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Meeting	Housing and Community Safety Policy and Scrutiny Committee
Date	19 October 2021
Present	Councillors Fenton (Chair), Pavlovic (Vice-Chair), Heaton, Hollyer and Vassie
Apologies	Councillors Baker and Wells

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## **24. Declarations of Interest**

Members were asked to declare, at this point in the meeting, any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests or any prejudicial or discloseable pecuniary interest that they might have in respect of the business on the agenda.

Councillor Pavlovic declared a pecuniary interest in relation to the item Finance and Performance Quarter 1 Monitor 2021/22, he highlighted the section about MP requests and that he worked part time for one of York's MP's whose office made the requests.

## **25. Minutes**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

## **26. Public Participation**

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

## **27. Finance and Performance Quarter 1 Monitor 2021/22**

The Committee considered the Finance and Performance Quarter 1 Monitor for 2021/22 and enquired about the debt and options regarding repayment and the length of time to repay. Officers outlined that the Council would consider options when it was due to start its repayment which would consider things such as interest to be paid, it was noted that the Council faced a challenge as under the current government model the Council did not make money on social housing and when the Self-financing

Settlement was agreed with government forecasts had put Council revenue in relation to housing as higher than they have been.

The impact of things such as Covid-19 and Brexit were touched on and it was confirmed that the Council's Housing Delivery Program had seen delays of up to 9 months. Officers did highlight however, that the investment from the private sector in house building in York was strong, but this would mean a continued issue surrounding access to resources in the short term.

Members highlighted issues raised by residents about accessing broadband and superfast broadband, even on streets where it had been installed. Officers asked that Members contact them about any specific examples and they will raise with suppliers. Finally Members enquired about the access to data and officers noted its availability online and agreed to share the Key Performance Indicator link for members.

Resolved:

- i. The Committee noted the financial and performance management position across Housing & Community Safety.

Reason: To ensure expenditure is kept within the approved budget and performance is effectively scrutinised.

## **28. Housing Service - impacts of Brexit and Covid**

The Committee received a wide ranging update on the impact Covid-19 and Brexit had had on the work of Housing Services. It was noted that the team had continued to work to deliver a 24 hour service during Covid as well as undertaking work to stop anyone sleeping rough during the first lockdown. Areas such as Voids were highlighted as particularly having been affected which had created a backlog of work. Accessing resources and trained trades workers were also highlighted as significant problems which had affected the work of the service.

Staffing levels in Housing Services were raised by Members and whether it had been affected by the Councils additional controls on recruitment related to Covid-19. Officers explained that due to the Council finances and the impact of Covid-19 additional scrutiny on recruitment had been put in place by the Corporate Management Team however, this had not been a block on recruitment where it was required, instead, it was noted that recruitment of those with skills such as joinery had been hard due to a lack of qualified people available in the job market. Officers highlighted that

wage inflation could affect Council recruitment in the medium term especially as the Council is facing a problem of an aging work force.

The backlog of work was discussed and it was highlighted that a spike in work was reported after all work undertaken at Council properties resumed. Offices highlighted how this had created long list of cases, 159 Void properties, and an increased number of FOI's, MP letters, and Councillor enquiries. Members acknowledged the significant challenges faced by the team but highlighted that council tenants with a long backlog of issues requiring maintenance was a serious issue to providing homes fit for habitation and that the Council had a duty to people who in most cases would not be able to find alternative accommodation.

The budget for Housing Services was discussed and it was noted that the Council had set a key challenge to reduce its number of Void properties, this would make more homes available for those on the housing waiting list, but also allow the Council to make more back in rents. Officers also highlighted that the underspend on repairs from the previous year due to Covid, was carried forward into this year's budget for the service, Members did however, highlight that despite the overspend being brought forward the Executive had removed £200,000 from the Council's budget for repairs. Members also enquired about rent arrears and whether this was a serious issue, officers noted that usually tenants would aim to pay and this was not a major issue for the Council.

