

Minutes of Health and Housing

Meeting Date: Thursday, 26 October 2023, starting at 6.30 pm
Present: Councillor S Hirst (Chairman)

Councillors:

J Alcock	J Atherton
S Atkinson	M Robinson
T Austin	C McFall
I Brown	A Wilkins-Odudu
R Elms	N Stubbs
D O'Rourke	G Hibbert

In attendance: Chief Executive, Head of Environmental Health Services, Strategic Housing Officer, Head of Financial Services and Head of Strategic Planning and Housing

Also in attendance: Councillor S O'Rourke

411 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors S Farmer and R Ray.

412 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 August 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

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

414 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

415 CHANGES TO DFG POLICY

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report seeking Committees approval for amendments to the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) Policy and to undertake a six-week consultation on the proposed changes.

The DFG Policy could be amended in order to reflect the needs of the Borough. Officers had identified two proposed minor amendments which would ensure that the Policy was clear to all applicants who required grant assistance.

The proposed amendments to the policy were highlighted in yellow within the DFG Policy, which was attached to the report. The amendments were as follows:

- Include the exception policy as to when repayment of the grant is required. The detail of exception policy was not previously included in the policy.
- In the case of DFG top-up grants, that the grant will be registered as a charge on the property. This had been identified during a recent audit assessment and it was requested that this was made clear to applicants of the grant.

The proposed Policy that Members were asked to consider would be made available on the RVBC website for public consultation for 6 weeks.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve the proposed amendments highlighted in DFG Policy as attached to the report.
2. Approve a six-week consultation on the proposed changes.
3. In the event of no negative consultation feedback following the six-week consultation period, delegate approval of the amended Policy to the Director of Economic Development and Planning.

416

ASSISTED PURCHASED SCHEME

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report updating Committee on the previously approved equity share scheme and seeking approval to take the scheme forward, renamed as an Assisted Purchase Scheme across the whole Ribble Valley.

The intention was for the Assisted Purchase Scheme to assist first time buyers to access the housing market, through the availability of a loan which would be registered as a charge on the property.

In 2004 RVBC had launched the Homebuy scheme, whereby the Council offered up to 25% as a loan towards the purchase of market properties against a maximum purchase price of £180,000. In the same year, RVBC had helped 8 first time buyers access the housing market. It was now suggested that with lenders insisting on deposits higher than 10%, that the scheme was run again, with applicants requiring to demonstrate that their income alone did not allow them to purchase the property at its open market value.

In March 2022, Committee had agreed for Officers to explore an equity share scheme option utilising £422k of S106 contributions, as noted in the report. It was suggested that the name be changed to Assisted Purchase Scheme, to avoid confusion with other Government schemes, and that it was made available to all first-time buyer households. The proposed scheme along with the eligibility criteria were included in the report for Members to consider.

Members discussed the scheme and queried if the administration fee was necessary. Officers confirmed that there would be significant legal work required for each application. It was also noted that the 2 bedroom limit for couples may be revised to a 3 bedroom limit for all applicants.

Officers explained to the Committee that it was necessary to obtain further legal information before the scheme could be implemented. Members also queried the trigger for repayment of the scheme should joint applicants separate or divorce, which

would result in the Land Registry being updated. Members were asked to approve the scheme in principle, and a report would be brought back to Committee should legal issues not be resolved.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Approve proceeding with the delivery of the Assisted Purchase Scheme (changed from Equity Share Scheme) across the Borough, in accordance with the criteria as set out in the report.
2. Agree that the scheme can be made available to first-time buyers across the Borough and not limited to the parishes where the S106 monies were collected.
3. Agree to the inclusion of a £350 administration charge per grant.
4. Request that Officers provide updates to Health and Housing Committee in respect of the uptake and any issues with the delivery of the scheme.
5. Delegate authority to the Director of Economic Development and Planning the implementation of the scheme subject to the confirmation of the Council having the necessary legal powers to do so.

417

FEES AND CHARGES 2024/25

The Director of Resources & Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report seeking approval on proposals to increase this Committee's fees and charges with effect from 1 April 2024.

Members were reminded that the Council's fees and charges were reviewed on an annual basis as part of the budget setting process.

The report noted that:

- Policy and Finance Committee had given guidance for service Committees to consider a 4% inflationary increase in the level of income raised from fees and charges.
- After applying the recommended percentage increase, proposed charges had generally been rounded up or down to minimise any problems with small change, therefore the individual percentage of increase varied.
- The overall increase based on the budgeted demand levels was expected to be 3.98%
- No inflation related increases were proposed for Dog Offences Fixed Penalty Notice charges and Environmental Health Fixed Penalty Notice charges in 2024/25, as these were set by Committee within government guidelines for the maximum and minimum levels and did not increase according to inflation.

The full proposed list of fees and charges for 2024/25 for Members consideration was included in the report.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

Approve the 2024/25 fees and charges proposed for this Committee as contained in the Annex to the report, for implementation from 1 April 2024.

