

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE  
18 NOVEMBER 2015

Present: Councillor Kelly Edwards (Chair);  
Councillors Debs Absolom, Davies, Dennis, Gittings (for items 12 to 18), Lawrence (for items 11 to 18), Livingston, O'Connell, Robinson, Steele, Terry and Tickner.

Apologies: Councillors Grashoff and Josh Williams.

8. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of 1 July 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

9. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

- Community Safety Partnership - 8 July 2015.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received.

10. PETITION ON RATS IN THE ANSTEY ROAD, BAKER STREET AND HOWARD STREET AREA

Richard Rowlands, secretary of the Baker Street Area Neighbourhood Association, provided the Committee with an update regarding the situation on which a petition had been submitted to Policy Committee on 8 October 2015.

Councillor Terry, Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods, provided an updated response to the petition.

11. WORKING BETTER WITH YOU IN NEIGHBOURHOODS

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the progress of Neighbourhood Working since its implementation in March 2015.

The report stated that nine virtual area-based teams had been set up across Reading, responding to a range of neighbourhood issues including highways inspection, litter, graffiti, fly-tipping, grass cutting and maintenance of public spaces, crime and fear of crime, speeding, road safety and street drinking. The neighbourhood officers provided a contact point for all environmental issues in their patch as well as carrying out a number of statutory highway functions and environmental enforcement.

The report stated that working in conjunction with Tenant Participation, Adult Social Care and Children's Services, neighbourhood teams had delivered a range of projects that had involved local people in shaping and in some cases delivering services to address locally identified needs. Successful initiatives that involved local people in delivering services were being replicated, where possible, across the Borough through the neighbourhood teams and other networks. Examples of these initiatives were attached to the report at Appendix I.

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Abby Knowles, Katesgrove Community Association, Janet Ives, Neighbourhoods Initiatives Officer, and Nick Povall, Neighbourhoods Officer, gave a presentation on Katesgrove Community Association and the neighbourhood work that had been undertaken.

Resolved - That the progress that had been made in embedding the neighbourhood working approach, be noted.

## 12. FUTURE OF THE COUNCIL'S HOUSE BUILDING PROGRAMME

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which provided an updated position further to a review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan and outlined current proposals in respect of Council owned land previously allocated to the Local Authority New Build (LANB) programme, the proposed revised programme of new Council homes and spend of 1 for 1 replacement Right to Buy (RTB) receipts.

The report explained that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) dealt with council housing finance. The main income was housing rent, and all expenditure related to council housing (such as dealing with lettings; managing, maintaining and repairing the stock; collecting rent) was charged to this account. The Housing Revenue Account was 'ring-fenced' from other Council activity which was accounted for through the General Fund account.

The report stated that based on the current assumptions within the plan it had been ascertained that it was possible to continue with the planned programmes of management and maintenance for the existing RBC properties. However, the capacity to build or acquire new Council owned properties had significantly reduced, with the business plan only able to support a few developments. This equated to a total of 78 new units of Council owned accommodation, 60 as permanent stock and 18 to be used as temporary accommodation. The report set out the implications in respect of the HRA debt position and explained that the reduced programme would result in £16m of outstanding debt at Year 30 of the HRA Business Plan. However the outstanding debt of £16m represented only 29% of the £55.9m projected annual rental income at Year 30 and was considered sustainable.

The original Council house programme had identified five General Fund owned development sites in addition to Conwy Close, and 12 small HRA owned infill sites, suitable for housing development and intended to be allocated for new Council homes. The 12 HRA sites were now in the process of being reviewed. The opportunities available in connecting the unspent RTB receipts (reported below) with the land previously identified for LANB were also being considered. The report provided an update on the development at Conway Close.

