

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 18 JANUARY 2021

Present: Councillors Page (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Barnett-Ward, Duveen, Emberson, Ennis, Jones, Rowland, Skeats, Stevens and White

Apologies: Councillor Brock

RESOLVED ITEMS

74. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved -

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of items 75-76 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

75. LOCAL AUTHORITY NEW BUILD - WENSLEY ROAD ESTATE IMPROVEMENTS

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing detailed financial information to support the public report on 'Local Authority New Build - Wensley Road Estate Improvements' (Minute 84 below refers). The information was presented in a confidential report as publication of the total spend required for the development might prejudice the procurement process.

Resolved -

That the financial information set out in the report be taken into account when considering the public report on 'Local Authority New Build - Wensley Road Development'.

(Exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3).

76. RIVER VIEW INTERIM BLOCK CONTRACT: NURSING DEMENTIA

The Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Health Services submitted a report seeking delegated authority to enter into a 10-month interim contract with River View Care Centre, whilst a new nursing dementia block bed contract could be tendered under Public Contracts Regulations to gain best value for the Council, as agreed at the meeting of ACE Committee on 22 October 2020 (Minute 6 refers).

The report noted that there was currently no formal contract covering this arrangement due to numerous failures of the companies that had managed River View Care Home since 2016. However, the Council now had the opportunity to put a formal agreement in place that would protect residents and the Council under a set of agreed terms and conditions.

Resolved -

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That the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Health Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care, be authorised to enter into a 10-month interim contract with River View Care Centre for 30 nursing dementia block beds from 1 December 2020 to 30 September 2021.

(Exempt information as defined in paragraph 3).

77. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

78. QUESTIONS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Cllr White	Covid-19 vaccine rollout in Reading	Cllr Page on behalf of Cllr Hoskin
2.	Cllr White	Long-term empty council properties	Cllr Ennis

(The full text of the questions and responses was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

79. DECISION BOOKS

The Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services submitted a report listing the Decision Books that had been published since the report to the previous meeting of the Committee held on 14 December 2020.

Resolved -

That Decision Book Nos 618-619 be noted.

80. THAMES VALLEY POLICE

John Campbell, Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police (TVP) and Superintendent Nick John, Reading LPA Commander attended the meeting to give a presentation and answer questions from members of the Committee. Anthony Stansfeld, Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) also attended to answer questions from the Committee.

The presentation by the Chief Constable and LPA Commander covered subjects including call answering times, online reporting, the response to Black Lives Matter, HS2/Extinction Rebellion and other protests, the Forbury Gardens incident, COVID offences and police response, the increase in officer recruitment and local policing activity and crime rates.

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The Committee asked questions on subjects including the performance of the 101 reporting line, recruitment of officers from BAME backgrounds, the possibility of local authority enforcement of speeding offences and the use of CCTV to monitor traffic offences.

Resolved -

That the Chief Constable and LPA Commander be thanked for their presentations.

81. ADULT SOCIAL CARE ASSET REVIEW AND CAPITAL STRATEGY

The Executive Director of Adult Care and Health Services and the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an overview of the Adult Social Care (ASC) Asset Review and Capital Strategy and setting out a recommended option proposing the development of two sites to provide a consolidation of ASC services and enable housing opportunities to be maximised. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Detail of Recommended Option
- Appendix 2 - Adult Social Care Pathway and Case Studies
- Appendix 3 - Summary of costs
- Appendix 4 - Adult Social Care Capital Strategy - Governance
- Appendix 5 - Project Programme for delivery of assets
- Appendix 6 - Images of current Adult Social Care Assets
- Appendix 7 - Equality Impact Assessment

The report explained that the Adult Social Care Asset Review and Capital Strategy had reviewed Adult Social Care's current assets to understand the suitability and condition of the properties, carried out a needs analysis to identify the projected needs in the medium to longer term and reviewed service delivery models. This had been followed by feasibility studies of the available assets and options and consideration of broader options including the co-location of services both of Adult Services and Housing Services, to look at wider development opportunities, taking into account current and potentially available land and property assets.

The report set out the current provision, building condition and suitability to meet future need, projected need, and future service model for Adult Social Care services including Mental Health Supported Living, Profound and Multiple Learning Disability Day Opportunities, Respite support, Older Persons Day Opportunities and Housing Services. A recommended option was set out for the consolidation of services over two sites which allowed the needs of Adult Social Care service users to be met and enabled housing opportunities to be maximised. In addition, the proposed approach would release sites to provide further opportunities for development or to generate capital receipts to support the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The report explained that the recommended option would provide 74 flats at Battle Street split between sheltered housing flats and general needs, 35 places for Older

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Persons Day Opportunities, 14 Mental Health Supported Living Flats and 6 family size houses. The Hexham Road site would provide 36 sheltered housing flats, 31 places for the Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities services and 9 Respite places. The report summarised the benefits of the two sites for the proposed uses.

