

Minutes

Housing, Health & Community Committee Monday, 18th December, 2023

Attendance

Cllr Dr Barrett (Chair)	Cllr Mrs Pound
Cllr Mrs Davies (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Russell
Cllr Kendall	Cllr Sankey
Cllr Mayo	Cllr Slade

Apologies

Cllr Mrs Francois

Substitute Present

Also Present

Cllr Barrett
Cllr Barber
Cllr Gelderbloem

Officers Present

Lauren Stretch	- Director of Housing
Kim Anderson	- Corporate Manager Communities, Leisure & Health
Angela Abbott	- Corporate Manager - Housing Needs and Delivery
Carol Burton	- Corporate Manager - Technical Services
Nicola Marsh	- Corporate Manager - Housing Estates
Zoe Borman	- Governance and Member Support Officer
Adam Aldridge	- Corporate Manager - Green Spaces
Paulette McAllister	- Programme Lead - Strategic Housing Development Programme

LIVE BROADCAST

[Live stream to start at 7pm and available for repeated viewing](#)

293. Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Cllr Mrs Francois. No substitute was present.

294. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 18th September 2023 were agreed as a true record.

295. Chairs report

The report highlights the work achieved by the Housing and Community Teams to date.

Cllr Dr Barrett announced that the New Homes Bonus figures had today been published for the period October 2022 to October 2023 and the number of empty homes in Brentwood had reduced by 127 which was positive. There are 439 additional homes in Brentwood but there had been no affordable homes built in the area which meant Brentwood had missed out on a substantial bonus as a result.

Cllr Kendall requested that the number of people on the housing waiting list be added to the Homeless Data within the Chair's Report.

Members noted the report.

Cllr Dr Barrett **PROPOSED** and Cllr Mrs Davies **SECONDED** a motion to Vary the Order of the Agenda to hear Item 11 next. This was agreed by Members.

296. Housing Grounds Maintenance Review

Grounds Maintenance services to the Housing Stock has historically been provided by the depot. However, the last known service level agreement (SLA) was drawn up in 1991, over 30 years ago.

Being that the service level agreement is dated, it has become difficult to accurately note the time and activity on site and the original requirements have somewhat changed.

This means, at present, we are unable to recharge the service charge to Leaseholders which is impacting on the income to the Housing Revenue Account.

As such, a decision was taken to review the specification of works to all housing sites, including garages, amenity greens and communal gardens. In order to price against the specification, the depot requested a bill of quantities that housing was unable to provide due to a lack of mapping on site.

An external mapping company has since been appointed to conduct an exercise to log all boundaries of HRA land as well as note the number and size of greens, hedges, and shrubs etc.

Once this is received, the depot will be in a position to reprice for the whole HRA contract and importantly break it down site by site to allow Housing to charge the correct service charges to both leaseholders and Tenants.

Mrs Marsh summarised the report.

Members welcomed the report and felt it would bring much needed clarity for residents.

297. Brentwood Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The Brentwood Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Appendix A) sets out the five-year plan to improve the health and wellbeing of residents in Brentwood and reduce the health inequalities at every stage of residents' lives.

The Strategy sets out the partnership approach to influence the wider determinants of health to make the biggest difference in our communities. The Strategy has been co-produced by board members, those with lived experience and informed by what the relevant data is telling us.

Mrs Anderson summarised the report.

Members thanked officers for their report adding it was a good reflection of what had been discussed over the last year.

Members thought it would be useful if there was detail around the current strategy and what had actually been delivered.

Concerns were raised regarding residents' expectations around GP services. They are currently not able to see a GP but are being signposted to other healthcare professionals. There needs to be better communication to residents.

Members requested key data for Brentwood with regard to suicide and loneliness be incorporated into the annual report. Mrs Anderson advised the report was in draft form and comments were welcomed to enable these points to be built in. There are overarching themes to the strategy which cover the GP surgeries.

Following a full discussion a motion to **APPROVE** the recommendations was **MOVED** by Cllr Mrs Davies and **SECONDED** by Cllr Dr Barrett.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and it was **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY**:

To review and give comments on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024- 28 (Draft) (Appendix A).

Reason for Recommendation

The Brentwood Health and Wellbeing Strategy has been developed in partnership with the Health and Wellbeing board members who include statutory partners such as Essex County Council, Brentwood and Basildon Alliance together with Voluntary and Community Sector partners. The Strategy is also aligned to the Essex Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Fit for Future Physical activity and Sports Strategy for Essex Southend and Thurrock the Essex Children and Young People's Plan as well Brentwood Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2020-25.

298. Compliance and Repairs Service Update Presentation

A presentation was given by Ms Carol Burton and Mr Chris Houlihan of Axis on the Compliance and Repairs Service update.

Members noted an improvement since the last presentation and asked for clearer data regarding targets and trend analysis going forward.

Officers confirmed that residents should communicate with Brentwood Council and not Axis. Although there are still improvements to be made, internal communication improvements are ongoing which will help the Council to inform residents. Officers are moving towards a firm partnership with Axis to the benefit of residents.

