

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 3 AUGUST 2020

Present: Councillor Brock (Chair);
Councillors Page (Vice-Chair), Duveen, Emberson, Ennis, Jones, Pearce, Skeats, Stevens and White

RESOLVED ITEMS

24. 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 25 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.

25. SOUTHCOTE LIBRARY

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report setting out commercially sensitive information relating to a marketing exercise to dispose of the freehold of Southcote Library. The report had appended a location plan and schedule and summary table of offers received.

Resolved -

That the information contained within the report and appendices be noted and taken into account in making a decision on the proposed disposal (Minute 29 refers).

(Exempt information as defined in paragraph 3)

26. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair announced that he had been advised that the Monitoring Officer had exercised his delegation, on the recommendation of the Conservative Group Leader, to appoint Councillor Stanford-Beale to the Parenting Panel in place of Councillor Robinson.

27. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair, subject to replacing the reference to 'Minster Street' in Minute 21 'High Street Heritage Action Zone Programme 2020 - 2024 High Street Heritage Action Zone Programme 2020 - 2024' with 'London Street'.

28. QUESTIONS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

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| | <u>Questioner</u> | <u>Subject</u> | <u>Reply</u> |
|----|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. | Cllr White | School Meals in Summer Holiday | Cllr Pearce |
| 2. | Cllr White | Pedestrian Priority | Cllr Page |

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

29. SOUTHCOTE LIBRARY

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the outcome of a marketing exercise to dispose of the freehold of Southcote Library. Confidential information relating to the proposed disposal had been considered in closed session (Minute 25 above refers). A location plan was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report explained that the highest offer received was for a residential development (Bidder A) on a conditional, subject to planning, basis. The other top offers received were also from residential developers (Bidder B & C) also both on a conditional basis subject to planning consent being granted. There was also a bid from a Housing Association (Bidder D) for a scheme of 15 x 1 & 2 bed affordable flats on a conditional basis subject to planning consent. The Committee was advised that Bids A, B and C should generate Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments of approximately £100k, whereas Bidder D would not generate CIL payment as it would deliver an affordable housing scheme.

The report stated that the Housing Association's bid was the preferred offer, despite not being the highest bid. The proposal assumed that the Housing Association would receive £785,000 of Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) to support the delivery of the development. The properties would be 100% affordable housing, all rented, with rent levels capped at 70% of market rent and the Council would obtain 100% nomination rights for the ingoing tenants.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Property be sold to Bidder D for a development of affordable rented properties on the terms set out in paragraph 4.3.1 of the report;**
- (2) That the allocation of £785,000 Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) to support the delivery of the Housing Association's proposed development be approved as set out in paragraph 4.3.1 of the report;**
- (3) That, in the event that the offer price was subsequently reduced or the purchaser did not perform to an acceptable timescale the Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services be authorised, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Lead Councillor for Corporate and Consumer Services and the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services, to:**

- a) agree a revised offer price which secures best consideration;
 - b) re-engage with other bidders as appropriate or remarket the property for disposal at best consideration;
- (4) That, in the event that the LASHG increased above the sum of £785,000 then the Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, be authorised to consider and agree any variation.

30. MODULAR DEVELOPMENT - CATTLE MARKET CAR PARK

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on a proposal to provide 40 modular temporary accommodation units as 'move on' accommodation for rough sleepers at the Cattle Market site on Great Knollys Street. A plan of the site was appended to the report.

The report explained that Crown Commercial Service had offered assistance in procuring the modular housing solution both in terms of drawing up a specification and drawing off their frameworks for supply and construction which would help reduce costs. Homes England and MHCLG had confirmed that the Council could bid for the grant funding, which was available to cover 40% of the development costs of new or refurbished accommodation targeted for this client group. If the Council was not successful in this process, then 30% of the scheme cost could be funded through right to buy receipts. There would be intensive 24-hour support provided on site to ensure that the residents were adequately supported, and the site was effectively managed. The pods would be manufactured to high environmental standards using modern methods of construction to minimise waste and maximise efficiencies of the build process and although temporary in nature, they would be robustly manufactured and could be re-used many times in different locations.

