

NEWARK AND SHERWOOD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of **Homes & Communities Committee** Broadcast from Castle House, Great North Road, Newark, Notts NG24 1BY on Monday, 18 January 2021 at 6.00 pm.

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

Councillor Mrs K Arnold, Councillor M Brock, Councillor Mrs B Brooks, Councillor Mrs I Brown, Councillor M Brown, Councillor S Carlton, Councillor L Dales, Councillor L Goff, Councillor J Lee and Councillor Mrs S Saddington

ALSON IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mrs L Hurst

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: None

The meeting was held remotely, in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020.

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

NOTED (a) Councillor Mrs I Brown – Agenda Item No. 14 – Personal Interest.

90 DECLARATION OF ANY INTENTION TO RECORD THE MEETING

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

91 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 23 NOVEMBER 2020

AGREED (unanimously) that the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2020 be approved as a correct record and to be signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman informed the Committee that the order of business on the agenda would be changed. Agenda Item 14 – Yorke Drive Regeneration Update would be taken before the Items for Decision.

92 DISTRICT WIDE HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2020

The Committee considered the report from the Housing Development Officer providing the findings of the Newark and Sherwood District Wide Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) 2020 and accompanying Sub Area Analysis Report.

A brief presentation of the findings of the HNA was given to the Committee by Michael Bullock, Managing Director of Arc4. This is to be followed by a detailed presentation at a separate meeting on Monday, 8 February 2021 to which all

Members and stakeholders will be invited. This will give Members and stakeholders the opportunity to scrutinise the findings, broaden their understanding of the housing market and needs across the District and, if appropriate, challenge the Consultant on the findings being presented to test the assessment's robustness.

The report explained that the District Wide Housing Needs Assessment 2020 and Sub-Area Analysis had been commissioned to ensure the Council maintains a robust housing needs evidence base to inform the key strategic housing, planning and economic corporate documents.

AGREED (unanimously) that Members did consider and endorse the findings of the Newark and Sherwood Housing Needs Assessment 2020 (HNA) and accompanying Sub-Area Analysis Report.

### 93 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman reported on an item relevant to meeting in January and therefore appropriate to update on flood resilience grants. The administration of the property flood resilience grants began in June 2020 and provides up to £5,000 per property to ensure that it is more resilient to flooding in the future. To date, the Council has processed and approved 39 applications. Of these, 11 applicants have now completed the works and the grant has been paid. Lowdham is the main area from where the applications are being received but grants from Girton, Egmanton, Laxton and Weston have also been submitted.

The Chairman then highlighted the continued challenges around coronavirus and lockdown, continuing to support residents in need: HART completed a further 25 CEV welfare checks throughout December ensuring support in place to access essential supplies. Also assisted with the distribution of 60 Christmas gifts to those in need, collected by a resident of Sutton on Trent. Having strengthened the Community Relations Team by recruiting two additional colleagues to progress objectives in the Community Plan and deliver on the HART response across the District.

Despite Covid, teams continue to provide services to tenants and residents across a number of areas – currently operating an “emergency plus” services on repairs and investment delivery to protect our trades teams and our tenants as much as we can by focusing our service on emergency repairs and essential planned works and external jobs that can be completed in a safe way.

The Chairman went on to highlight the progression of research with tenants to understand their satisfaction with our services to form the basis of our Tenant Participation and Engagement Review and using tenant feedback. Updating the lettable standard of our homes with a proposal coming to the next Homes and Communities Committee. This will enable reinvestment to some of the savings that have been created bringing the housing service in house and noting services our tenants want us to improve. Preparations are being made for bringing the grounds maintenance of our rented homes into the Council and working with tenants to agree how we will monitor the quality of this service.

The Chairman went on to inform the Committee, how it is vitally important we

understand our responsibilities – particularly around the regulatory framework of housing. To this end, a paper will go to the next Committee to talk through the themes of the White Paper. The Chairman then invited the Committee members to suggest topics for “bitesize workshops” where officers would talk about different aspects of the Directorate – to widen the Committee’s knowledge and help be a good landlord that puts tenants at the centre of our services.

94 FORWARD PLAN - FEBRUARY 2021 TO JANUARY 2022

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for February 2021 to January 2022 with the Chairman inviting Members to put forward any items they would wish to be considered by Committee at a future meeting.

One Member requested that adequate kitchen facilities were explored for consideration in a future homelessness report.

95 YORKE DRIVE REGENERATION UPDATE

The Committee considered the report from the Growth and Regeneration Lead Officer providing an update to the Committee on progress within the Yorke Drive Regeneration Project.

The Growth and Regeneration Lead Officer confirmed to the Committee that there would be a net gain of 190 homes within a mixed tenure scheme. The Committee were encouraged that this will be an area that people will be proud of and by supporting the residents going forward, leading to less anti social behaviour.

AGREED (unanimously) that progress on the delivery of the Yorke Drive Regeneration Project is noted.

