

Minutes of Health and Housing

Meeting Date: Thursday, 27 October 2022, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor D Peat (Chair)

Councillors:

J Alcock
S Atkinson
T Austin
I Brown
R Elms
S Farmer
K Fletcher

J Hill
M Hindle
B Holden
G Mirfin
D O'Rourke
M Robinson
R Sherras

In attendance: Chief Executive, Head of Regeneration and Housing, Head of Environmental Health Services and Senior Accountant

418 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

419 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 September 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

420 DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY, OTHER REGISTRABLE AND NON REGISTRABLE INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary, other registrable or non-registrable interests.

421 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

422 FIRST TIME BUYERS GRANT REVIEW

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report for Committee to consider amendments to the first-time buyer grant scheme.

The first-time buyer grant had been introduced in April 2022 for a 12 month trial period. The purpose of the grant was to assist first time buyers with core improvements that would improve the housing stock, but also help with energy efficiency. The scheme was based upon the energy performance certificate (EPC) and included but was not limited to boiler improvements, new windows, insulated doors, and all forms of insulation. The grant scheme had been generally well received, 11 grant applications has been received with 1 completed and 3 approved and in progress.

The report noted that the repayment terms were that a charge would be registered on the property with the grant to be repaid (in full) if the property was sold or ceased to be occupied as the main and only residence within a 5-year period of the grant commencing. If the property was sold after 5 years, the repayment would reduce to 50% of the total grant, however the charge would remain on the property in perpetuity. The terms had led to some potential applicants not pursuing the grant. As the charge issue appeared to be affecting take-up it was proposed that the repayment was aligned with other Council grant schemes. The following amendment to the terms was recommended:

- *The value of the grant award will be placed as a Local Land Charge against the property. This will remain registered with no inflation added until the point at which the property is sold. At that point the Council will be repaid the grant monies. In the event that the property is sold after a period of 5 years the grant repayment will reduce to 50% of the total grant award. **THE CHARGE WILL BE REMOVED AFTER 10 YEARS.***

There was discussion at the meeting regarding the purpose of the charge, and it was clarified that this was in line with other Council grant repayment conditions and was intended to ensure the grant was awarded to genuine recipients and would not be used for profit. It was also noted that under the conditions of the grant, at the Council's discretion, exceptional circumstances could be considered by the Health and Housing Committee if recipients were unable to remain in the property for the minimum term.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

- Note the information related to the first-time buyer grant and agree the amended wording to the grant repayment conditions as set out in the report, along with an amendment to the wording regarding property eligibility to read 'You may qualify if your property age is 10 years or older'.

423

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT UPDATE

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report updating members on the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and requesting approval for the use of additional burdens funding.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which had come into force in April 2021, aimed to make changes to better protect and strengthen the provision of support for survivors of domestic abuse. As the Tier 1 authority, Lancashire County Council (LCC) were responsible for assessing the need for accommodation-based support for victims of domestic abuse in their area, ensuring suitable strategies were developed and put in place, that coordination existed across the local authority area, and that mechanisms existed to ensure the requirements of the act were delivered and given "effect". As a Tier 2 authority, Ribble Valley Borough Council were required to co-operate with the Tier 1 authority, as far as reasonably practicable in delivering against the Act when requested to do so.

The report noted that in the Ribble Valley data collated through the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) from April 2021 to March 2022 recorded 321 domestic abuse related crimes, which was a 4.2% increase (up 13 offences) compared to the previous year. In 2021, 35% of domestic abuse victims fell into the 'financially stretched' category.

In response to the act LCC had launched their Domestic Abuse Services in May 2022. Implementation of the Safe Accommodation Strategy was led by the Lancashire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (LDAPB), on which Ribble Valley was represented by an Officer from Burnley on behalf of East Lancashire districts. The report included the current implementation plan for the draft strategy which members were invited to comment on. The strategy would be reviewed annually. The report noted that the draft plan included commitments to spending additional burdens funding provided by the government to assist in the implementation of the act, of which the Council had received two tranches of funding. An option was to use some of the additional burdens funding to provide a sanctuary scheme whereby additional security would be provided to enable survivors to remain in their own homes where appropriate.

A meeting was planned with County Officers to consider co-commissioning where the arrangement was consistent with the terms of the DHLUC funding agreement.

