

Decisions of the Housing and Growth Committee

25 October 2022

Members Present:-

Councillor Ross Houston (Chair)
Councillor Anne Clarke (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Zahra Beg
Councillor Richard Cornelius
Councillor Humayune Khalick

Councillor Kath McGuirk
Councillor Ella Rose
Councillor Daniel Thomas

Apologies for Absence

Councillor Paul Edwards
Councillor Alex Prager

Councillor Sarah Wardle

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Housing and Growth Committee held on 5 September 2022 be approved as a correct record.

2. ABSENCE OF MEMBERS

The Chair thanked Members for their attendance at the additional meeting of the Housing and Growth Committee.

Apologies were received from Councillor S Wardle who was substituted by Councillor J Conway.

Apologies were received from Councillor P Edwards and Councillor A Prager.

3. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND NON-DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Councillor K McGuirk declared an interest in relation to item 11, Annual Performance Review of Registered Providers, by virtue of being a tenant of Notting Hill Genesis (Registered Provider).

Councillor R Houston declared an interest in relation to item 11, Annual Performance Review of Registered Providers, by virtue of being a nominal shareholder of Notting Hill Genesis (Registered Provider).

4. REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER (IF ANY)

There was none.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS (IF ANY)

There were none.

6. MEMBERS' ITEMS (IF ANY)

There were none.

7. COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair noted that this would be taken later in the agenda for future meetings.

During the course of the Housing and Growth Committee one additional item was identified and a request was made during item 12 for the Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for a report on Homelessness to come to the January meeting.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the Work Programme.

8. HOUSING & GROWTH PRIORITIES UPDATE

The Head of Housing and Regeneration presented the report supported by other Officers. They highlighted a number of areas including successful bids for tree planting to help improve the public amenity spaces on estates and the progress on digital access and the launch of a business support programme.

The Chair welcomed the focus on support for the cost of living crises and fuel poverty. They also reported to the Committee that since the publication of the Agenda a decision had now been made to retain Hendon Library in its current location and refurbish the building.

Other Members of the Housing and Growth Committee queried whether the changes at a national level had impacted on the Council's ability to deliver. The Chair responded that the country was in a very different economic position compared to May with a doubling of interest rates. The Council was awaiting information on changes to the levels of government funding available through the financial settlement for local authorities. In the wider economy the rising interest rates, cost of living crises and inflation in building material costs also meant that some projects may be delayed as developers reduced their activity which would impact CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) receipts.

A question was raised as to whether there were any concerns with regards to developers active locally. A case was cited where a developer had become insolvent whilst rectifying works. The Chair responded that if increases in interest rates and building costs continued it could have an adverse impact both for the Council and developers and this could result in more issues. In extreme situations it might be appropriate for the Council to step in where there was a community benefit but this would be looked at on a case by case basis.

Members asked how the success of measures to support local businesses would be measured and whether actions taken added value. Officers reported that suitable performance measures were being assessed as part of the process.

With regards to the tree planting projects it was noted that this was positive and that this would also be important when planning new estates due to the health and wellbeing benefits that they brought. Officers responded that they were looking to engage local

people to help identify where planting could have the most positive impact and were working with Barnet Homes to secure funding for existing estates.

Finally, Members commented on the positive news on affordable homes and affordable rented properties as an administration priority. The Chair noted that this report would be a regular item to ensure that targets were reviewed.

That the Committee notes the report.

9. SOLO PROVISION

The Assistant Director Estates and Acquisitions presented the report. They highlighted that the provision would allow the Council to provide better one to one support to help the Council fulfil its corporate parenting responsibility. The Estates Service had worked with the Children's and Families Service to identify a suitable property where limited work was needed to get it up to the required standard.

Members of the Housing and Growth Committee welcomed the report. The Chair noted that from a Corporate Parenting perspective that the paper was important to all Members as the issue was cross-cutting for the authority and a priority for Members as Corporate Parents.

RESOLVED unanimously by the Housing and Growth Committee that:

- 1. The Committee approve the total cost to purchase and renovate a residential property to be used as Solo Provision for looked after children in the borough.**
- 2. Subject to successful completion of all due diligence activity, approving completion of the purchase of the property be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive or the Executive Director of Resources.**
- 3. If the Council does not for any reason proceed with the purchase of the property, authority be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive or the Executive Director of Resources to authorise the purchase (inclusive of all costs/fees) of an alternative property in the borough which is suitable for the intended purpose.**

10. REVIEW OF THE OPENDOOR HOMES (ODH) ACQUISITION PROGRAMME

The Director of Growth and Development, Barnet Homes presented the report. The programme was working to reduce the costs of temporary accommodation and had already delivered savings. There were concerns about the future of the project due to the increase in interest rates and they were looking at how to maintain and sustain the delivery programme.