96 RESPONSIVE REPAIRS PRIORITIES

The Committee considered the report from the Assistant Business Manager for Housing Repairs and Asset Management to gain approval to adopt new responsive repairs priorities introduced temporarily in July 2020 to assist the Council with managing our service during the early days of the pandemic.

The report explained that this change will provide a more customer focused, simplified service to our customers and result in shorter waiting times generally whilst maintain high levels of satisfaction with the service.

The breadth of repairs contained within the Priority 1 (P1) category had also been extended and were highlighted in section 3.2 of the report.

The Committee noted the efforts made and thanked the team.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) the Committee approved the proposal to move to the three priorities system.

- (b) at the request of the Housing Advisory Group, a further report will be brought to this Committee in six months' time to provide an update on the impact of this service change with regard to performance, tenant satisfaction, complaints/feedback and training completed across both Customer Services and Responsive Repairs.

97 HOUSING OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT HANDLING – SELF ASSESSMENT

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Housing Management to update on the results of the self-assessment of the newly revised and approved Customer Feedback Policy against the Housing Ombudsman Effective Complaints Handling Self-Assessment.

The Committee having approved the revised Customer Feedback Policy at the November 2020 meeting.

The report highlighted how the Housing Advisory Group on 21 December 2020 had commented as well as views of involved tenants also included in this report and the Self-Assessment.

The Housing Advisory Group had agreed the current process was too long winded but that it was important to keep a tenant perspective on complaints. The group requested a programme of communications to tenants to ensure all are aware of how to make a complaint, how to provide feedback and the process involved.

Feedback and learning from complaints should be reported to the Tenant Scrutiny Panel at suitable regular intervals.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) Members approved the proposals outlined in section 3.2.
- (b) Members approved the amendments to the Policy, principally to remove the tenant panel stage of the complaint process and for complainants to be offered the option for an involved tenant to be involved in Stage 2 complaint investigations.
- (c) Members approved the creation of a reasonable adjustment policy to support our equalities commitments.
- (d) the production of a communications plan be provided to promote the new feedback policy as outlined in section 8.2.

98 THE DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL (2020) – IMPACTS FOR NSDC

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Public Protection advising the Committee of the new duties required by the Domestic Abuse Bill (2020) and the specific requirements for Tie One and Tier Two authorities. The report advised that the County Council is required to appoint a domestic abuse

local partnership board for the purposes of providing advice to the authority about the exercise of the authority's functions.

The report highlighted the implications for NSDC with reference to secure tenancies and victims of domestic abuse and homelessness.

AGREED (unanimously) that Members considered the implications of the Domestic Abuse Bill and how it will be implemented locally.

99 UPDATE ON THE DELIVERY OF THE SAFER STREETS INITIATIVE

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Public Protection to update Members on the progress made on the delivery of the Safer Streets initiative.

The report informed that progress is being made for which the district council is the lead involved with target hardening at Chatham Court, bicycle theft reduction including Chatham Court and improved secure bicycle storage for Newark, as well as redeployable CCTV for two areas as part of the safer streets initiative.

Chatham Court is to also have a Community Hub which will be provided within a vacant unit, planning permission is currently being sought for change of use. Partners such as police, Nottingham County Council and local support groups have committed to support the hub. It is expected to be available for use towards end of March.

The safer streets project is due for completion at the end of March 2021 and it is therefore proposed that a final report after completion of the project will be presented to the Committee in May 2021.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) Members noted the progress in the implementation of the Safer Streets project and;
- (b) to support the proposal to have a report at the completion of the project.

100 E-NEWSLETTERS

The Committee considered the report from the Assistant Director Transformation and Communications to propose a move from a twice yearly printed versions of the Voice, the council's newsletter, to an E-Newsletter format.

To incorporate within this move an alternative provision for tenants (previously a quarterly printed publication provided by the council's former housing management provider, Newark and Sherwood Homes).

The proposal was to not return to a primary printed publication (either for residents or for tenants) but replace this with an e-newsletter format that will be equally useable for both purposes, as well as a range of additional functionality.

The proposal was also presented to the Housing Advisory Group on 21 December 2020 and was well received, particularly with regard to modernising this communication channel.

Initial feedback included:

- a) A request for hard copies to be available in Community Centres and how we support people to opt in;
- b) How we might “push out” notifications to tenants that a new e-newsletter is available
- c) Further discussion on how we might be able to use the savings from this to invest in digital skills/equipment/connectivity for tenants.

The Committee discussed alternatives, noting that tenants receive quarterly rent statements in a paper format and additional papers can be included such as the tenants annual report. Feedback using this means to gain opinion for an e-newsletter or a printed version.

The need to engage with tenants, leading to more tenants becoming involved.

AGREED that:

- (a) the proposal to move to electronic E-Newsletters;
- (b) one paper newsletter provided once a year; and
- (c) to review in six months as to take up.

101 HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY – ANNUAL DELIVERY UPDATE

The Committee considered the report from the Homeless Strategy and Safeguarding Officer informing them of the progress achieved to deliver objectives within the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019 – 2024 and to inform of the findings of the Homelessness Review 2020.