The issues around volatile energy prices were raised and it was noted that a Housing Hardship Fund was available that officers highlighted to residents, as well as, directing people to support such as that from York Advice Network residents were always encouraged to get the best energy deals. Members suggested that Community Hubs could potentially support residents about finding energy deals and support. It was also noted that would to create more energy efficient homes would have a positive impact for residents energy bills.

Resolved:

- i. Noted the impact of Brexit and Covid-19 on Housing Services;
- ii. Officers to explore what support could be provided at Community Hubs regarding energy bills.

Reason: To ensure the Committee remain aware of the ongoing challenges within Housing Services.

## **29. Housing Energy Efficiency Strategy**

Officers introduced the Housing Energy Efficiency Strategy, they noted the Government's plans for the UK to become net carbon zero by 2050 and York's commitment to achieve this by 2030. It was confirmed that more than 30% of York's Co2 emissions came from housing. Discussing the strategy Members requested additional context surrounding the cost of retrofit in York be provided, they highlighted that a full retrofit would be an expensive challenge but the Council could benefit from outlining an estimated cost.

Members raised the prospect and challenge of creating programs that would encourage investors to get involved in retrofit. It was discussed what programs could be used such as upfront investment from the Council. It was confirmed that there were mechanisms to retain costs incurred to retrofit properties that are subject to right to buy.

The Committee discussed current housing data to ensure the Council was aware of the level of installation in Council properties. The Local Plan was also raised and what policies were outlined around the required level of energy efficiency. Officers noted that the Council was working on the Housing Supplementary Planning Document to go alongside the Local Plan which would include requirements relating to energy efficiency of homes being built.

Resolved:

- i. That the Committee requested that the Housing Supplementary Planning Document be brought to the Committee to be reviewed prior to its finalisation.

Reason: To allow the Committee the opportunity to feed into the production of the Housing Supplementary Planning Document.

## **30. Report on the Homeless Winter Night Provision 2021/22**

The Committee were provided with a update on the Homeless Winter Night Provision 2021/22, it was confirmed that Covid-19 had reduced the services initial numbers of homelessness. The Council had maintained relationships with hotels that provided additional accommodation in the first lockdown should the Council need to access it again. Members were provided with a wide range of work that was undertaken to support people to avoid becoming homeless and supporting those that do.

Members enquired about the use of former care homes after the Council had been able to reopen Cromby House. Officers noted Cromby House had provided a good opportunity but that there was not another former care home in a state that would make it suitable to use in the same way. Enquires were also made about Probation Services recommending people present in York, officers noted while not common it could be to do with a lack of provision in a home authority. Members also discussed the projected rise this year in people presenting to the service and whether this was expected to return to previous year's levels, Officers noted that the number of people presenting fluctuated and not one indicator could be accounted for the rise, therefore, it would be challenging to predict a decrease. They did highlight areas such as a rise in domestic violence having an impact and that work continued to be focused on the prevention of homelessness to ensure people remained in safe housing.

Resolved:

- i. The Committee noted the report on the Homeless Winter Night Provision 2021/22.

Reason: To ensure the Committee can provide input into the Councils the Homeless Winter Night Provisions for 2021/22

### **31. Work Plan**

Members considered the Committees work plan for 2021/22.

Resolved:

- i. The Committee work plan was noted.

Reason: To ensure the Committee has a plan of work for 2021/2022.

### **32. Urgent Business**

The Committee received a presentation on the Decent Homes Standard which outlined the changes made since 2016 which showed how the Council identified homes that did not meet the standard. The Committee requested that a report providing an update on the homes not currently confirmed as having passed being a 'decent home' be brought to the Committees meeting in April.

Resolved:

- i. Report on the Decent Homes Standard be brought to the Committees meeting at the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2022 meeting.

Reason: To provide the Committee with a update on the work undertaken to tackle homes not identified as a 'decent home'.

Cllr Fenton, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.34 pm and finished at 8.38 pm].