

MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

3 DECEMBER 2019

Councillors: Adeleke (Vice-Chairman)
Mrs Bassadone
England
Imarni (Chairman)
Johnson
Hollinghurst
Barry

Officers:

Natasha Beresford	Group Manager - Strategic Housing
Mark Gaynor	Corporate Director - Housing & Regeneration
Fiona Jump	Group Manager - Financial Services
Katie Mogan	Corporate and Democratic Support Lead Officer
Alan Mortimer	Group Manager - Property and Place
Matt Rawdon	Group Manager - People
Linda Roberts	Assistant Director - Performance, People and Innovation
Layna Warden	Group Manager - Tenants and Leaseholders

Also Attendance: Banks
Griffiths

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

88 **MINUTES**

Following a Joint meeting of the OSC's where a presentation on the Corporate Plan and the budget was given, the Housing & Community OSC meeting began at 9.00pm.

The minutes from the meeting held on 6 November 2019 were agreed by the members present and signed by the Chair.

89 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received by Councillor Mahmood, Pringle, Arslan, Durrant, Oguchi and Freedman.

90 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

91 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

92 **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

None

93 **BUDGET PREPARATIONS 2020/21**

L Roberts gave a presentation on her service area.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked what a 3G sports pitch was.

M Rawdon said it was made from plastic and can be played on in all weathers. There a 4G option but this is still in its infancy.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked about the environmental impact of these pitches.

L Roberts said this was part of the tender process. The pitch has drainage in.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked if these pitches would require less maintenance.

L Roberts said yes they would. The key is getting the surface underneath prepared correctly to allow water to drain through.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked if these pitches would give players burns if they fell over.

M Rawdon said there were small rubber balls on the surface which stops any friction burns. The previous generation was sand based. The 3G pitches do not cause burns and are not slippy.

Councillor England asked about the Armed Forces Day and what the £20k would pay for.

M Rawdon said it was principally entertainment costs and the hire of equipment such as toilets, security and marshalling.

Councillor England asked if this is normally taken from reserves but that we may receive a Ministry of Defence grant.

M Rawdon said a grant as applied in previous years but not the full amount needed and it has been up to £5k before. This offsets what we borrow from reserves.

Councillor England asked if the grant funding we receive is predictable.

L Roberts said it varies.

M Gaynor said it depends on whether you are talking about generally or a specific service area. James Deane would be able to give a full answer across the whole council.

Councillor Adeleke asked if we knew how other councils fund their celebrations.

M Rawdon said it is celebrated across the whole country. He said he was unsure how they are funded but could certainly ask. Some may charge people to attend which we have avoided in the past. Others may charge for refreshments and is something we could consider moving forward.

Councillor Imarni said she didn't think charging people to attend would work. We could look at sponsorship from local businesses.

Councillor Adeleke mentioned lottery funding.

M Rawdon said they would have a look to see what was available.

M Gaynor gave a presentation on his service area.

Councillor Hollinghurst said he was surprised at the low figure of £50k to carry out a one off survey on trees.

M Gaynor said this survey was only for trees on HRA land which is a fraction of the total number of trees in the borough.

A Mortimer expanded and said the survey was for trees on HRA land within communal and tenant properties. There has been a case elsewhere in the country where a branch from a tree has fallen on someone and were awarded a six figure sum in compensation. The survey will help us identify what has been done and what is still to be done. This may require further reassessment and a rolling programme but need to know what we have got first. The survey will be carried out by Clean, Safe and Green so the money will be transferred from the HRA to the General Fund.

Councillor Griffiths said the trees officer in consultation with CSG have carried out a rolling programme to identify trees.

Councillor Adeleke asked how to identify who owns a tree.

M Gaynor said the land owner the tree is on is responsible.

Councillor Adeleke asked about insurance claims.

F Jump says the council receives a wide range of insurance claims. In recent years, the number of claims have been reducing so it is sensible at this point to reduce the budget.