The report stated that the Cattle Market site was currently being used for a surface level car park to bring additional income into the Council of around £150k per annum. A business case had been developed to improve access to the car park which indicated that it would provide the Council with an estimated additional income of £100k per annum. This improvement was unlikely to be possible if part of the land was made available for the 40 modular units. However, the loss of potential income would be more than offset by the provision of modular temporary accommodation, which would reduce the Council's spend on emergency accommodation by approximately £960k per annum. Additionally, depending on whether grant funding could be secured (£178k) or whether right to buy receipts needed to be used (£172k) the development would provide a net income to the HRA of about £172-178k per annum.

The project would be progressed in conjunction with the Local Planning Authority to ensure it was in line with planning requirements, and a full planning application would be submitted as soon as possible. However, the Council was allowed to move swiftly and install additional temporary accommodation without waiting for the planning application

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to be approved in cases of emergency. As a result, it was anticipated that clearance of the site and installation of the modular units could start in August and be completed by October 2020.

Resolved -

- (1) That the £2m addition of the Modular Home Development to the 2020/21 - 2024/25 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital programme be approved, funded through a combination of external subsidy and HRA borrowing;**
- (2) That spending up to £2m within the Housing Revenue Account for the purpose of delivering 40 units of modular accommodation units to rehouse rough sleepers currently accommodated in Bed and Breakfast (B&B) as part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic be approved.**

31. CONTRACT AWARD - NORTHGATE NPS HOUSING

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report seeking spending approval and authority to award a five-year contract with a possible two-year extension for software licences, support and maintenance and hosting of the Northgate NPS Housing IT system.

The report explained that the Housing Service required an IT system which could deliver services in an efficient and effective way; that enabled customers to self-serve as much as possible; and allowed staff to mobile work and work remotely. There were a limited number of Housing Systems in the market and the NCC Group had been commissioned to perform a soft market test of the available systems. The resulting report from NCC was appended to the report along with an Equality Impact Assessment and a Data Impact Assessment.

The report recommended procuring Northgate's NPS Housing as the replacement cloud IT system for the current Ohms system, which was no longer fit for purpose. The procurement of the upgraded software would support the Council's ICT and Digital Strategy, promoting better access for customers to digital and online service delivery and was in line with the future operating model of the Council. This proposal had been signed off by the Digital Futures Board and was aligned to the Council's cloud IT strategy. Since the current Ohms system was owned by Northgate, the NPS Housing System implementation would be treated as an upgrade by Northgate which would significantly reduce the implementation time and cost, compared with procuring an alternative system.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Assistant Director of Housing & Communities and the Chief Digital Information Officer in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing to be authorised to approve the award of a contract to Northgate Public Services Housing (UK) Limited for a period of five years from the**

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commencement date for the provision of an upgraded cloud Northgate Housing system delivered as SaaS (software as a service);

- (2) That spend approval of £1,137,640 over 5 years to procure the upgraded cloud Northgate Housing system be authorised.

32. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE READING COVID-19 OUTBREAK ENGAGEMENT BOARD

The Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services submitted a report on a proposal to set up a Reading Covid-19 Outbreak Engagement Board (OEB) to involve the public and partners in the evolution of the Reading COVID-19 Outbreak Control Plan, and to support swift and effective local communication with all residents potentially impacted by a local outbreak. The report also dealt with the membership, terms of reference and arrangements for holding meetings of the OEB.

It was proposed at the meeting that Councillor Hoskin be appointed as the Chair of the Board and Councillor Brock as the Vice-Chair. The remaining members would be nominated by Group Leaders and appointed under delegated powers by the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Reading Covid-19 Outbreak Engagement Board (OEB) be set up as a Sub-Committee of Policy Committee with the terms of reference as set out in paragraph 4 of the report;
- (2) That Councillor Hoskin be appointed as Chair and Councillor Brock be appointed as Vice-Chair of the OEB;
- (3) That Group Leaders be asked to send their nominations to the Board to the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services in order to finalise the membership of the OEB as soon as possible;
- (4) That all non-Councillor members of the Health & Wellbeing Board (including co-opted members) be co-opted onto the OEB;
- (5) That the OEB be authorised to determine the frequency of its meetings, as necessary;
- (6) That the first meeting of the OEB be scheduled to take place on Friday 4 September 2020 at 2pm.

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.26 pm)