

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 28 October 2020

Present: Councillor J McManus (Chair)

Councillors J Bird J Johnson
A Brame I Lewis
G Davies J Robinson
P Hayes S Whittingham

Absent: Councillor M Sullivan

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everybody to the first meeting of the Housing Committee.

2 APOLOGIES

No apologies had been received.

3 MEMBERS CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests and to state the nature of the interest.

No interests were declared.

4 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

Three questions were received from members of the public:

Victoria Harris asked:

“Would it be reasonable to support a clause in the planning application that matters of Leasehold with the current residents should be resolved before the proposed estate is built?”

Answer given by Chair: Thank you for your question. I’m afraid that this is not a relevant matter that the local authority as planning authority can legally take into account when determining planning applications.

Jessica Harris asked:

“The Competition and Markets Authority are investigating miss-selling allegations against Persimmon Homes for the way they have sold properties on not only our estate, Mersey View, but scores up and down the country.

The government has said it is committed to bring forward leasehold legislation as soon as time allows, what would the council's thoughts on this matter be and how would they see fit to support and advocate for their residents?"

Answer given by Chair: Thank you for your question. The Council notes that there is an ongoing investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority and we understand the Government will be looking at legislation to address the issues going forward. There is existing legislation - the Leasehold Reform Act 1967 which allows tenants to buy out their freehold subject to certain terms and payment. However, the Act does have some limitations and may not be helpful to all long leaseholders. As and when proposals for new legislation are brought forward by the Government the Council will consider its response to those proposals and any other proposals which may be made by the Competition and Markets Authority. I would like to recommend that I write to the Minister to put forward the necessary steps asking for at least a timetable to be set out for action. This really does need to be resolved as soon as possible. I am aware of the disparity and problems which a lot of current leaseholders face and lack of regulation regarding unacceptable charges and fees which are associated with this practice, and it needs to stop.

Tim Baker asked:

"The Local Authority in Cardiff supported the local residents affected by leasehold and were preparing to take Persimmon to court, would Wirral Council support such action were it to lead to this?"

Answer given by Chair: Thank you for your question. The action in Cardiff was taken by the local authority's Trading Standards Service. In 2014, Wirral Council took a decision to stop operating a consumer advice service as part of Trading Standards and as such, since that date Wirral Trading Standards only investigate criminal matters. Advice in relation to consumer issues is now provided by the National Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline. Wirral Trading Standards are aware that there is an ongoing investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority and have advised that residents may wish to contact that agency directly regarding their individual cases.

5 **2021/22 BUDGET PROCESS**

Alan Evans, Director of Regeneration and Place introduced his report which provided the Housing Committee with details of the process for budget setting for 2021/22 and described the financial position for 2021/22, which as at Quarter 1 was deficit of £45m, and the actions being put in place to mitigate the gap.

These actions included a 5 stage phased approach and included the timeline for the 2021/22 budget setting process when budget proposals were presented to the Policy and Resources Committee for the recommendation to Full Council to set the 2021/22 budget.

Members were apprised that as this was a transition year, proposals had been identified and would continue to be presented to the Committee by Officers. The Committee was however encouraged to identify its own proposals for Officers to work up, if within the timescale, to be included for the 2021/22 Budget. For future years this would become the usual process and throughout the year the Committee would be identifying proposals for Officers to work up for the following years budget. Members noted that a workshop session in respect of the budget was scheduled to take place at the conclusion of the formal committee meeting.

Resolved – That the Councils’ current financial position and process for the 2021/22 budget in this transition year be noted.

6 BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Alan Evans, Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report of the Director of Resources that informed that through the development of Wirral Council’s new Governance arrangements and the approval of the Wirral Plan 2025 (currently being refreshed to reflect strategic priorities, as a result of Covid-19) the Authority had committed to developing a budget and performance monitoring framework, which honoured the Council’s dedication to a more accountable, transparent way of conducting business, policy formation and decision making.

It was proposed that the Performance Framework be modelled on the Covid Dashboard set up at the start of the Coronavirus pandemic. This would enable clear and accessible data to be presented in a timely and meaningful way.

Members noted that there were a very wide range of data sets that could be included in the Dashboard, and it was proposed that the specific selection would be co-created with members to ensure it was of most relevance and benefit to members.

Aligned with this, the Wirral Plan 2025 was currently being refreshed to reflect the Covid-19 situation and emerging Recovery Plans. This Plan would set out what the Council could commit to delivering over the next 5 years. Wirral’s public services: the Wirral Partnership had a shared duty to improve the quality of life for residents and the report set out the ambition for the Borough including its economy, residents and services.

The Director’s report further set out the ambition for:

- A prosperous, inclusive economy where local people could get good jobs and achieve their aspirations.
- A sustainable borough that was not only environmentally friendly but one which played its part in urgently responding to the environment and climate crisis

- Brighter futures for young people and families – regardless of their background or where they live
- Safe, vibrant communities where people want to live and raise their families.
- Services which help people live happy, healthy, independent, and active lives, with public services there to support them when they need it.

Resolved – That

- 1) **Members note the proposals outlined in the report for shaping future Performance monitoring reports, and**
- 2) **that further discussions take place with the Committee Chair and Group Spokespersons in early November so that they can shape monitoring reports for the purposes of this Committee.**

7 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Members gave consideration to the report of the Director of Law and Governance that set out the proposed Housing Committee Work Programme 2020/21 as detailed in the appendix to the report.

The report informed that the Housing Committee, in cooperation with the other Policy and Service Committees, was responsible for proposing and delivering an annual committee work programme. This work programme should align with the corporate priorities of the Council, in particular the delivery of the key decisions which were within the remit of the Committee.

It was envisaged that the work programme would be formed from a combination of key decisions, standing items and requested officer reports. The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year.

Members suggested consideration be given to the possibility of Council House building, opening of a Housing Revenue Account, Homelessness, travellers and their right to housing and negotiated stopping, empty properties and social landlords, being added to the Committee's work programme.

The Head of Operational Housing Services advised that the committee might also wish to give consideration to the Property Pool Plus consultation and the Financial Assistance Policy used for Housing Services and grants, being added to the Committee's work programme.

The Chair and Director of Regeneration and Place confirmed that the above proposals would be added to the upcoming work programme.

Resolved - That the proposed Housing Committee work programme for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year be noted.