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MINUTES

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

1 DECEMBER 2020

Present:

Members:

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

Councillors: Griffiths

Officers:	Natasha Beresford	Group Manager - Strategic Housing
	Mark Gaynor	Corporate Director - Housing & Regeneration
	Jason Grace	Group Manager - Property and Place
	Fiona Jump	Group Manager - Financial Services
	Matt Rawdon	Group Manager - People
	Linda Roberts	Assistant Director - Performance, People and Innovation
	Layna Warden	Group Manager - Tenants and Leaseholders
	Fiona Williamson	Assistant Director – Housing
	Kayley Johnston	Corporate and Democratic Support Officer (minutes)
	Samantha Raggatt	Garages Programme Lead

The meeting began at 6.30 pm

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MINUTES

The Minutes from 4 November were agreed by the Committee. The Chair advised that there were some amendments to the minutes from 7 October 2020, these will be agreed at the next meeting.

Cllr Imarni informed the committee that the action log had been updated since being published, and was available to view as an appendix.

83 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pringle.
Councillor Mahmood was attending Finance & Resources OSC as part of Joint Budget.

84 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

85 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

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

None

87 **BUDGET PREPARATIONS 2021/22**

J Deane gave an in-depth presentation to provide Members with an overview of the draft budget proposal for 2021/2022 and provide the opportunity for committees to scrutinise and provide feedback to Cabinet.

F Jump gave a brief introduction to Members asking for feedback on the budget preparations for next year. She was happy to take questions on the report.

Cllr England asked for the officers to prepare a report for the next Committee on the borrowing options to build council housing, given what we have just heard about the Public Works Loan Board from James Deane?

Cllr England will email the Chair and officers following the meeting with details but did not want to miss the opportunity expressed this evening.”

Action: Cllr England

F Jump said that they plan to refresh this next year and will happily bring it to the committee after.

Action: F Jump

Cllr Freedman enquired as to the top line 2021 figures; in particular the lack of significant difference with the current year budgets. He stated an expectation to see an increase in many areas relating to slippage of works into the future year due to pandemic and other delays.

F Williamson explained that there had been some slippage, due to some elements of work not being delivered moving from this year to next. The total amount of slippage has not been allocated into next year's budget, as this had been profiled over the next few years to smooth the business plan and allow for investment in areas in preparation for the Building Safety Bill.

Cllr Freedman said that he has over simplified it and that he needed to look at the bigger picture over three years, then he should see a difference.

Cllr Johnson, said seeing the comprehensive spending last week, £254 million to support rough sleepers that was at risk of homelessness will be going to authorities. He asked, Do we have any idea what this money could be used for or what will the Borough be receiving?

N Beresford said that they met with MHCLG last week in relation to the grant funding. Through the 'everyone in ask' the COVID response was to bring all rough sleepers in off the streets. The council were allocated 7.5 million pounds; to date we have spent 80 thousand pounds.

We do not have an indication of what we will receive for flexible homeless support grant or homeless support grant but we hope it will be reflective of what we have previously received.

They usually receive an update around October/November but the update they have had is it is currently with treasury. They hope to receive an update soon.

N Beresford said that 18 thousand pound has been allocated to them from County to enable them to support households through the COVID response. However, she suspects that the funding they do receive will not cover their costs.

Cllr Johnson thanked N Beresford for the comprehensive response.

Cllr England asked if he was right in thinking that, there were some monies to come from central government and asked if it will enable them not to lose the homelessness officer.

N Beresford said that they need to have a conversation with finance as the service is under increasing pressure. Proposals have been submitted for growth items for several posts to alleviate grant funding. The preferences is to continue funding those posts by grant funding allocation, however they would like to have a discussion on freeing up grants to enable them to deliver homelessness prevention initiatives and deal with the increased demand.

This will be discussed further with Members at the Member Development briefing on Thursday.

There has been an increase in figures, which are not likely to decrease any time soon as the pressures have not yet hit, they expect an increase in the New Year after the latest furlough scheme/redundancies. If we cannot access growth funding for the reserves for those posts then we will have to provide these posts via the grant, which means there is less grant for them to provide prevention initiative for the homelessness.