Resolved -

- (1) That the completion of the Adult Social Care Asset Review and Capital Strategy and its findings be noted;**
- (2) That the recommendation to utilise Battle Street and Hexham Road sites to deliver both Adult Social Care and general housing provision be endorsed, subject to approval by Council in February 2021 in the HRA Capital Programme;**
- (3) That the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, Executive Director for Adult Care and Health and the Assistant Directors for Legal & Democratic Services and Finance, in consultation with the Lead Councillors for Housing and Adult Social Care, and subject to approval by Council in February 2021 in the HRA Capital Programme, be authorised to:**
 - a) procure a multi-disciplinary team to carry out all necessary work towards site development, including detailed designs, securing planning permission and assisting in the procurement of a main contractor for the development;**
 - b) appoint a demolition and main contractor to undertake all necessary works to deliver the proposal;**
 - c) allocate capital and spend up to £44 million (including contingency) of Housing Revenue Account (£38m) and General Fund (£6m) spend to deliver Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities day opportunities, respite, mental health supported living, older people day opportunities and new Council homes on the sites outlined in the report.**

82. SITES TRANSFER - APPROPRIATION OF LAND FROM THE GENERAL FUND TO THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report seeking approval to appropriate four vacant sites, earmarked for housing in the Local Plan, from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account, in order that they be considered for the development of new council housing. Appendix 1 to the report set out the anticipated market value of the sites and the calculation of the proposed ongoing revenue saving.

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The report noted that the Council's Local Plan had designated several sites across the Borough for future housing delivery. Four such sites were currently held in the Council's General Fund, none of which have previously been used for housing purposes: Battle street, Amethyst Lane, Hexham Road and Dwyer Road. All four sites had been deemed surplus to General Fund requirements as they were no longer required for their previous purpose. It was therefore proposed that the four sites be appropriated from the General Fund to the Council's Housing Revenue Account, for them to be considered for future housing development. The report set out the arrangements for and financial implications of the transfer, and the calculation of the anticipated savings to the General Fund and costs to the Housing Revenue Account were set out at Appendix 1.

Resolved -

- (1) That the following vacant sites be declared surplus to General Fund requirements:**
 - Battle Street**
 - Amethyst Lane**
 - Hexham Road**
 - Dwyer Road**
- (2) That the above sites be appropriated from the General Fund into the Housing Revenue Account with an effective date of 1 April 2020, in order that they be considered for the development of new council housing;**
- (3) That the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to enter into the necessary legal agreements to undertake the appropriation.**

83. SUPPORTED LIVING RENT INCREASE FROM APRIL 2021

The Executive Director of Adult Care and Health Services submitted a report proposing a rent increase within the Council's Supported Living properties utilised within Adult Social Care, to bring rents in line with similar Council properties.

The report summarised supported living provision offered within Council-owned properties and explained the nature of the properties' exemptions from social housing and rental legislation which applied to other forms of social housing, and the impact this had on chargeable rents. In order to calculate rent that was reflective of the locality and could meet housing management costs and Housing Benefit eligibility, as well as resolve the disparity of rent charged within the Supported Living scheme for different types of accommodation, it was recommended to set new rent levels in line with the Local Housing Allowance and implement an annual rent increase for all properties within the scheme.

The report explained that individuals who were receiving Housing Benefit or Universal Credit (which currently included all the individuals who were living in these properties) would continue to have their rent paid by these welfare benefits and would not see an

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impact on their own personal finances. A five-year maintenance plan had been developed in order to ensure the properties were fit for purpose into the future.

Resolved -

That the rent for Council-owned Supported Living properties be increased in line with Local Housing Allowance and that annual rent increases of CPI (as at October each year) +1% per annum be implemented from 1 April 2021, in line with social rent and affordable rent increases, generating an expected additional rent of £21k per annum.

84. LOCAL AUTHORITY NEW BUILD - WENSLEY ROAD ESTATE IMPROVEMENTS

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report requesting spend approval to deliver the Wensley Road Estate Improvement Project - a proposed development of 46 homes, 25 new garages and wider estate improvements at Wensley Road. The report also sought authority to award contracts for the proposed development and the appropriation of a number of garages to the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Financial information had been considered in closed session (Minute 75 above refers).

