
Meeting	Housing and Community Safety Policy and Scrutiny Committee
Date	23 September 2019
Present	Councillors Fenton (Chair), Pavlovic (Vice-Chair), Baker, Mason, Vassie, Musson and D Myers (Substitute)
Apologies	Councillors

14. 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. None were received.

15. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the previous meeting of the committee held on Monday 22 July be approved and signed as a correct record.

Matters arising from the previous minutes:

- On page 3, it was noted that the new temporary accommodation at James Street was expected to be ready in October. Members asked the Head of Housing for further information regarding how this was progressing.
- On page 3, last paragraph 'the Executive Member was asked to clarify the budget of the YorHome scheme, it was noted that the Executive Member would look into this and report back to the committee'. – Members requested an update on the position regarding this, it was agreed that the Scrutiny Officer would circulate this response.
- Members noted that the Older Persons Accommodation Needs Update would be discussed at the Health and Adult Social Care Policy and Scrutiny Committee on 23 October.

16. Public Participation

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

17. Update Of The Housing Revenue Account Business Plan

Members received a report which outlined the purpose and scope of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, the main priorities of the current Business Plan and the proposed additional areas of priority for a 2019 revised Plan alongside a similarly revised Asset Management Strategy.

Denis Southall, Head of Housing (CYC), Patrick Looker, Finance Manager (CYC) and Adrian Waite, Director of Adrian Waite (Independent Consultancy Services) Limited (AWICS) were in attendance to answer questions from Members.

Adrian Waite circulated a briefing paper which provided his view on the position as regards the HRA. Members were pleased to note that he considered that the HRA appeared to have very healthy finances. Arising from this, he considered that the council had a range of options. Due to his experience of working with a number of local authorities, Adrian Waite was able to advise Members and provide insight as to how other authorities organise their HRA and housing stock, business planning and strategic issues.

Adrian Waite provided the following information in response to questions from committee members:

- He explained that he had worked for approximately 12 councils. He also provided consultation on the LGA peer review programme.
- There is no scientific way of judging an authorities spend. His role is to encourage authorities and ask them questions about what they will spend money on.
- The council is in a good financial position to spend on new stocks.
- Regarding service charges, the council are spending 2million (m) on providing services and receive a return of only 1.3m, he suggested there may be an opportunity to charge more.
- The provision for major repairs was increased by 29%, the government's own research had recommended increasing provision by 43%.

- Right to Buy policy is reducing the stock of social housing in York. Much of the proceeds of these sales go to the Treasury rather than being retained locally. It could be argued that local authorities should have discretion over the operation of the 'right to buy' scheme.
- The council's general reserves are at about a year most authorities would be happy with 3 months, he considered that there was no right or wrong way of managing reserves.

Officers provided the following information in response to questions from committee members:

- The Finance Manager explained that the law requires that the council shows its business plan over a 30 year period.
- There was a short explanation around how the HRA balances and options available. The council has the option of: (1) borrowing to buy capital assets, then you will have a HRA that balanced with high debt from council stock. Or (2) the council could minimise debt and spend less on capital. Or (3) somewhere in between.
- On the £17m in other earmarked reserves, the Finance Manager clarified that £10m of this was money put into the new building reserves and £7m was to pay for James House, Lincoln Court in the capital programme.
- An additional £1m had been agreed by the Executive towards achieving the Decent Homes Standard and a further £1m had been allocated for investment in carbon reduction programmes and energy efficiency.
- In relation to consultation undertaken to establish people's needs and inequality. The Equalities Board were tackling homelessness which is a long term priority for the council in relation to its priority for improved mental health.
- The Housing Manager explained that their department were working with Health colleagues to develop a mental health pathway and funding had been agreed with consideration to sites to take this forward. This would be in relation to supported or assisted living projects.

Resolved: Members noted the report and appreciated the opportunity to consider and comment on the outlined priorities.

Reason: In order for Members to receive information regarding the HRA Business Plan.

18. Update On Compliance With The Decent Homes Standard

Members received the above report which provided an update on the Council's performance, as a registered provider, against the Decent Home Standard criteria.

David Binns, Technical Manager from Decent Homes and Mike Gilsenan, the Head of Building Services were in attendance to present the report and to respond to questions.

The following information was provided in response to questions from Members:

- Regarding the 9% of housing stock that did not meet the decent homes standard, this was almost entirely due to the absence within the council's records of electrical certification. Without this information it was necessary to make a presumption of 'failure'. This does not mean that electrical testing had not been undertaken.
- 2006 was the last time that the council had considered stock condition data.
- The stock condition survey allows the council to gain complete accurate data to inform the Housing Revenue Business Plan.
- Regarding building standards for new builds for social housing the Head of Building Services provided assurance that the most recent homes, for example, the 165 properties built at Lowfield were built to a higher standard than was required with carbon passive standard (meaning electrical heating bills will be around £60 a year).
- Market sales and social housing are built to the same standard and are offered at affordable price.
- Regarding doors, it was confirmed that the standard of door was reviewed under part 4b and 4c of the report.
- In relation to carbon passive and renewable technology there are very few contractors trained to undertake this area of work.
- Action for the Scrutiny Officer - to check what procurement is in place to govern procurement in relation to housing works since 2008 in relation to the council's sustainable procurement plan strategy agreed at Executive in 2008 where they agreed a sustainable procurement plan.

Resolved: The committee considered and noted the current

status of the council housing stock condition survey being carried out.

Reason: In order for members to receive information regarding service delivery.

19. Work Plan

The Chair explained that at the 5 September Area Planning Committee meeting, a referral was made to this committee for a possible topic for scrutiny regarding social housing take up and prohibitive service charges. The Scrutiny Officer explained that he would prepare a feasibility report for the committee to consider how they would like to take this topic forward.

Cllr Fenton, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 7.28 pm].