

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Homes & Communities Committee** held in the Civic Suite, Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, Notts NG24 1BY on Monday, 24 January 2022 at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor T Wendels (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs R Holloway (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Mrs B Brooks, Councillor S Carlton, Councillor R Crowe,
Councillor Mrs L Dales, Councillor L Goff, Councillor S Haynes,
Councillor J Lee, Councillor T Wildgust and Councillor Mrs Y Woodhead

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mrs P Rainbow

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor M Brock (Committee Member)

52 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS AND AS TO THE PARTY WHIP

NOTED that no Member or Officer declared any interest pursuant to any statutory requirement in any matter discussed or voted upon at the meeting.

53 DECLARATION OF ANY INTENTION TO RECORD THE MEETING

NOTED that there would be an audio recording of the meeting undertaken by the Council.

54 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 22 NOVEMBER 2021

AGREED (unanimously) that the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

55 POLICING IN NEWARK AND SHERWOOD - PRESENTATION FROM NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING INSPECTOR CHARLOTTE ALLARDICE

The Neighbourhood Policing Inspector Charlotte Allardice gave her apologies and would provide her presentation at the March meeting of the Committee.

56 UPDATE ON ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND INTERVENTIONS AND ENFORCEMENT

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Public Protection providing the Committee with information on the current position with regard to anti-social behaviour across the district and the interventions and enforcement used to combat this behaviour.

In the report ASB does not recognise council structures or partnerships, however there are a number of ways in which ASB is measured and recorded. The measure in the report is the ASB incidents reported and recorded by the police.

The impact of the pandemic resulted in an increase in ASB and in order for a comparison to be meaningful the current level of ASB is being compared to 2019/20 and it can be seen that there has been an increase in ASB but this is well below that being experienced last year.

The Committee were advised that wildlife crime was on the increase and that police had visited schools to address this.

A Clipstone Day of Action recently took place providing positive engagement with a large number of school age children as part of a graffiti project that centred on respect for each other and for the local areas.

The Committee also heard that as well as reacting to reports of ASB, the council is also proactive in identifying ASB in its early stages and to then be able to prevent it escalating. The Community Protection Officers and Housing Street Wardens playing a key role in this.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Committee noted the data relating to Anti-Social Behaviour and the range of activities, both delivered and planned that are in place to address Anti-Social Behaviour.

57 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first meeting of 2022 and wished the Members a healthy and happy new year. The Chairman also welcomed Councillor Mrs Yvonne Woodhead, as the newest member of the Committee.

The Chairman advised that the recent Tenant Engagement Survey gave a small positive response to the proposals for future engagement which will now be complimented with neighbourhood pop up events, targeted in unrepresented neighbourhoods alongside telephone and door step campaigns to seek wider views. The officers are also looking at social media to promote feedback.

In line with the digital declaration and to encourage the use of the digital services involved tenants have been trained so that they can become trainers themselves and deliver training to other tenants. The digital training has now been completed and the content of the lesson plans and handbook are progressing through the final stages. These will be tested during a number of pilot sessions at Chatham Court Hub. For those tenants wishing to progress further with their digital learning a connection has been made with Inspire and Newark College.

At the end of quarter 3, 71 tenants had been actively engaging and we have set challenging targets to expand our pool of engaged tenants over the next year.

The Community Engagement Team, working with partners delivered a very successful district wide Veteran's Breakfast and Support Awareness event at Newark Town Hall in December. It showcased a number of services including Careline and Support for Older Persons. This event was well attended and requests have been received to replicate our approach across Nottinghamshire.

The team has also co-ordinated the Crop Drop End of Season Celebration Event which showcased the value of sharing fresh surplus produce and supported over 200 families in need of additional support across the District. They have assisted 10 community groups so far to receive funding from the Nottinghamshire County Council's Social Recovery Fund and Food Fund.

The Chairman also informed the Members that a very successful Day of Action in Clipstone took place in December, working with partners and the local school delivering a Graffiti Art Project on the local cycle network, collected over 10 tonnes of waste which included 9 tyres, 2 gas bottles and a rocking horse to name just a few and issued 5 speed warnings to motorists and reinstated 30 dog fouling notices.

Plans are in place for the arrival of the third Afghan family and also recently arranged a tour of Sherwood Forest for the resettled families as part of their ongoing integration into the Newark and Sherwood community.

The Yorke Drive Regeneration project is now moving forward with resident consultation on an element of redesign programmed at the end of January. This redesign takes into account the challenges identified around noise and the introduction of the new Parking Supplementary Planning Document including the installation of Electric Vehicle Charge Points. Following the resident consultation, the proposals will be finalised with a detailed planning application for Phase 1 to be submitted in Spring 2022.

And finally the Chairman reminded the Members that the Ollerton Advice Office is open for business to help with any and all Council related issues, queries and advice. The opening hours are Monday to Friday 9am – 4.30pm closing for lunch between 12.30 and 1.30.