The report noted that in Autumn 2018, a bid had been submitted to Homes England to support the delivery of affordable housing under the Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Programme, and the Council had been allocated £3,960,250 in grant funding to support a potential development at Wensley Road. Between August and October 2019 the Council had consulted residents about the development of the Wensley Road area and following on from the consultation a planning application had been submitted in early 2020, which had been granted planning permission subject the completion of a legal agreement at the Planning Applications Committee meeting on 12 August 2020 (Minute 35 refers).

The report explained that, in addition to the building of new homes the approved designs included proposals to enhance and improve the general area for existing residents. Plans included improved play areas and equipment, improved parking, increased cycle storage, replacement of refuse facilities and improvements to the public realm. There were also planned improvement works for a new water distribution system and the installation of a fire sprinkler system due to be completed on the three high rise towers in January 2021, and improvements to the windows and exterior of the towers would follow. Included in the S106 legal agreement for the planning application was a commitment for the HRA to fund £116k of improvement works to nearby Courage Park, and contributions would also be made to fund an employment and skills plan. The development had been designed to achieve zero carbon, incorporating design features such as air source heat pumps, arrays of photovoltaic panels on the roofslopes of the buildings (predominantly those south facing), highly efficient insulation and triple glazed windows. In overall terms the proposed scheme was considered to incorporate a variety of passive and active measures to be a highly sustainable development for the Borough.

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The report explained that an outline budget allocation for the Project had been included as part of the HRA capital programme budget build, with the budget for the scheme expected to be made up of a Homes England Grant, S106 funding and HRA borrowing. The updated capital programme would be formally submitted for approval to the full Council meeting February 2021, and it was recommended that the Committee approve spend for the project as set out in the confidential report considered in closed session (Minute 75 above refers). Like most regeneration projects, the development had a number of risks and uncertainties and it was considered prudent to seek a 20% contingency.

The report also proposed that the existing garage sites within the development area (known as G1-G13 Wensley Court and Garage G104-G119 Wensley Road) be transferred from the Council's General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account, for the purposes of developing housing. The Council had committed to offer a replacement garage within the area to tenants of these 29 garages that were due to be demolished (only 24 garages out of a total of 29 were currently let to tenants), and in order to meet this commitment, 25 new garages were due to be built as part of the project.

The Council had commenced a procurement exercise to appoint a contractor to deliver the 46 new homes and associated landscaping works and would also tender and enter into a contract for the delivery of the two additional garage schemes. The report sought authority for the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, to agree the award of the contracts to the successful contractors.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Housing Revenue Account spend, as set out in the report considered in closed session (Minute 75 above refers), be approved to deliver 46 new Council homes, up to 25 new garages and wider estate improvements within the Wensley Road area;**
- (2) That the Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, be authorised to tender and enter into contracts for the construction and all necessary external works relating to the delivery of 46 new Council homes, up to 25 new garages and wider estate improvements within the Wensley Road area;**
- (3) That the Committee note and approve the appropriation of the garage sites known as G1-G13 Wensley Court and G104-G119 Wensley Road from the Council's General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account to support the delivery of the Wensley Road Development Project with effect from 31 March 2021.**

85. EXTERNAL FUNDING APPLICATIONS FOR LOW CARBON INVESTMENT

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report to inform the Committee of funding applications being submitted and prepared in

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pursuit of funding opportunities which would help deliver the Council's policy commitments in relation to climate change. The report also sought approval to spend grant funding should the applications be successful. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1: Green Homes Grant Memorandum of Understanding
- Appendix 2 Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund Guidance

The report explained that grants had been made available by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to support national and local climate change policy objectives, through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund (energy projects for Council buildings), Low Carbon Skills Fund (for project planning and bid preparation), and the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Scheme (housing retrofit). The grant funding schemes were being made available at short notice with numerous rounds and tight application deadlines and the report therefore sought a delegation to accept any successful grant applications and deliver grant funded projects.

Resolved -

- (1) That the grant applications submitted and proposed to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund, the Low Carbon Skills Fund and the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme be noted;
- (2) That the acceptance of the Green Homes Grant and associated MoU, as set out at Appendix 1, be noted;
- (3) That the Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Executive Director of Resources and the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport, be authorised to spend any grant monies received from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund, the Low Carbon Skills Fund and the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery scheme.

86. ACCEPTANCE OF CULTURE RECOVERY FUND GRANTS

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report informing the Committee of the award of an Arts Council England (ACE) culture recovery fund and The National Lottery Heritage Fund's (NLHF) culture recovery fund for heritage, totalling £1.069m.