The report explained that a percentage of the income from the sale of a property through Right to Buy was retained by the Local Authority to support the development of replacement social housing. The amount the Council was required to spend, with the associated target dates was set out in the report. It was envisaged that this available capacity would predominately support a new build programme of Council homes with some purchasing of properties from the open market (where timing issues meant funding could not be applied to new build units). Since nationally imposed

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funding changes had severely curtailed the Council's house building programme, the authority would have excess receipts which could not be applied to new build housing or acquisitions as there was no 'match funding' capacity within the HRA business plan. Currently all receipts due to be spent before June 2016 were accounted for. It was expected that a majority of the receipts that needed to be spent throughout late 2016 and 2017 would contribute towards the Conwy Close development. However, alternative options needed to be appraised in respect of remaining receipts. These could be passed to a Registered Provider working in Reading to support affordable housing development where viable, taking into account high and rising land values.

Resolved -

- (1) That the reduced LANB development programme, as detailed in the report at paragraph 4.2, and the implications in respect of HRA debt position, be noted;
- (2) That the planned approach to deliver new Council homes at Conwy Close, the position in relation to land previously identified for LANB and the approach related to Right to Buy '1 for 1' receipts be noted;
- (3) That a further report seeking specific spend approval in relation to the Conwy Close proposal be submitted to a future meeting once detailed plans and costs had been developed.

**13. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2015-2020 AND REDUCING THE USE OF BED AND BREAKFAST ACCOMMODATION**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which presented the draft Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020. The Homelessness Strategy established the Council's priorities in order to prevent homelessness and to ensure that appropriate accommodation and support was available for people who were or might become homeless. The following documents were attached to the report:

Appendix 1 - Draft Homelessness Strategy

Appendix 2 - Draft Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan

Appendix 3 - Draft Homeless Private Sector Offer Policy

Appendix 4 - Homeless Private Sector Offer Policy - information leaflet for applicants

Appendix 5 - Equality Impact Assessment: Private Sector Offer

The report stated that it was proposed that the draft Homelessness Strategy was published for an eight week public consultation period prior to the draft being finalised.

The report set out the background to the growth in the use of temporary accommodation, including Bed and Breakfast (B&B), which was creating a significant budget pressure for the Council. It set out action taken to date and the Council's proposed approach to managing and meeting demand for affordable housing in the future. The Council's approach to achieving this was comprehensive and included three key strands (prevention of homelessness, increasing the supply of temporary

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accommodation and increasing the supply of affordable permanent housing across sectors) which were detailed in the report.

The report explained that as part of a wider range of measures to manage growing demand, it was proposed that the Council implemented powers to fulfil the homelessness duty by provision of suitable and vetted private rented accommodation, which would allow a more flexible approach to meeting local housing demands. Access to suitable private rented sector (PRS) property would only be through the Rent Guarantee Scheme and the proposed wholly owned Council housing company. It was recommended that a detailed business case was developed to establish a housing company, to be wholly owned by the local authority, in order to increase the supply of quality rented accommodation in Reading. The company would be financed principally through Prudential Borrowing via the General Fund, to purchase properties in the open market and, where viable, develop new build housing.

The report explained that the draft Homeless Private Sector Offer Policy set out the policy and procedural arrangements for discharging statutory homeless duties into the private rented sector and included guidelines on determining the suitability of accommodation offered. An information leaflet for applicants had been produced.

Resolved -

- (1) That the draft Homelessness Strategy and Delivery Plan, and the approach to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation, be noted and approved;
- (2) That a final eight week consultation exercise be approved and upon the conclusion of the consultation a finalised Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020 and Delivery Plan be presented back to the Committee for approval;
- (3) That a business case for the establishment of a new housing company wholly owned by the local authority to alleviate temporary accommodation budgetary pressures be brought forward;
- (4) That the Local Authority's duty to statutory homeless households to be fulfilled by the provision of suitable private rented accommodation, as detailed in the report, be permitted and be reviewed one year from implementation;
- (5) That the Homeless Private Rented Sector Offer Policy, attached to the report at Appendix 3, which proposed arrangements for discharging the Council's statutory duty through an offer of vetted private rented sector housing from a safe and trusted supply, be approved and adopted.

