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HOUSING COMMITTEE

Thursday, 18 November 2021

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	J McManus (Chair)	
	Councillors	A Brame	M Collins
		J Bird	A Gardner
		P Martin	I Lewis
		T Smith	H Gorman
		H Cameron	
<u>Deputies:</u>	Councillor	J Walsh (For Cllr S Whittingham)	

11 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed Members of the Housing Committee, Officers and viewing members of the public to the meeting.

12 APOLOGIES

The Chair confirmed apologies the apologies of Councillor Stuart Whittingham, with Councillor Joe Walsh deputising.

13 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No such declarations were made.

14 MINUTES

Resolved – That the minutes of the Housing Committee held on 19 October 2021 be approved and adopted as a correct record.

15 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

16 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The Chair reported that two questions had been received from members of the public.

Question 1:

The Chair invited Ruth Molyneux to put her question which was:

“What are the needs and targets for affordable housing for Wirral?”

Answer:

There are currently 13,693 people on the Housing Register. 19% have an assessed housing need and been awarded a priority banding accordingly, (Band A the highest through to Band C). Those with the highest priority Band A equate to 207. The pressure for meeting housing needs is a challenge and the Council recognises this, as does this Committee.

The Council is in the process of concluding its Strategic Housing Needs and Market Assessment as part of the local plan. The emerging SHMA which is still to be formally approved recommends the need for 374 additional affordable homes each year. The Council's proposed target which is still subject to viability testing and is currently recommended to be 20% of all new homes.

However, we are striving to meet the demands within the Borough and it was anticipated as part of Wirral's Delivery Plan for 2021/22 a total of 400 affordable housing units would be completed and 700 units started on site. The current position at the end of quarter 2 is that 235 units have completed, with 650 on site. It is further estimated that the target 400 units will be surpassed which is positive.

Supplementary Question:

"When will an affordable housing strategy plan be published?"

Answer:

Affordable Housing targets for each area in the borough will be included within the local plan which is due to be approved by Members early in the new year. A new Affordable Housing Statement is currently being prepared and informed by the key findings emerging from the Strategic Market Assessment. This Committee will be considering this statement for approval before the end of the municipal year.

Question 2:

The question was submitted by Giuseppe Roberto, who was not able to attend the meeting in person. His question was read out by the Solicitor, Matthew Neal on his behalf:

"During the first lock down, Wirral Council ensured zero street sleeping with Everyone In.

But, with no-fault evictions starting again, the housing market on Wirral is still not meeting everyone's housing needs and many people live in insecure or over-crowded homes. I understand there are still over 2,000 people on housing waiting list assessed as high priority.

The Wirral Plan 2021-2026 states "A new plan will be set out outlining our needs and opportunities for the delivery of affordable housing with our partners.

How will more affordable housing be delivered?”

Answer:

There are broad range of mechanisms to deliver affordable housing, and this includes both the direct involvement of the Council and by us working in our ‘enabling role’ with partners.

Specific examples of what this entails includes: -

- Bringing forward the Councils own assets and/or acquiring land to deliver a range of housing to meet our Regeneration ambitions. i.e. the former Rock Ferry High School site where 186 homes are being delivered in partnership with a Registered Provider. The Legacy Scheme within the Birkenhead Regeneration area where 100 units of affordable housing will be delivered.
- The Council acquiring our own affordable housing. The approval to purchase some units having previously been approved by this Committee earlier in the year.
- Bringing forward early development of affordable housing, through existing and emerging delivery vehicles, such as the Wirral Growth Company and the Urban Development Corporation.
- Working closely with our Registered Providers to secure grant and access funding for delivery.
- Through planning policy, we seek to ensure that new market housing developments in Wirral meet the current targets for provision of affordable housing, wherever it is viable.

17 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS

The Chair reported that no statements or petitions were received.

18 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

The Chair reported that no questions from Members had been received.

19 PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT 2020/2021

The Assistant Director of Health & Wellbeing and Public Health Consultant introduced a report that presented the Public Health Annual Report 2020/2021. It was noted that the annual report was a statutory requirement. It described the enduring health inequalities in Wirral, the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these differences in health outcomes and the recommended actions that needed to be taken to improve everyone’s health.

Members asked questions on the demands placed on the social housing sector on the Wirral and rises in costs in private sector rental accommodation.