58 FORWARD PLAN - FEBRUARY 2022 TO JANUARY 2023

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for February 2022 to January 2023 with the Chairman inviting Members to put forward any items they would wish to be considered by Committee at a future meeting.

A Committee Member requested that an update report be provided on Homelessness for the March meeting and the Chairman requested that it be included on the Forward Plan.

59 HOUSING OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT HANDLING - SELF ASSESSMENT

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Customer Services providing an annual update on the results of the self-assessment of the Customer Feedback Policy against the Housing Ombudsman Effective Complaints Handling Self-Assessment.

The Committee recalled receiving the inaugural update at the January 2021 meeting following the introduction of the Housing Ombudsman Effective Complaints Code in July 2020.

The Committee were reminded that the Complaint Handling Code placed a mandate for all Council's to undertake a self-assessment against the code by 31 December 2020, and an annual review thereafter.

The Complaint Handling Code provides a framework to promote high quality complaint management, in particular:

- i. greater and easier routes of access for tenants and residents with faster resolutions
- ii. how we use and share the learning from complaints to drive service improvements or amendments

The Tenant Forum having inputted into the self-assessment process again this year and provided feedback on the findings.

The Housing Advisory Group having met on 6 January 2022 were happy with the direction of travel and additional feedback was received as there could be confusion for tenants when wanting to make a complaint being directed to a feedback form. Following the recommendations an amendment will be made to the feedback mechanism to make it clear if the tenants comments are treated as feedback or a complaint.

The Housing Advisory Group felt the communications plan was a work in progress and would look forward to the improvements over the next year.

The Committee were also informed that a revised code would be created in February 2022 for implementation in April 2022.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) Members noted the progress and continued compliance against the self-assessment.
- b) Members noted and endorsed the actions put in place to support the Council's approach of the effective complaint handling.
- c) the creation of a communications plan to promote the feedback policy, as outlined in section 8.2.

60 REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT POLICY FOR CUSTOMERS REPORT

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Customer Services seeking approval of the Reasonable Adjustment for Customers Policy, subject to final approval by the Policy & Finance Committee.

This report followed on from the previous report, and the policy in Appendix 1 detailed what is a reasonable adjustment, including how the Council communicates with customers and what can be done to support. Each request to be considered on its own merits and the council will support the request within the parameters set out in the policy.

The Housing Advisory Group at their meeting on 6 January 2022 agreed with the policy as being a key way of supporting customers through adjusting our services.

AGREED (unanimously) that Members of the Committee supported the Reasonable Adjustment for Customers Policy and recommended it to the Policy & Finance Committee for final approval.

61 DEALING WITH UNREASONABLE BEHAVIOUR AND VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS POLICY

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Customer Services seeking approval of the revised Dealing with Unreasonable Behaviour and Vexatious Complaints Policy, subject to final approval by the Policy & Finance Committee.

The report explained that this policy was last updated in 2009 and therefore required a refresh, to make the policy easier to read, hear all complaints fairly and to protect staff from persistent contact and unreasonable behaviour, with each case reviewed on its own merit.

The Housing Advisory Group felt the approach taken was necessary and as a last resort where resources were being directed away from other residents they supported. A right of appeal ensures the Council were being objective in their application of the policy.

AGREED (unanimously) that Members of the Committee supported the revised Dealing with Unreasonable Behaviour and Vexatious Complaints Policy and recommended it to the Policy & Finance Committee for final approval.

62 ALLOCATION OF HRA EFFICIENCY SAVINGS WITHIN HOUSING SERVICES

The Committee considered the report from the Director for Housing, Health and Wellbeing on the proposed allocation of budget savings from the integration of housing services back to the Council.

The report also requested delegated authority by given to the Homes & Communities Committee to approve the allocation of budgets subject to individual business case reports being presented.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Homes and Communities Committee met with a small number of tenants and officers in December 2021 to review nearly 3000 responses over two years from tenants on various services to provide some direction for projects and investment. The group agreed it was important not to spend “just because” and that it was important to make every penny count.

The Housing Advisory Group having considered the proposals based on the meeting with tenants were therefore satisfied with the short and long term proposals and that the money would be spent wisely.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) the Committee note the comments and involvement of tenant feedback and endorse the proposals set out in the report.
- b) the Committee recommend to the Policy & Finance Committee to approve the proposals as set out in the report to enable Officers to build these proposals into the budget process for 2022-23.

63 LANDLORD STRATEGY

The Committee considered the report from the Director for Housing, Health and Wellbeing sharing the Council's Landlord Strategy which sets out the approach the Council intend to take with landlord services over the next five years and to show the proposal that will form the narrative and basis of the financial modelling of the 30 year HRA Business Plan.