#### 14. PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR CHARTER

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the outcome of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) Charter Consultation which had been

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carried out between 16 September 2015 and 14 October 2015 through a combination of an on line survey and focus groups held at the Landlord Information Evening. The PRS Charter aimed to build a common understanding of values, standards and requirements for the rental sector. The Private Rented Sector Charter was developed based around 'providing a home for those most in need' as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2015-18. A copy of the Charter was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that 40 responses had been received and of these 95% agreed with the actions that the Council were aiming to achieve through the Charter. 95% agreed that the right partners had been included in the Charter. 80% said that they would sign up to the Charter and 50% agreed that the Council had identified all the correct proposed actions with its partners. 48% had suggested some further actions that the Council could include in the action plan such as criminal record checks for all landlords and agents and production of a list of all convicted landlords/agents; fair charges for maintenance by Letting agents; liaison with tenants and action taken against tenants were appropriate & necessary: further guidance on the law for both tenants and landlords; advice to tenants on fuel economy; and fair rents. The action plan had been reviewed following the feedback from the consultation and the comments received had already formed part of the action plan.

The report stated that over the next six months the key piece of ongoing work would be to ensure all Letting and Managing Agents operating within the Borough were members of a Redress Scheme (point 3 of action plan). Officers would also be reviewing the Private Rented Sectors current position with Energy Performance Compliance (EPC). Officers would also look to publish a list of organisations and Landlords who had signed up to the Charter on the Council's website providing they had given consent to have their names included.

Resolved -

- (1) That the outcomes of the Private Rented Sector Charter consultation, which demonstrated the Council's and partners' commitment to improving the sector be noted;
- (2) That the Private Rented Sector Charter and the proposed actions within it, be endorsed;
- (3) That officer's look to publish details on the website of those who sign up to the Charter.

#### 15. PROVISION OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION UNITS AT LOWFIELD ROAD

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the proposal to site temporary accommodation on Council owned land at Lowfield Road in Caversham. A plan of the Lowfield road site was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report explained that the Council owned a piece of land at Lowfield Road in Caversham that had been used for mobile home accommodation in the past. There was now the opportunity to use this land again for suitable modular temporary

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accommodation and by doing so put in place a relatively quick solution to meet the needs of homeless households by procuring new modular constructed accommodation. The budget for the proposed units was an estimated £1million and would be funded from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). With the rental income and the associated net revenue savings the project was expected to pay back within five years when looking at the HRA and General Fund together. The costs were still being finalised and therefore a contingency of 20% was recommended.

The report stated that it was proposed that the Council procured modular constructed temporary accommodation units to site on the land at Lowfield Road to use as an alternative to bed and breakfast. The units would provide self-contained living accommodation with a bathroom, kitchen-diner, living room and bedrooms. It was anticipated that it would cost approximately £1 million (with a contingency of 20% proposed to be added to this figure) to provide at least 18 units of accommodation on the site based on the final units chosen, which would include the clearance of the current site, provision of services and the procurement of the units. The time scales for delivery of the completed units was anticipated to be 6 months which would include the time required to gain Planning permission, however the nature of units selected would inform the overall timescale for this project. The approach offered a viable, suitable and innovative housing solution to meet urgent needs and reduce the number of families in bed and breakfast accommodation.

Resolved -

- (1) That the use of the land at Lowfield Road for temporary accommodation, subject to gaining any necessary planning permission, be approved;
- (2) That officers undertake a detailed assessment of the land and its capacity to support temporary accommodation in order to make the best use of the land recognising the need for an appropriately designed housing environment and to make a formal planning application for the development;
- (3) That the Lead Councillor for Housing and the Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods assess the temporary accommodation options available and determine the best available accommodation for the development;
- (4) That the authority for the procurement of the units be delegated to the Head of Housing and Neighbourhoods in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing;
- (5) That the spending of £1,200,000 (which included a 20% contingency sum) from the Housing Revenue Account to support the development be approved. Should the capacity of the development allow for additional accommodation beyond the proposed 18 units further spend approval be delegated to the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services and the Head of Finance in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing.