Councillor Adeleke asked if the council was insured to pay these claims.

F Jump said the council has insurance cover but there is a budget for this. Some claims are met from internal budget provisions, others are covered with insurance by an external provider. It is a two level system.

Councillor Adeleke referred to the new posts being created. He asked how many were being created and at what cost?

N Beresford said within Strategic Housing there are three additional posts proposed. One lead officer within Private Sector Housing and two posts in the Homeless Prevention Team.

L Warden said within Tenants and Leaseholders there are three posts proposed. One apprentice post, a housing officer to meet the five year visits target and a lead officer for Supported Housing.

A Mortimer said that within Property and Place, there will be a restructure with two existing vacant posts removed. Five new posts will be created to promote career growth and balance the team. This will create more operational posts and remove management tiers.

Councillor England referred to the garages income and whether income will reach £3.5 million as before.

M Gaynor said that was the longer term aim. The shortfall has been identified and work is ongoing to modernise the system and make it easier for residents to look online and find vacant garages. He said that the team believe they can raise income substantially and that OSC would be kept informed of the progress.

Councillor England queried the £35k saved which is no longer needed to support the bedroom tax. He asked if this was balanced out from the increase in arrears from Universal Credit.

L Warden said this was addressed somewhere else and £100k has been set aside to help incentivise people to move into smaller homes. The priority has moved towards getting people into sheltered housing instead of smaller homes. Universal credit has increased the debt provision. Worked out that 62% of rent arrears under Universal Credit are less than £900.

Councillor England asked what has been done after the council declared a climate emergency or if the council are waiting for the dedicated officer to start.

M Gaynor said he would be able to provide more detail in due course. All new builds are built well above the required energy standards and there are several initiatives through a combination of good insulation and a heating source that uses renewable energy. Realistically, the country should focus first on meeting the challenge of combatting climate change through better energy efficient private homes (owned and rented) where energy efficiency levels are lower than in social housing. We can make more impact in the future through the development of the Local Plan and new homes.

L Warden said after the last OSC she had circulated a summary of the steps that had been taken to address climate change. She said she could recirculate this to the committee.

Councillor Johnson asked if the condition survey had been completed.

A Mortimer said that the team are reviewing the whole customer experience and the stock survey is ongoing. A telephone survey will be carried out on residents who had expressed an interest in renting a garage. We have generated a further interest of 200 lets.

Councillor Johnson asked about the reduction in Herts County Council flexicare funding and asked if this would have an effect on sheltered housing.

L Warden said they were initially expecting a reduction of £42k and a few changes have been made to counteract a reduction in funding. We have been talking with HCC and if we want to deliver more flexicare, we need additional capital funding to provide additional funding. We are also working with other local authorities across Herts to try and highlight that grant funding is crucial for the delivery. Sheltered Housing is provided through rates.

Councillor Bassadone asked what percentage of sheltered housing units are vacant.

N Beresford said this information had been sent round. There is a graduate working in the team at the moment to undertake a full review of housing stock.

Councillor Bassadone asked if two bed properties were still the most desirable.

N Beresford said yes. There are 6,500 people on the register and 1,900 of these required a two bed house and a similar number requiring a one bed.

Councillor England referred to the 400 new homes target over the next four years and asked if officers thought this was a bit low.

M Gaynor said the limitations on what we could do are financial. We could borrow more money but this will need to be paid back. We are working in a way which balances the need to maintain stock and deliver new builds. If we have the opportunity to get social grant funding from Homes England then we could look to increase this target.

N Beresford added to this and said it was important to bear in mind the current new build programme. There is an allocation of 44 new units with Hightown Housing that is due to complete this month. In addition, it is important to acknowledge further work undertaken on the housing allocations policy. There is a high number on the housing register and the policy is going to be reviewed in the new year. Of the 6,000 people on the register, just 900 are exercising their right to express a housing need.

The Meeting ended at 9.50 pm