299. Strategic Housing Delivery Programme (SHDP)

This report summarises progress since the last committee in September 2023 on a pipeline of new affordable homes through the development and regeneration of various Housing Revenue Account (HRA) owned sites.

Ms McAllister summarised the report.

Members congratulated officers for receiving a Highly Commended at the Essex Housing Award ceremony for Harewood Road Regeneration Site.

Following a full discussion the report was noted.

300. Fees & Charges

Fees and charges made by the Council for various services are reviewed on an annual basis by the relevant Committees relating to the services provided. Recommended amendments to the fees and charges are incorporated into the budget setting process to take effect from the following financial year.

Ms Stretch summarised the report.

Following debate a motion to **APPROVE** the recommendations was **MOVED** by Cllr Mrs Davies and **SECONDED** by Cllr Dr Barrett.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and it was **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY**:

- 1. To approve the proposed fees and charges to be sent for approval at the FAIR committee**

Reasons for Recommendation

The Council has a number of fees and charges relating to the services it provides. As part of the budget setting process, these charges are reviewed on an annual basis.

Whilst some of the fees and charges are statutory, and therefore determined through legislation, the Council must also review its charges for discretionary services to ensure that they reflect the current costs of service provision.

301. Housing Debt Write Off

In July 2023 the Council introduced a new Former Tenant Debt Recovery Agency to assist with the collection of all former tenant debts. This triggered a review of all outstanding debts.

Following this review, a number of accounts have been identified as requiring write offs for debts where all avenues of recovery have been exhausted, the debt is statute barred (6 year old debt) rendering it unrecoverable for legal action or the debtor has passed away and there is no money in the estate to cover the debts.

Mrs Marsh summarised the report.

Following discussion a motion to **APPROVE** the recommendations was **MOVED** by Cllr Mrs Davies and **SECONDED** by Cllr Dr Barrett.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and it was **APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY**:

1: To agree that the following debt amounts are presented to the FAIR committee for approval for write off.

A: Former Tenant Debt £66,663.87

B: Temporary Accommodation Debt £122,607.67

C: Miscellaneous Debt £13,056

Total: £202,327.54

Reasons for Recommendation

The overall debt write off figure being proposed is £202,327.54

By writing these debts off officers can focus on the recovery of the debts we are able to redeem and work more efficiently.

302. Rent Setting 2024/2025

This report seeks the recommendations of the committee on the proposed rent and service charge levels for 2024/2025.

The recommendations will be considered by FAIR Committee when the final recommendation will be made as part of the budget setting process. The final decision will be made by Ordinary Council on 28th February 2024.

Mrs Marsh introduced this report.

Members recognised the need for the increase in the rent setting and reiterated the need for social and affordable rent within the borough.

Following a full debate a motion to **APPROVE** the recommendations was **MOVED** by Cllr Mrs Davies and **SECONDED** by Cllr Dr Barrett.

A vote was taken by a show of hands and Members **APPROVED**:

1. To apply a 7.7% (CPI+1%) increase to all Social and Affordable Housing Properties

2. To apply a 7.7% (CPI+1%) increase to Shared Ownership and General Fund Property Rents

3. To apply formula rent to all new tenancies from April 2024

4. To apply a 7.7% (CPI+1%) increase to all non-council tenant garage rents

5. To apply a 7.7% increase to all council tenant garage rents

6. To note that service charges have been reconciled and charges have been increased or decreased so they are brought in line with actual costs and that no increase will exceed CPI plus 1%.

Reasons for Recommendation

The recommendation is to follow government guidelines which proposes to increase rents by 7.7%, for 2024/25. This figure is CPI from September 2023 which was 6.7% +1%.

The proposed increase will contribute to funding the current services provided as well supporting the development of the capital programme and housing development plans.

When considering the rent setting the following assumptions have been considered:

- The financial viability of the HRA business plan
- Provision for the repairs & maintenance capital programme
- Development for new homes in the borough
- Affordability for tenants
- Investing in services to the tenant receives the best service delivery.

It is also important to note that during the Autumn budget, the government announced that the local authority housing allowance for the rent element of benefits would be increasing. Whilst this amount is not yet set, this will benefit Tenants who are entitled to that particular benefit and assist with their rent payments.

303. Leasehold Major Works Payment Options

In 2023, the Council saw an increase in section 20 notification of works to leaseholders and some of these were anticipating bills in excess of £20,000. Although we reviewed the Leasehold payment options policy in 2022, we have come to realise that due to the level of bills, the timescales attached to some of the payment options, may not be viable for a high number of leaseholders.

In addition to the above, we have also been approached by a higher than expected numbers of leaseholders asking if we will buy their property back due to financial concerns further highlighting that residents are struggling with the cost of living.

In order to assist with the financial pressures, we are proposing to review the payment options policy one year early to include additional options which we hope will ease the pressure.

Mrs Marsh summarised the report.

Following discussion the report was noted.

304. Urgent business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting concluded at 20:20