The report explained that in July 2020 the government had announced a £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund (CRF) designed to safeguard cultural and heritage organisations across the UK from the economic impact of COVID-19. Portions of the funding were being distributed by Arts Council England for arts and culture, the British Film Institute for film and cinema and The National Lottery Heritage Fund, for heritage. A bid for up to £80,500 had been submitted to the culture recovery fund for heritage to support the Abbey Quarter, and a bid for £989,374 had been submitted to the culture recovery fund to support The Hexagon, South Street and Reading Museum.

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In October the council had been notified that it had been successful with both bids and awarded the full amount requested. Arts Council England had given the council two weeks within which to accept the grant and having sought legal advice officers had accepted the ACE grant on behalf of the council. The National Lottery Heritage Grant had provided their final terms and conditions of the grant in December and having sought legal advice the grant had been accepted by officers, again due to the limited time frame.

Resolved -

- (1) That grant funding of £989,374 from the Arts Council England's culture recovery fund be accepted and the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage & Recreation, be authorised to allocate the funding to support The Hexagon, South Street and Reading Museum to mitigate the economic impacts of COVID-19 on those venues;
- (2) That grant funding of up to £80,500 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund's culture recovery fund be accepted and the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage & Recreation, be authorised to allocate the funding to support activities within Reading Abbey Quarter to mitigate the economic impacts of COVID-19;
- (3) That, subject to satisfactory terms and conditions being published by Arts Council England, the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services be authorised to apply for grant funding from the second round of Arts Council England's culture recovery fund to support eligible cultural services transition back to a viable and sustainable operating model during April-June 2021.

87. CIVIL ENFORCEMENT (PARKING) CONTRACT AND PARKING STRATEGY - UPDATE

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an update on the development of a new Parking Strategy and a new Civil Enforcement Contract, and seeking approval for an extension to the contract for Civil Enforcement with NSL Ltd.

The report noted that the current Civil Enforcement Contract with NSL Ltd had commenced in November 2014 for a term of up to 10 years, consisting of an initial term of five years and extensions of a period or periods of not less than one year up to five years. The Committee had agreed contract extensions in January 2019 and January 2020, and the report summarised the work completed since the January 2020 extension had been agreed.

During the year officers had worked with specialist parking consultants who had been appointed to guide the Council towards a new Civil Enforcement Contract and a new

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Parking Strategy. This work had included the implementation and review of the performance of the improvements agreed as a part of the current contract extension, a review of the procurement strategy, and the outline development of a new parking strategy to align with the objectives of the new Reading Transport Strategy, which was due to be adopted early 2021.

The report set out the next stages and recommended that, in light of the impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic on the original programme, and the need to continue further detailed work on the most appropriate route to Market for any new Civil Enforcement (Parking) contract and development of a new parking strategy for Reading, a further extension of the existing Civil Enforcement (Parking) contract with NSL Ltd be approved for up to two years.

Resolved -

- (1) That progress made on the development of a new Parking Strategy and a new Civil Enforcement Contract be noted;**
- (2) That an extension to the contract for Civil Enforcement with NSL Ltd from 1 November 2021 - 31 October 2022, and if needed to 31 October 2023, be agreed in accordance with the terms of the contract;**
- (3) That the ongoing development of a new Parking Strategy and a new Civil Enforcement (Parking) Contract over the next 12 months be endorsed.**

88. SUPPORTING HOUSING DELIVERY AND PUBLIC SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE - CONSULTATION RESPONSE

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on a government consultation on changes to the existing planning system, and setting out at Appendix 1 a recommended response to the consultation.

The report noted that in recent years the government had made frequent changes to the planning system, with the aim of streamlining the development process and delivering more homes. Most recently, a consultation had taken place on the Planning White Paper, which proposed a fundamental overhaul of the entire planning system, to which the Council had responded in October 2020 (Minute 48 of the meeting held on 28 September 2020 refers). The current consultation dealt with the existing planning system, and proposed a number of changes that could be made to the way it currently operated, in advance of any more fundamental changes as a result of the Planning White Paper. There were three elements of this consultation: a new permitted development right to change commercial uses into residential; changes to simplify and streamline the process for new and extended public service infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, further education colleges and prisons; and consolidation and simplification of some existing permitted development rights.

Resolved -

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That the proposed response to the consultation on Supporting Housing Delivery and Public Service Infrastructure set out at Appendix 1 be approved.

(The meeting started at 6.31 pm and closed at 8.45 pm)