Resolved – That Housing Committee endorsed the recommendation detailed within the Public Health Annual Report.

20 **WIRRAL PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STOCK CONDITIONS**

The Housing Standards Manager introduced a report which set out the condition of Wirral's private sector housing stock and the range of interventions taken by the Council to remedy any problems.

The report provided an overview of how the Council was working to improve sub-standard housing stock conditions, ensuring the Council's available resources were prioritised to the areas of highest need to support vulnerable residents and bring empty properties back into use,

Members asked a range of questions on the Houses of Multiple Occupation licensing scheme, how the Council verifies if a property is vacant, how hazards in privately rented properties are reported to the Council and how the Council engages with housing associations, Members also asked questions about the voluntary accreditation scheme for landlords, obstacles to bringing empty properties back into use and prosecutions of landlords.

Resolved – That the content of the report be noted.

21 **UPDATE ON LOW CARBON HOUSING RETROFIT PROGRAMME**

The Principal Strategic Housing and Investment Officer introduced a report which set out the scale and challenge of carrying out low carbon housing retrofit of Wirral's housing stock. Low carbon housing retrofit supports at least three aims of the Wirral Plan 2021-26:

- Delivering regeneration, growth and transport ambitions;
- Creating jobs and supporting local businesses; and
- Responding to the Climate Change Emergency.

Members asked a number of questions on properties in conservation areas being made low carbon, publicity of the programme to landlords and costs involved.

Members thanked the Principal Strategic Housing and Investment Officer and the Housing Standards Manager for their reports and noted that they had been of excellent quality.

Resolved – That the Committee noted the report and further offered its support to the current programme of work.

22 **2020/21 REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN**

The Senior Finance Manager introduced a report which provided a summary of the year-end revenue outturn and capital position for the Housing Committee as at the end of March 2021 for the 2020-21 financial year.

Members asked questions on reserves and whether money could be reallocated.

Resolved – That:

- 1. The year-end revenue outturn variance of £0.102m favourable position for 2021/22 be noted; and**
- 2. The Capital Programme Report be noted.**

23 **HOUSING QUARTER 2 MONITOR REPORT**

The Senior Finance Manager introduced a report which provided a summary of the projected year-end revenue and capital position for Housing Committees as at the end of Quarter 2 (to September 2021) of the 2021/22 financial year. The report provided an overview of budget performance to enable the committee to take ownership of their specific budgets and provide robust challenge and scrutiny to officers on the performance of those budgets.

Members asked questions on slippage, waiting lists for residents that have applied for disability grants and staff resourcing issues.

The Chair noted that she had been delighted to present to the Motor Neuron Disease Foundation recently and that the Council had been recognised for the work it has done for people with Motor Neuron Disease. The Chair thanked officers for the work they had done.

Resolved – That:

- 1) the projected year-end revenue forecast variance of £0.071m favourable position as reported at quarter 2 (Jul-Sep) of 2021-22 be noted;**
- 2) progress on the achievement of approved savings and the projected year-end forecast position at quarter 2 (Jul-Sep) of 2021-22 be noted;**
- 3) the reserves allocated to the Committee for the future one-off commitments, be noted; and**

4. the projected year-end capital forecast expenditure position of £6.926m as reported at quarter 2 (Jul-Sep) of 2021-22, be noted.

24 **HOUSING COMMITTEE BUDGET REPORT**

The Director of Regeneration of Place introduced a report to consider the feedback and outcomes from recent Budget Workshops. The workshops enabled officer and Member liaison on proposed budget options, to facilitate discussion and allow direction to be obtained on further analysis required.

The Director of Regeneration and Place noted that the content of the report had been superseded by the recent governance reviews and that a further workshop would likely be arranged once clarification on the new budget process was received.

Resolved – That the Budget Workshop feedback and outcomes as detailed in appendix 1, being reported to the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration, be agreed.

25 **WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE**

Members gave consideration to a report of the Director Regeneration and Place that set out the proposed Housing Committee Work Programme 2021/22 as detailed in the appendix to the report.

The report advised that the Housing Committee, in co-operation 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.

The report provided the Committee with an opportunity to plan and regularly review its work across the municipal year.

Resolved – That the Housing Committee Work Programme for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year be noted.