Members were positive about the longstanding project and queried the split of properties in and out of the Borough and the Council's relationship with the neighbouring boroughs. Officers responded that 40% of the properties were within the Borough with the majority of the rest being in neighbouring authorities. There were processes in place to communicate with those boroughs both during the purchase and placement phases.

The Council continued to look at ways to revise and improve the programme including through different financial packages.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Growth Committee:

1. Approve the continuation of the Opendoor Homes purchasing programme for up to 230 units, as per the terms of the loan facility.
2. Note the update on delivery of placements for care leavers.
3. That the Committee delegates authority to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, to agree terms for loan drawdowns to complete the purchase of the next tranche of 70 homes.

11. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW OF REGISTERED PROVIDERS

The Officer presented the report highlighting that Registered Providers in the Borough had an important role with supporting residents with health and wellbeing, landlord services and other support for 9,000 households. The Council liaised with them on a variety of areas including looking at the impacts of welfare reform and building safety changes to ensure that they were implemented.

Members queried how information on complaints was collated and their role as advocates as Members dealt with complaints from residents with the Registered Providers. Officers confirmed that Members should use the contact list that had been provided in most cases, however where it appeared to be a major issue the team should be informed.

The Chair noted that under the Localism Act the Council had the ability to question and scrutinise Registered Providers and this is something which the Council should look to do. This would give the Registered Providers the opportunity to highlight their positive work as well as to receive feedback.

Members questioned the situation with Clarion Housing and their ability to provide statistics due to a computer systems failure. The Officer confirmed that Clarion Housing were back up and running providing new data, however they were still working to restore information which had resulted in a gap in the data.

It was noted that there were positives with regards to welfare advice and support which could provide good practise that the Council, not just Barnet Homes, could use to help support people in private sector accommodation who would otherwise not have access to it. Members also felt that the Registered Providers involved in regeneration also represented an opportunity to ensure good quality redevelopments making use of Section 106 contributions and requiring affordable housing provision to be on site.

The Chair noted that BOOST (Burnt Oak Opportunity Support Team) was continuing to do good work that should be commended.

The low satisfaction levels at Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing were queried. Officers responded that this was being monitored and there had been a positive increase in more recent surveys.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the Barnet Annual Performance Review of Registered Providers 2021/22 as attached in Appendix 1 of the report.

12. HOUSING STRATEGY AND HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEG

The Head of Housing and Regeneration presented the report and that this was part of the process to incorporate changes into the strategies to reflect the housing market, updated evidence base and emerging themes.

Members welcomed the report but queried the level of evidence provided on rough sleeping in the Borough. In particular whether there were specific trends related to whether individuals were from within the Borough and their needs, for example around language. The Director of Growth and Development, Barnet Homes responded that the work undertaken during the pandemic had tackled some of the pent-up demand and that they would be looking at how things had subsequently changed. It was highlighted that Homeless Action in Barnet would be a useful point of contact.

Members noted that homelessness was not a new issue and that there should already be data available and work to prevent the risk of recurring homelessness. The Director of Operations & Property, Barnet Homes confirmed that there is a lot of data available but that the intention of the focus in the strategy regarding data was to use it better more broadly to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage. This included assessing and using data, not just on housing but right across the Council's various data sets, to better predict triggers earlier to allow targeted interventions to prevent homelessness and that the new strategy includes a focus on this.

Following the debate, the Chair asked Officers to provide an update to the January meeting on Homelessness in Barnet. This should cover in more detail the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping in the in Borough so that Members could provide their input for consideration in the strategy.

RESOLVED that the Housing and Growth Committee:

- 1. Endorses the emerging themes for the new Housing Strategy and instructs the Deputy Chief Executive to prepare an updated draft strategy for consideration by the Housing and Growth Committee at its meeting on 23 March 2023.**
- 2. Endorses the emerging themes for the new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and instructs the Deputy Chief Executive to prepare an updated draft strategy for consideration by the Housing and Growth Committee at its meeting on 23 March 2023.**

13. ANY OTHER ITEMS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT

There were none.

14. MOTION TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee resolved – 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 involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended).

15. EXEMPT: SOLO PROVISION

RESOLVED that the recommendations as set out in the Exempt Report be approved.

16. ANY OTHER EXEMPT ITEMS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES ARE URGENT

There were none.

The meeting finished at 7.49 pm

