

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 3 APRIL 2023

Present: Councillor Brock (Chair);
Councillors Page (Vice-Chair), Barnett-Ward, Emberson, Ennis, Leng, McElroy, McEwan, Mitchell, Robinson, Rowland, Terry, Thompson and White

Apologies: Councillors Hoskin

RESOLVED ITEMS

64. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

65. LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND

The Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhoods submitted a report on a proposal to purchase 15 homes, using funding provided by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), which would initially be made available to Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, and in the longer term be used as General Needs Social Housing. The report set out the total spend approval required to deliver the scheme, which included match funding of £3m from the Council.

Additionally, the report sought agreement to endorse retrospectively the Memorandum of Understanding, which had been signed by the Director of Finance to deliver 15 homes for the purpose set out above by the end of March 2024, in return for Government grant as set out in the table at paragraph 4.2.3 of the report. Due to the short timescale, it was proposed that the mechanism to deliver the scheme would be to purchase additional properties from the open market.

Resolved -

- (1) That the signing by the Director of Finance of the Memorandum of Understanding between Reading Borough Council and DLUHC to receive an award of grant totalling £2,164,331 to purchase 15 homes, initially for Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, and in the longer term to be used as General Needs Social Housing, as described in more detail in the report, be endorsed;**
- (2) That the budget of £3m to match fund the grant, funded through a combination of S106 contributions and Housing Revenue Account borrowing be approved;**
- (3) That the total spend of £5.5m to purchase 15 homes, as set out in the body of the report, be approved.**

66. APPOINTMENT OF REMUNERATION PANEL MEMBERS

The Executive Director of Resources submitted a report seeking agreement to appoint additional members to the Independent Remuneration Panel, following the resignation of one of its current members. The report explained that the Council must maintain the Panel to review the scheme for Councillors' Allowances annually and make recommendations on:

- the amount of basic allowance to be paid to all Councillors;
- duties in respect of which Councillors should receive a special responsibility allowance, and the amount of such an allowance; and
- allowances for the care of children or dependents.

The report also sought delegated authority to the Monitoring Officer to appoint a further member to the Panel.

Resolved -

- (1) That Jeanette Skeats and Sally Swift be appointed as members of the Independent Remuneration Panel for a term of four years;**
- (2) That the Monitoring Officer be given delegated authority to advertise for a further member of the Independent Remuneration Panel;**
- (3) That the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be given delegated authority to appoint a further member to the Independent Remuneration Panel.**

67. SOUTHCOTE LIBRARY DISPOSAL

The Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhoods submitted a report on a proposal to appropriate Southcote Library from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for market value for the development and provision of affordable housing. A site plan was attached to the report at Appendix 1. The report explained that the Committee had previously resolved to dispose of the site to Sovereign Housing Association (SHA) at its meeting on 3 August 2020 (Minutes 25 & 29 refer) for the development of affordable housing. However, in January 2023, the Council had been advised that, following an internal review, SHA had withdrawn from the purchase of the site. As a result, the Council had considered contacting the previous underbidders for the site; remarketing the site; and appropriating the site to the HRA for the development of Council housing.

The report stated that there was authority to appropriate suitable sites for the purpose of delivering new housing in cases where a business plan showed it was cost effective. The proposed scheme had been modelled within the latest 30 Year

HRA business plan and it remained financially viable. A key priority of the Corporate Plan and the Housing Strategy 2020-2025 was to build new homes, which supported the appropriation to the HRA being the best option, rather than remarketing the site. The HRA would potentially deliver 15 x 2 Bed flats for Social Rent at an anticipated scheme cost of £3.8m (£800k Land Appropriation and £3m build cost).

Resolved -

That the appropriation of the Southcote Library site from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for Market Value for the development and provision of affordable housing be approved.

68. DISPOSAL OF 40 CHRISTCHURCH ROAD

The Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhoods submitted a report on the outcome of a marketing exercise to dispose of the freehold of the former Phoenix School, 40 Christchurch Road on the terms set out in the report. A site plan was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

Resolved -

- (1) That the recommended action set out in the report be noted;**
- (2) That further consideration of the proposal to dispose of the freehold of the former Phoenix School be conducted in 'Part 2' of the meeting, which would take place in the absence of the press and public as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information.**

69. 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 item 70 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.

70. DISPOSAL OF 40 CHRISTCHURCH ROAD

Further to Minute 68 above, the Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhoods submitted a report on the outcome of a marketing exercise to dispose of the freehold of the former Phoenix School, 40 Christchurch Road on the terms set out in the report. The report recommended acceptance of an unconditional offer for the property from Bidder A to use the property for educational purposes. The Council retained the option to revert to the other offers

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without any real loss of opportunity, in the event the preferred bidder was unable to move as promptly as expected to conclude the agreement. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Location Plan;
- Appendix 2 - Tabulated summary of offers;
- Appendix 3 - Evaluation Matrix;
- Appendix 4- Culture Development comments; and
- Appendix 5- BfC comments on the proposal.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Property be sold to Bidder A on an unconditional basis on the terms set out in paragraph 4.3.1 of the report;**
- (2) That, if the purchaser was unable to perform to an acceptable timescale, the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Lead Councillor for Planning & Assets and the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services to:**
 - a) agree a revised offer price and terms where appropriate which secured best consideration;**
 - b) re-engage with other bidders as appropriate or remarket the property for disposal at best consideration.**

(Exempt information as defined in paragraph 3).

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 6.57 pm)