.1 on page 56. He suggested to add in the figures of how many tonnes of carbon had been saved as requested by a Councillor at the initial briefings.

Councillor Jockel raised a point whether there should be a metric added to compare the numbers of affordable housing against the market demand.

Councillor Davies raised concerns with the ambitious target for homelessness prevention in CW2.3 due to the current housing crisis adding pressure and questioned whether there

had been any extra resources set aside to achieve this. The Strategic Director of Communities explained that this topic would be discussed at length in the HomeseekerPlus briefing which was due to take place on the 15 December. He further explained that they had recently reviewed the budgets and tried to allocate as much resource as they could within the limited budget.

Councillor Baker questioned whether the HomeseekerPlus figures could be reported on and how many people were housed and in what type of accommodation to get a better view of what demand was being met. The strategic Director of Resources confirmed this could be reported on and he would take it away and discuss with the Chair on the best way to report back with those figures.

Councillor Housden requested a breakdown on the Towns/Parishes in which the new builds were proposed. The Strategic Director of Communities agreed the information could be provided however may not be necessary to include as part of the KPI targets.

Councillor Jockel proposed and Councillor Schoemaker seconded.

The Councillors debated that these were flexible indicators that could be amended as time went by.

Councillor Housden debated the inclusion of the locations for the proposed new builds within the KPI's.

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

RESOLVED To **AGREE** on the performance indicators that are relevant to this committee subject to the amendments included in the minutes above.

And

RECOMMEND That these amended performance indicators are incorporated in the Council Plan and updated and monitored according to the Council's Performance Management Framework.
TO
STRATEGY
AND
RESOURCES
COMMITTEE

HC.049 **Progress update on Key action plans (Cleaner Estates & Service Standards)**

The Housing Manager circulated a written update to Members prior to the meeting.

In response to questions raised the Housing Manager gave the following answers:

- Tenants of Chapel Street had raised an interest in spending the day investing in the local area carrying out activities such as planting or tidying.
- 11 Cameras had been arranged for Chapel Street, this had been arranged with the Police in order to gain best knowledge of where to put the cameras.
- Discussions were taking place with tenants in Nouncells cross to gain feedback from the cleaning, there were also plans in place to close off the unused nooks and crannies where rubbish gathered.

- The trial of using the skip to prevent fly tipping had been very successful on independent living sites and the pilot site. It was being monitored and it continued to be successful would be rolled out in wider HRA areas.

RESOLVED To note the report

HC.050 Member / Officer Reports

a) Tenant Representatives (Verbal Update)

The Tenant Representative gave a short update on recent work that he had been involved with.

b) Retrofit/Carbon Reduction Task and Finish Group Update

Councillor Jockel as the lead member of the task and finish group gave an update on the work they had completed which included:

- Shifted the main focus to tenants having recognised the success was about engaging with people so they could enjoy the benefits.
- Discussed the factors influencing installed performance and things SDC would not be able to control and how they could encourage tenant behaviour to use the technology to its maximum efficiency.
- They had developed a dash board to keep up with the progress of the work going forward.

c) Tenant Engagement and Empowerment Task and Finish Group Update

Councillor Fryer as the lead member of the task and finish group gave an update on the work they had completed which included:

- Meeting to review communication channels for SDC was postponed. They would be looking to gain an understanding of the complaints raised by tenants and how they were investigated.
- Out of the pool of new tenants who expressed an interest in working with SDC this is what they have expressed an interest to support with:
 - 8 Tenants interested in Repair and Inspections.
 - 4 new Neighbourhood Ambassadors Community Champions.
 - 7 Green Champions.
 - 12 tenants interested in focus group activities.
- At a recent focus group meeting 2 tenants asked to join the task and finish group to be involved with the new tenant charter.

Task and finish group were looking to review the ARK report.

d) Housing Repairs and Voids Task and Finish Group Update

Councillor Baker as the lead member of the task and finish group gave an update on the work they had completed and explained up to this point, they had been solely focusing on Voids. The updated included:

- The Empty Homes Team had been working hard and as of yesterday had progressed from 120 voids to 91.

- The task and finish group identified customers didn't engage in upgrades which then extended the amount of work needed while the property was in void status. Work was underway to support customers to receive the upgrades when they were required.
- It was identified that the Repairs and Voids team were not notified when notice was received, this was delaying the repairs.

She informed the committee of the following recommendations suggested by the group:

- To increase home checks to prevent further neglect and damage of properties were made.
- For pre-void inspections to be undertaken with a surveyor and a further NMO follow up.
- A small incentive implemented to leave the property in a good condition and consequences for leaving rubbish and damage.
- A key safe for the Repairs and Voids team to enable efficient transition and earlier commencement of work.
- Better communication between Repairs and Lettings, let the team know when a property is due to come back into use 4-6 weeks prior so they can prepare and advertise earlier.
- A cross review of the waste management to increase recycling and manage repairs waste more efficiently.
- The letting process could be completed on days other than Monday, dependant on the new IT system.

HC.051 Work Programme

The Chair informed the Committee that the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) Policy had been added to February meeting.

RESOLVED To note the above update to the Work Programme.

HC.052 Members' Questions

Member questions were submitted. They were asked by Councillor Housden. (Refer to the [Council's recording](#) and [Agenda Item 11](#)).

The Chair reminded Members of the upcoming HomeseekerPlus briefing.

The Strategic Director of Communities gave some assurance on the OOH plans this year and explained that an information sheet with OOH Officer contact details would be circulated prior to the shutdown.

The Chair ended the meeting by informing the Committee that the food bank had been struggling due to a 40% increase in referrals across the SDC district in Nov. This included a 70% increase in Stroud wards and reminded Members that people were struggling with the high prices and credit cuts.

The meeting closed at 9.07 pm

Chair