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**16. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAMME FOR LEISURE, PARKS AND OPEN SPACES 2015-2017**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report requesting scheme approval for new leisure, parks and open spaces capital projects starting in 2015/17. A summary of the schemes was attached to the report at Appendix I.

The report set out the projects included in the proposed capital programme for 2015 - 2017 for which approval was being sought, with an indication of the amount of S106 contributions earmarked to fund each scheme, to the estimated total value of £348,500. The schemes would be funded from Section 106 receipts.

The report also set out the current progress of a number of schemes that had previously been approved by Policy Committee, at its meeting on 10 June 2013 (Minute 10 refers) and Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 8 July 2014 (Minute 7 refers), which were yet to be completed. These included Arthur Newbery Park, Forbury Gardens, Lousehill Copse, Bear Wharf/County Lock, Prospect Park and Thames Parks.

Resolved -

- (1) That scheme approval be given for the Capital Projects outlined in paragraph 4.3 of the report and detailed in appendix 1;
- (2) That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services and the Head of Finance, be given delegated authority to finalise details of the individual schemes and programmes within the overall approval given.

**17. KERBSIDE FOOD WASTE COLLECTION UPDATE**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an update on the current position with regard to the introduction of a future kerbside food waste collection and disposal service as part of the Waste Minimisation Strategy 2015-20.

The report stated that the Waste Minimisation Strategy 2015-2020 had been adopted in March 2015 and one of the high priority actions for the first year was to review the potential for the introduction of a kerbside food waste collection service for Reading. The report provided an update on the preliminary work that had been carried out and the challenges the introduction of a kerbside food waste collection and disposal service posed to the Council at the present time.

The report stated that the next steps would be to undertake a new waste compositional analysis which was being commissioned to obtain up to date data on the amount of food waste in the residual waste stream. A new yield analysis based on current and projected increase in the number of households and communal properties would be produced and further assessment work for the viability and production of a detailed business case for a kerbside waste collection service would

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be progressed with re3 partners and the results would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Resolved -

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That a further update report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

#### 18. ON-STREET COMMUNAL BINS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which set out an assessment, prioritisation and consultation process for requests for on-street communal bins and recommended that it was applied to all new requests. The proposed assessment process was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report explained that the recent introduction of two on-street communal bin schemes in Anstey Road and Amity Street had shown that if the infrastructure allowed communal bins could be successfully introduced. The current schemes had shown that it was possible to offer an alternative waste collection solution where properties were currently on a weekly bagged collection, but that they were not popular with all residents. Therefore, a more rigorous consultation process needed to be adopted to ensure all residents views, both positive and negative were considered prior to scheme approval.

The report stated that as well as following the proposed assessment process a number of other relevant considerations should be taken into account in the assessment which would include; the number of complaints received in relation to bag collections, the number of recorded missed collections, any access difficulties for refuse freighters and any environmental health considerations.

In order to ensure that the views of all the residents affected by the scheme were considered it was recommended that the following informal consultation process be adopted:

1. A letter and plan would be sent to all the residents in the affected street/streets outlining the scheme and explaining the reasons for its introduction.
2. A 4 week consultation period would be given
3. The consultation would be posted on the RBC website allowing responses to be posted online.
4. Officers would door knock to discuss the scheme proposal with residents.
5. The consultation responses would be collated and reported to the Committee with an Officer response to each point raised.



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6. The Committee would consider the results of the consultation and resolve whether the scheme was progressed or not, subject to funding being available. It was proposed that a minimum 60% favourable response rate would be a reasonable cut-off point for the scheme to go ahead.

Resolved -

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That the on-street communal bin assessment process be adopted.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 8.40pm).