There was discussion at the meeting around the proposed sanctuary scheme which could be delivered in a number of ways, including by the Council or contracted out. Being able to support families to remain in their own homes where possible was a positive, which meant less disruption and that children could remain close to their existing schools. It was felt the scheme would be flexible without restricting the limited housing stock. There was support for a scheme, and it was suggested that the word 'sanctuary' be reconsidered which suggested moving away from your home. Members requested a report to the next Committee providing an update.

Councillor Mirfin declined to vote on this item due to sitting on a related Committee for Lancashire County Council.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Note the update to the act and agree to the draft actions set out in the report in relation to the draft Lancashire Accommodation Strategy.
2. Authorise the Director of Economic Development and Planning to investigate whether a sanctuary scheme for the borough would be a suitable way forward and to continue to develop a mechanism with LCC to ensure appropriate support to address identified needs can be established and report the outcome back to Committee for ratification before implementation.
3. Agree a request for a progress report at the next Committee meeting.

424

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR STRATEGIC HOUSING WORKING GROUP

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

- Approve the Draft Terms of Reference for the Strategic Housing Working Group.

425

AFFORDABLE WARMTH GRANT

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report updating Members on an Affordable Warmth Grant which had been offered to all Lancashire District Authorities by Lancashire County Council.

The Affordable Warmth Lancashire fund was announced by LCC in July 2022. The grants would be distributed to district Councils to assist residents on low incomes and those vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home by aiming at improvements such as insulation and efficient heating systems, and supplementing work with district housing authorities on existing schemes. The funding the Council could apply for was £41,315 and was subject to LCC approving proposals.

The report listed the eligibility criteria and considerations for the funding. The Council would be responsible for delivery and coordination of the scheme, however LCC should be referenced as the source of funding when the grant was being promoted or publicised.

The recommendation was to directly offer a grant of up to £4000 per property for:

- Servicing, repairs and replacement boilers and heating systems and associated works, including controls and replacement of unsafe heating appliances.

An online application process would require details of the applicant's vulnerability, income, and benefits to ensure they met the criteria. The applicant would need to supply 2 quotes for the work and if they met the criteria the Council would approve in principal and make payment when the work was completed.

There was discussion at the meeting around the LCC eligibility criteria and clarification was requested to confirm that applicants would require both a low income and at least one listed vulnerability in order to qualify. The number of applications was expected to be high, therefore there was concern around the amount of funding, which was calculated by LCC based on the number of houses in the Borough and was not driven by data relating to the high number of Ribble Valley residents with vulnerabilities. The scheme was welcomed, particularly because the income threshold was reasonable, and Members were keen to publicise the scheme as much as possible to residents, including a report to the Parish Councils Liaison Committee on 10 November 2022.

Councillor Mirfin declined to vote on this item due to sitting on related Committees for Lancashire County Council.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

- Endorse the grant scheme which is available to assist our residents based on the grant criteria from LCC, with clarification regarding the wording of the grant criteria and a report providing an update at the next meeting.
- Agree to report to Parish Councils Liaison Committee to raise awareness of the grant scheme.

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION FUNDING

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report updating Members on community integration in respect of the Ukrainian refugees living in the Ribble Valley.

Members were reminded of the Homes for Ukraine scheme under which the Council would receive a per guest payment of £1000 to support community integration. Part of this funding had been utilised by the Council's Homes for Ukraine Administrative Assistant working closely with the Ukraine Community in the Borough, and the support groups set up to assist with the refugees integrating into the community. The

Mayor had hosted a lunch for the refugees, and the Council had provided passes to our swimming pools. A pool party had also been held and a trip to Blackpool Pleasure Beach.

Following a recent Homes for Ukraine District Meeting a specific grant scheme had been created for Ribble Valley which community groups would be able to bid into. that involve projects and activities that benefit Ukrainian guests and sponsors would be encouraged however the specification was not prescriptive. The report listed the criteria which would be used to assess the suitability of bid proposals.

It was proposed that the Council utilise a proportion of the remaining funding already received, which was £12,000, for groups to be able to bid into. The grant would be administered by the Integration Team at LCC, and submissions assessed by a panel consisting of the Councils Ukraine Administrative Assistant and Housing Strategy Manager along with members of the LCC Integration Team.

Members supported a suggestion at the meeting that the Council plan a Christmas event for Ukrainian guests in the near future.