Cllr England referred back to Climate Change, he noticed that there is provision change for the climate officer for 3 years, is there a misunderstanding, as the problem will last more than 3 years.

M Gaynor said that strictly speaking, it is not the purpose of this OSC as such, the climate change officer is permanent and it is the inclusion officer, which is fix term.

Cllr England asked if the papers could be checked and clarified.

Action: M Gaynor/F Jump

Cllr Adeleke referred to page 31, appendix G, Budget relocation of 210k to technical support. He asked what was our justification of taking it out of the budget and transferring it as with COVID we have reduced the maintenance scheduled why so much money? Can someone explain the role of technical support and place?

F Jump said she believes it reflects the work that is required for future years.

F Williamson said that this relates to the increased requirements that will need to be resourced. There are two posts, the buildings safety manager, to address the requirements of the Building safety bill and the pre void surveyor, in order to stream line the voids process and reduce the key to key time and to ensure that they are picking up all compliance areas whilst undertaking the voids work.

She added, there will be a new officer brought in to undertake pre void assessments prior to the works being done by the contractor. They have also managed to get some efficiency gains from Osborne in terms of their overall site management costs, because of the reduced work volumes this year.

It's more of a re-alignment of the services to re address the areas of pressure.

Cllr Adeleke said, what you are saying is repair and maintenance is firmly under control?

F Williamson said there are still some ongoing issues with repairs and voids due to the backlog that built up during the first lockdown and some of the restrictions. i.e. the rules of social distancing allowing less workers to occupy a property, do increase the time for works on site. There has been an increase from last month's figures in the number of non-urgent repairs completed in target and are projecting these will be back in target in November

88 GARAGE PROJECT UPDATE

L Roberts updated the committee on the garage programme update, the purpose of the report is to update members on the current garage asset position and the progress of the garage programme review and its objectives highlighting that the main risk for the Council

L Roberts was happy to take questions from members.

Cllr Mahmood referred to the survey for repairs works that come through, the main things he can think of is a door or the roof, assuming it is not asbestos. He wondered, where we rent to businesses and the local public, should we not be double charging businesses and half to the public to differentiate the two.

S Raggatt replied stating that they do charge two different rates, private pay VAT on top of the rental cost and a third pricing for charities, which is very low.

L Roberts said with the pricing going forward we want to look at how we want to develop the stock, so it's something they will consider. The most common repairs as part of the survey was roofs, walls, door and decoration so they have that level of detail now.

Cllr Mahmood said that as we are looking for housing do we have the ability to build on top of the garages.

F Williamson said that they strongly advise against that As aside from structural considerations when the development team design the new builds these are to higher codes for sustainability and therefore the preference where they have a developable site is to demolish and start again.

Cllr Mahmood said that we talk about garages, but they're used for storage so when we re brand them we need to look at a more descriptive name.

S Raggatt agreed with Cllr Mahmood and said that any input would greatly be received. They would like to do a survey to find out what they are currently using them for, this will help us market going forward.

Cllr England asked if we had the cart before the horse. If we are going to fix the garage letting system and make it professional then why don't we evaluate what we are going to do with the garages after we have done that, and we might find that the picture changes.

L Roberts asked for clarification, as she did not understand the question being asked.

Cllr England referred to point 12, if we are contemplating that shouldn't we do that before we evaluate what is lettable and what is not?

L Roberts said its more about the process, we know that we have some garages that are lettable as with the current system we have ones that come back and get re let. What we are talking about is a significant number of garages being able to be re let, or if you then want to do that it would be useful to improve the process. It then makes it easier in the future for tenants to get the garages, as this has proved difficult due to systems.

The point is the process around the garages.

S Raggatt said they will need go through a procurement process, so while this is ongoing we can do the work, and what we are doing to manage the process. When we look at the first years of repairs work, our surveys will show us what we are focusing on. We do need to start repair work while we are looking at how we are going to improve our lettings service and get the turnaround as soon as possible.