The Committee commended the Officers in carrying out a great job providing customer engagement and noting also that the Housing Advisory Group had endorsed the strategy at their January 2022 meeting.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- a) the Homes & Communities Committee endorsed the Landlord Strategy as the narrative for the 30 year HRA Business Plan.
- b) the Homes & communities Committee recommend adoption of the Strategy at Policy & Finance Committee on 27 January 2022.

64 STRATEGIC APPROACH TO SOCIAL HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Housing Maintenance and Asset Management providing members of the Committee with an overview of the Council's approach to managing HRA social housing assets and to explain how we expect our strategic approach to managing social housing assets to develop.

The report informed members of the Committee that the Landlord Strategy will be supported by an HRA asset management strategy which will be developed over the next year. One of the key pieces of work is a new externally conducted stock condition survey of upto 50% of the housing portfolio. This has been procured and is being undertaken in 2022. Further in-house surveys will take place over the following four years to achieve 100% stock condition information by 2026, using this information to reformulate the HRA Business Plan and to reconfigure our programmes of investment in tenants' homes.

The Housing Advisory Group having met on 6 January 2022 were happy with the approach set out in the appendix. They also welcomed the stock condition survey and annual visits to help keep the Council up to date with the condition of homes and ensuring they are fit for purpose.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Committee noted the contents of the report.

65 2022/23 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET AND RENT SETTING

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Housing Maintenance and Asset Management and the Assistant Business Manager for Financial Services.

The annual report being presented to the Committee on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) would:

- a) provide the actual outturn of the HRA for the 2020/21 financial year (1 April 2020 - 31 March 2021) (column 2 of Appendix A1);
- b) examine the proposed income and expenditure on the HRA for the 2022/23 financial year (column 4 of Appendix A1), in accordance with Section 76 (Duty to prevent debit balance on Housing Revenue Account) of the *Local Government and Housing Act 1989*;
- c) provide indicative amounts of income and expenditure for the 2023/24 to 2025/26 financial years (columns 5 to 7 of Appendix A1); and
- d) set rent levels and service charges for 2022/2023 (with effect from the first Monday in April 2022).

The setting of the HRA budget and the approval of rent levels will allow the required time to notify tenants of proposed changes to rents in accordance with legislation.

AGREED that the following recommendations be made to the Policy & Finance Committee on the 27 January 2022 and to Full Council at its meeting on 8 February 2022:

- a) the HRA budget for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix A1 to this report;
- b) an increase of 4.1% (CPI + 1%) in the 2022/23 rents of all properties in the HRA as at 31 March 2022; and
- c) the 2022/23 service charges as set out in Appendix C to this report.

66 HOMES & COMMUNITIES REVENUE AND CAPITAL FORECAST OUTTURN REPORT TO 31 MARCH 2022 AS AT 30 NOVEMBER 2021

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Financial Services comparing the Revised Budgets for the period ending 31 March 2022 with the Projected Outturn forecast for the period, based on meetings with Financial Services staff and the appropriate Business Manager. These are based on eight months' performance information on the Council's revenue and capital budgets, including:

The Committee were reminded that it was requested by Members at the Policy & Finance Committee during February 2020 that reports were presented to individual Committees, for noting, for them to understand the financial position of their Committee.

The Committee were presented with the report for noting and to be taken to the next Policy & Finance Committee on 27 January 2022.

AGREED (unanimously) that the contents of the report be noted.

67 HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE REVENUE BUDGET 2022/23

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager and Assistant Business Manager for Financial Services:

To seek approval from the Committee for the 2022/23 base budget in Appendix A to be recommended to Policy & Finance Committee at its meeting on 21 February 2022 for inclusion in the overall council budget; and

To seek approval from the Committee for the 2022/23 fees & charges in Appendix D to be recommended to Policy & Finance Committee at its meeting on 21 February 2022 and Council at its meeting on 08 March 2022.

AGREED (unanimously) that the following recommendations be made to the Policy & Finance Committee at its meeting on 21 February 2022:

- i. the 2022/23 base budget in Appendix A for inclusion in the overall council budget;
- ii. and to Council on 8 March 2022 the 2022/23 fees and charges in Appendix D.

68 HRA GROUNDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE UPDATE

The Committee considered the report from the Director of Housing, Health and Wellbeing providing an update on the performance of the Grounds Maintenance Service for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) land and council owned homes provided by StreetScene.

The Grounds Maintenance Service was brought back in house from April 2021 from an external contractor and has been running for nine months, with the Council employing an additional seven staff to facilitate the contract.

The Committee commented that the service is improving and was the right decision to bring back in house, with improved tenant satisfaction through monthly surveys.

The Housing Advisory Group reviewed the update at their meeting on 6 January 2022 and endorsed the findings having first-hand experience of the improved level of service quality and responsiveness.

AGREED (unanimously) that the Committee noted the positive progress of the service.

Meeting closed at 7.54 pm.

Chairman