427

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SECTION UPDATE

The Chief Executive submitted a report providing Committee with an update on staffing levels and operational work levels in the Environmental Health Section.

The report provided statistical figures of the work undertaken by Environmental Health Staff in both financial years 2021 and 2022 (to date) and the current filled and vacant employment posts.

Since the last report to Committee on 18 March 2021 the department had suffered with depleted staff numbers, which continued to date. As a result, non-statutory functions such as dealing with waste related issues had become secondary in order to prioritise primary statutory functions such as food inspections and statutory nuisance investigations. It was noted that despite this the service was still unable to fulfil all of its primary functions. Staff were credited for their excellent work in keeping the department buoyant despite the challenges including the Covid pandemic which had further impacted resources.

The primary focus over the next 12 months was to aim to fill the vacant Environmental Health positions and achieve all statutory functions.

428

REVENUE MONITORING 2022/23

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Committee of the progress of the 2022/23 revenue budget as at the end of September 2022.

The comparison between actual and budgeted expenditure showed an underspend to date of £201,893 on the net cost of services, after allowing for transfers to/from earmarked reserves. Details of the variances to date were included in the report for information.

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information of progress on the 2022/23 capital programme for the period to the end of September 2022 for this committee.

At the end of September 2022 £329,515 had been spent or committed which equated to 9.2% of the annual capital programme budget for this committee. Of the ten schemes in the capital programme at the end of September 2022, three schemes were expected to be completed in-year, one scheme would not be completed in-year, three schemes were unlikely to be completed in-year, and three schemes were ongoing grants schemes.

Members were updated at the meeting that a consultant had been appointed regarding the Clitheroe Market Improvements scheme, that the expected delivery time for the Pest Control and Dog Warden vans was nine months, and that the Joiners Arms roof renewal scheme main roof work was expected to start in November 2022, with the rendering work part of the scheme expected to take place in Spring 2023.

430 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

431 MERSEY-CARE NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

Councillor David Peat submitted a report for information following the Council of Governors meetings on 6 September 2022 and 17 October 2022 for Mersey-Care NHS Foundation Trust. The report noted the appointment of a new Chairman and provided an update on the ownership of the Mersey-Care site. Following a Panorama programme detailing a similar service in Manchester, Mersey-Care had implemented increased checks and monitoring to provide assurance. The update on the Calderstones Retrenchment as at 30 September was that 44 residents remained, and assurance had been received about patient transfer safety and caring for staff.

432 LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL HEALTH & AUDIT SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor David Peat submitted a report for information following the Lancashire County Council Health and Audit Services Scrutiny Committee meeting on 21 September 2022. The main topic had been the Lancashire and South Cumbria New Hospitals Programme, which involved some combination of new or rebuild hospitals for Royal Preston Hospital and Royal Lancashire Infirmary, and a further update was expected in Spring 2023.

433 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the next item of business being exempt information under Paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

CHANGES TO THE ESTABLISHMENT - HOUSING ADMINISTRATION ASSISTANT

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report seeking Members approval of proposed changes to the Establishment in respect of a post within the Economic Development and Planning Directorate.

The existing post was part-time and had been subject to several temporary changes to contract to extend the hours of the post. It had therefore been currently extended to full time in November 2020 on a temporary basis. The report noted the capacity issues related to the pandemic and additional workloads being experienced within the department. It was considered that there was a need to create the post as full time on the establishment and Member approval was requested.

Members were keen to provide staff with job security, and it was confirmed that the existing post holder would not be required to re-apply for their position.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

- Approve a change to the Establishment to alter the post as noted in the report to a full time post and that the matter be referred to Personnel Committee for their consideration.

UPDATE ON GRANT APPROVALS

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report for information on recent approvals for five Disabled Facilities grants, six Ribble Valley Adaptation grants, and three First Time Buyer Energy Efficiency Grants. No new Landlord/tenant Capital Grants had been approved since the last committee report.

MINUTES OF WORKING GROUPS

Committee received the minutes of the Strategic Housing Working Group meeting of 4 October 2022.

There was discussion at the meeting around the Housing Waiting List review, and the option of a Choice Based Letting system was still being considered.

The meeting closed at 7.47 pm

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact the committee clerk, Rebecca Tait rebecca.tait@ribblevalley.gov.uk.