Cllr England sees common grounds here. He also referred to point 16 page 40/41 'the next phase of disposal is on its way' he asked, do we know what the percentage of affordable homes are for social rent?

F Williamson said that they are looking at six sites at the minute, which would be for social housing, which would be developed by ourselves. The ones that are sold to registered providers are at affordable rent, 80% of market rent. The exact percentage is unknown as the totality is unknown, F Williamson to speak to estates regarding percentage.

Action: F Williamson.

Cllr England said as an observation, could we look at parking problems. Could they be used as parking grounds?

L Roberts said absolutely, nothing would be ruled out.

S Raggatt said we would also be considering the verge-hardening programme, its only applicable where there is land available. It will not apply everywhere its land dependant.

Cllr Adeleke referred to the blue tick by council tenants in the presentation, he was wondering when locating council properties to tenants is there a way to advertise available garages to get more ticks by them.
His second point is that the review of the whole programme is a step in the right direction, which he supports. He said that there are some successful local authorities in the way they manage their stock, can we look into some of these to learn a lesson before we embark on a decision.

L Roberts said yes we are learning from other local authorities, it does vary due to the amount of stock, but we look to seek a best in practice approach. We have not done any marketing so certainly we make this point and advertise into these areas.

Cllr Hollinghurst referred to the market research, which he believed, should come first, a large number of different usages have been revealed. He asked how many are actually used for whatever purpose; he suspects very few are used for cars due to size. He said there are lots of 8/12 or 6 blocks which are usually used in such a way the land can't be used for anything else. He is not concerned about making people pay the true cost of their cars; he suggested reserved parking spaces being provided in private areas. People would be prepared to pay for a reserved space and it would be an income stream; he suggested even upgrading and offering extra security with CCTV or charging points. It should all begin after a detailed market research survey.

L Roberts said a survey is on the agenda so they get a better understanding, certainly this would be an option in some areas.

S Raggatt said that we need to construct the survey in the right friendly way so people feel comfortable saying what they use the garage for, as historically, the Terms & Conditions said they had to be for car storage.

The work programme was agreed.

The Meeting ended at 8.55 pm

Housing and Community OSC

Actions arising

Date of meeting	Action point	Responsible for action	Date action completed	Update on action point
4 Nov	<p><u>HC/077/20</u> Cllr Mahmood asked about the total income and where appreciation should be included. F Jump advised that appreciation is accounted for differently, not in the Housing Revenue Account and she would be happy to provide the information outside of this meeting.</p>	F Jump		
4 Nov	<p><u>HC/078/20</u> L Roberts advised that we need to be very careful of the information provided due to confidentiality. Cllr England will the request as he</p>	Cllr England		

	<p>does not think it contains personal information, it's Government information and just a case of amplifying it as it's already in the public domain. L Roberts confirmed it would be helpful if Cllr England could forward the information.</p>			
4 Nov	<p><u>HC/079/20</u> F Williamson advised she will circulate more detailed information on the Capital charges breakdown.</p>	F Williamson		
1 Dec	<p><u>HC/079/20</u> Cllr England asked for the officers to prepare a report for the next Committee on the borrowing options to build council housing, given what we have just heard about the</p>	Cllr England/F Jump to bring to next committee		

	Public Works Loan Board from James Deane? Cllr England will email the Chair and officers following the meeting with details but did not want to miss the opportunity expressed this evening.”			
1 Dec	HC/087/20 Cllr England referred back to Climate Change, he noticed that there is provision change for the climate officer for 3 years, is there a misunderstanding, as the problem will last more than 3 years.	Action: M Gaynor/F Jump		
1 Dec	HC/088/20 F Williamson said that they are looking at six sites at the minute, which would be for social housing,	F Williamson	10/12/2020	Email circulated

	<p>which would be developed by ourselves. The ones that are sold to registered providers are at affordable rent, 80% of market rent. The exact percentage is unknown as the totality is unknown, F Williamson to speak to estates regarding percentage.</p>			