After a jointly commissioned Homelessness Review was conducted in 2018 jointly with Mansfield District Council and Ashfield District Council, Newark and Sherwood District Council launched the Newark and Sherwood Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-24.

The report showed the activities within the first year to take the Council closer to eradicating homelessness and showed the ongoing commitment to support those in most need.

The Committee thanked the staff in providing the information in this report, again noting the request that adequate kitchen facilities were explored for consideration in a future homelessness report.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) Members noted the update on the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy's first year achievements and the findings from the Homelessness Review 2020.
- (b) also noted the partnership work that is being carried out to support the homeless strategy and frontline service delivery.

102 HOMES & COMMUNITIES REVENUE AND CAPITAL FORECAST OUTTURN REPORT TO 31 MARCH 2021 AS AT 30 NOVEMBER 2020

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Financial Services comparing the Revised Budgets for the period ending 31 March 2021 with the Projected Outturn forecast for the period, based on meetings with Financial Services staff and the appropriate Business Manager.

They are based on eight months' performance information on the Council's revenue and capital budgets, including:-

- General Fund (GF) Revenue
- Housing Revenue Account (HRA)
- Capital Programme

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 21 January 2021.

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

103 2021/22 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET AND RENT SETTING

The Committee considered the report from the Business Manager for Housing Projects and the Assistant Business Manager for Financial Services.

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

- a) provide the actual outturn of the HRA for the 2019/20 financial year (1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020) (column 2 of Appendix A1);
- b) examine the proposed income and expenditure on the HRA for the 2021/22 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 2022/23 to 2024/25 financial years (columns 5 to 7 of Appendix A1); and
- d) set rent levels and service charges for 2021/22 (with effect from the first Monday in April 2021).

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 (unanimously) that the following recommendations be made to the Council at its meeting on 9 February 2021:

- a) the HRA budget for 2021/22, as set out in Appendix A1 to this report;
- b) an increase of 1.5% (CPI + 1%) in the 2021/22 rents of all properties in the HRA as at 31 March 2021;
- c) an increase of 1.5% (CPI + 1%) in all 2021/22 service charges, except for the television (TV) licence costs payable by tenants of Gladstone House; and
- d) that the TV licence costs payable by tenants of Gladstone House in 2021/22 remain at £0.21 per week.

#### 104 HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE REVENUE BUDGET 2021/22

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

To seek feedback from the Committee on the proposed general fund revenue budget for the 2021/22 financial year (01 April 2021 – 31 March 2022) for those services which fall under its remit.

To seek feedback from the Committee on the scale of proposed fees & charges for 2021/22 for those services which fall under its remit.

To seek approval from the Committee for the 2021/22 base budget in Appendix A to be recommended to Policy & Finance Committee at its meeting on 22 February 2021 for inclusion in the overall council budget; and

To seek approval from the Committee for the 2021/22 fees & charges in Appendix D to be recommended to Policy & Finance Committee at its meeting on 22 February 2021 and Council at its meeting on 09 March 2021.

AGREED (unanimously) that the following recommendations be made to the Policy & Finance Committee at its meeting on 22 February 2021:

- i. the 2021/22 base budget in Appendix A for inclusion in the overall council budget to this report;
- ii. and to Council on 9 March 2021 the 2021/22 fees and charges in Appendix D.

105 SEVEN HILLS HOMELESSNESS PROVISION VERBAL UPDATE

The Committee considered the update from the Development Manager and the Senior Housing Options Officer regarding the Seven Hills Homelessness Project.

The Committee were informed that potential bidders had been sourced during December as a precursor to the tender process.

The build would involve linking properties together by way of a connecting door (similar to hotel rooms) allowing for flexibility in room sizes to capture varying needs.

The Development Manager advised that tenders would be going out in late January with a return in March, awarding the contract in April and to start construction in August/September, with completion in April 2022.

AGREED (unanimously) that the content of the update be noted.

106 HRA NEW BUILD DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Committee considered the report from the Development Manager providing the Committee with the up to date performance of the HRA new build development programme.

The HRA Development Programme has to date provided 190 additional new council homes with a further 70 homes currently under construction. This is the largest single contribution of affordable new build homes by any single provider within the district during this period.

A Committee Member referred to 3.8 of the report and requested a breakdown to the numbers of types of properties in each area. The Development Manager to provide and circulate to the Committee a full breakdown of the flats, houses and bungalows.

AGREED (unanimously) that:

- (a) the Committee noted the current position and progress of the HRA new build development programme delivery and the financial performance thus far.
- (b) Members feedback their observations about the content and any further information that may be useful in future reports.

107 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

That, under section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

108 HRA NEW BUILD DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL SITE REPORT

The Committee considered the exempt report regarding the HRA New Build Development Potential Site Report.

(Summary provided in accordance with Section 100C(2) of the Local Government Act 1972).

Meeting closed at 8.50 pm.

Chairman