418 CAPITAL MONITORING 2023/24

The Director of Resources submitted a report for information of progress on the 2023/24 capital programme for the period to the end of September 2023 for this committee.

At the end of September 2023 £691,955 had been spent or committed which equated to 17.9% of the annual capital programme budget for this committee. Of the ten schemes in the capital programme, at the end of September 2023, four schemes were expected to be completed in-year, five schemes were unlikely to be completed in-year, and one scheme had been completed.

419 REVENUE MONITORING 2023/24

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Committee of the progress of the 2023/24 revenue budget as at the end of September 2023.

The comparison between actual and the original estimate budget showed an underspend to date of £101,608 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.

420 LCC - SPECIAL NEEDS HOUSING ASSESSMENT

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report providing Members with a copy of the Housing Needs Assessment for Accommodation with Support Plan for Lancashire 2023-2038.

Lancashire County Council (LCC) had commissioned the Assessment which set out the level of need for accommodation with support for older people, people with learning disabilities/autistic, people with significant mental health needs, and people with physical disabilities/long term conditions.

Full details were included in the report.

421 UKRAINIAN INTEGRATION FUND

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report informing Members of the successful applications that had been supported using the Homes for Ukraine Community Integration Grant.

Two community integration grant scheme opportunities had been delivered, both offering £12,000 in total, up to a maximum of £3,000 per scheme. The first was advertised in October 2022, and the second round in June 2023, with the bids considered on 18 July 2023 at a joint panel with LCC and RVBC officers. All approved schemes were detailed in the report.

422 HOMELESSNESS AND REFUGEE UPDATE

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report providing Committee with information about the level of homelessness and refugees in the Borough.

The report provided details such as the number of homeless applications in the second quarter, a snapshot of the number of households in temporary accommodation, details of the home for Ukraine scheme and the Afghan resettlement scheme.

423 MINUTES OF WORKING GROUPS

Committee received the minutes of the Strategic Housing Working Group meeting of 11 October 2023.

424 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor Austin provided a report on The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee meeting of 13 September 2023, and an update on the new Hospitals planned for Preston and Lancaster.

425 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

426 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report providing Committee with an update on the Domestic Abuse Act, and the Council's duties, and seeking approval to make changes to the Council's temporary accommodation and provide additional training to the housing staff.

To assist with the extra burdens associated with the new requirements of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 the Council had received a sum of new burdens funding. In March 2023, Committee had been advised of suggested initiatives in relation to the Act which would utilise the new burdens funding. The suggested initiatives aimed to meet the Council's duties and assist LCC in enabling victims of domestic abuse with the Ribble Valley to access support. The report provided Members with updates on the initiatives and the further actions required as advised by LCC.

The report highlighted that the Council had received conflicting information from LCC. RVBC Officers had met with the Domestic Violence Team at DHLUC in order to clarify the duties of LCC as the Tier 1 Authority, and RVBC as the Tier 2 Local Authority, which were noted in the report. It was noted that should a DV victim present to RVBC they would be directed to LCC to undertake a risk assessment and source appropriate accommodation.

Based on the advice received from DHLUC, Committee approval was sought to revert the use of the Council's temporary hostel accommodation to mixed sex to include single females and families with males. It was proposed to accommodate single males in other units of accommodation. As the Council was the Housing Authority, it was further proposed to use up to £600 of the new burdens funding to provide basic training for the housing team in respect of domestic violence issues.

RESOLVED THAT COMMITTEE:

1. Agree to allow single females and families, including families with males, to be housed within our temporary hostel accommodation when they present to the Council as homeless.
2. Note that any DV victims who present to the Council's Housing team will be referred to LCC so they can provide the necessary assistance.
3. Agree to use up to £600 of the extra burdens funding to provide training for the housing team in respect of the links between domestic violence and homelessness.

427

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SECTION UPDATE

The Chief Executive submitted a report providing Committee with an update on the Council's Environmental Health Service.

Since the last report to Committee on 27 October 2022 the department had successfully recruited two new full-time staff members to the fill the positions 'Lead Food Environmental Health Officer' and 'Environmental Health Technical Officer (Environmental Protection and Housing)'. It was reported that the department was in a much better position than 12 months ago. Further resource was required in emergency planning and risk/assessing sampling water supplier, and a strategy was being explored. New training had been undertaken, and the team were now dealing with both statutory and non-statutory functions.

The primary focus over the 12 months that followed was to fulfil the remaining vacant positions and achieve all statutory functions, whilst continuing to deal with non-statutory issues that were of the greatest concern to members of the public.

428

GRANT APPROVALS UPDATE

The Director of Economic Development and Planning submitted a report informing Committee of recent approvals for various Disabled Facilities Grants and Landlord Tenant Grants.

The meeting closed at 7.21 pm

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