
INFRASTRUCTURE, HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Draft MINUTES

Of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on Tuesday 20 November 2018 between 7.30pm and 8.39pm.

Councillors present:

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| Martin Trevett (Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy) | |
| Andrew Scarth (Lead Member for Housing) | |
| Diana Barber (substitute for Cllr Hiscocks) | Angela Killick |
| Joanna Clemens | Joan King |
| Peter Getkahn | Jon Tankard |
| Heather Kenison | Kate Turner (substitute for Cllr |
| Sarah Nelmes (substitute for Cllr Hofman) | Giles-Medhurst) |

Officers Present: Kimberley Grout, Head of Housing Services
Kimberley Rowley, Head of Regulatory Services
Nigel Pollard, Section Head Financial Planning & Analysis
Mike Simpson, Committee and Web Officer

Also In attendance: Deborah Allen, Housing Options Officer

Councillor Andrew Scarth in the Chair

IHED23/18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen Giles-Medhurst (substitute Member Cllr Kate Turner), Paula Hiscocks (substitute Member Diana Barber), Margaret Hofman (substitute Member Sarah Nelmes).

IHED24/18 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Infrastructure, Housing and Economic Development Committee meeting held on 25 September 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

IHED25/18 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

IHED26/18 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

IHED27/18 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT – PERIOD 6 (End of September)

The Section Head Financial Planning and Analysis introduced the report, which had been produced for each of the Council's Committees. Members were asked to review the details relating to this Committee.

A Member questioned the increased budget for Parking and Street Enforcement, and was informed that the figure shown was carried over from the previous year and had been agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee.

A Member asked whether the Council was sure the £42,000 variance was not required for Better Buses. The Head of Regulatory Services replied that budgets were subject to variations and unpredictable factors, but it was believed that sufficient funding had been allocated. Members pointed out they encouraged improved bus services but were aware of a number of viability issues affected service provision.

A Member asked why an outturn variance of £101,000 was reported for the current period, and the Section Head Financial Planning and Analysis said it was not an underspend but a re-phasing of the budget for use in the next Committee year.

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chairman the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the Budget Monitoring Report – Period 6 (end of September) be noted.

IHED28/18 STRATEGIC, SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PLANNING 2019-2022

The Chairman invited Members to comment on the report, which enabled the Committee to comment to the Policy and Resources Committee on the draft Strategic Plan, the Committees draft service plans, and the growth bids to support them for the three years commencing on 1 April 2019.

A Member referred to the Better Neighbourhoods section (1.1.3) and said the Council was hypocritical to claim it wished to preserve the Green Belt, judging by the scale of building taking place and identified on such land. .

The Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy said the housing figures were a very difficult target to achieve given the numbers involved, and another Member said it was good to have a plan in place to protect the Green Belt and look to develop brownfield sites.

A Member asked how it would be possible to protect the Green Belt from being built on when planning approval was required within such a narrow timeframe (national PIs 8/13 weeks) A Member said the present arrangement was preferable as otherwise applications would go straight to appeal and the LPA would lose any control of the decision making process. The Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy said the challenge of providing the number of housing units set by the Government was of great concern.

A Member asked whether there was still a brownfield register, and the Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy said it wasn't possible to force people to put brownfield sites forward for development.

A Member said that the Council should clamp down on developers who do not meet the agreed targets for affordable homes. The Head of Regulatory Services said that if applicants did not propose policy compliant levels of affordable housing they had to justify their proposals and submit appropriate viability studies. Officers are unable to refuse applications that are not policy compliant if accompanying viability studies proved they were not viable. Officers were currently reviewing work around affordable housing provision and viability. However, in the event of an appeal, the Council would face legal costs if it lost the case and could not justify the level of affordable housing it sought.

Councillor Nelmes moved, duly seconded, that the report be noted and agreed its contents in principle, but deferred the matter on how to achieve the aims until a later date.

The Member asked that the same course of action also be taken with the three Draft Service Plans 2019-22, for Economic Development, Regulatory Services and Housing.

A Member referred to the Strategic Plan and said it was simply a wish list. The Member said that's what, in effect, a Strategic Plan was.

The Chairman asked the Head of Housing Services for clarification of what DFG meant, as mentioned in the report, and similarly RDGS. It was explained the abbreviations related to Disabled Facilities Grant and Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme respectively. The Head of Housing Services was then asked to explain the difference between performance indicators HN01 and HN03. The Head of Housing advised that HN01 refers to a snapshot figure which is taken on the last day of the quarter; HN03 refers to the throughput figure of all households that have been accommodated during the year.

The Committee was invited to comment on the Regulatory Service Plan. It was advised that the plan comprised a list of what the Council aimed to achieve. The Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy moved the recommendations.

The Head of Regulatory Services explained the rationale for the PID relating to the integration from Firmstep to Uniform for licensing applications, which would improve efficiency and reduce costs. The Chairman noted that the stated budget for the project was £20k and estimated costs were £19k, and asked whether the remaining £1,000 in the budget was likely to be sufficient to progress it.

A Member said that exceeding £20k would not necessarily result in the termination of the PID, but that an approach to the Finance department for more funding would be required.

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chairman the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

That the Strategic Plan, Service Plans and PID for 2019-22 be noted.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

IHED29/18 THREE RIVERS CYCLING & WALKING STRATEGY – SCHEME DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, 2019/20-2020/2021

The Head of Regulatory Services introduced the report which detailed the Strategy and current work programme of cycling and walking improvement schemes in the District.

A Member asked whether Councillors and local businesses had been asked for their views regarding the establishing of a cycle hub within the District, to which it was stated that the Leavesden cycle hub was a starting point at local level. The proposal by County was for a rental scheme similar to that used in London, but Members expressed concerns locally over the prospect of dumped bicycles.

Councillor Sarah Nelmes moved the recommendation in the report, duly seconded.

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chairman the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee agreed to progress the Cycle Strategy and the current work programme of cycling and walking improvement schemes in the Three Rivers District.

IHED30/18 PARKING MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME 2019/21

The Head of Regulatory Services introduced the report and said the proposals were no longer proposed as a 12 month scheme, but tied in with the County's three year programme.

A Member asked that in future the programme include estimated dates of completion. The Head of Regulatory Services said the nature of the projects made estimating completion dates impractical due to outside factors and internal resourcing issues, to which the Member replied it was preferable to give an estimated completion date, even if it was several years away, rather than have no information.

A Member suggested the implementation of a traffic light system in which projects were assigned red, amber and green lights according to their estimated completion timeframes. A Member said it would be useful for Councillors to understand the lengthy process by which such a strategy is drawn up. Another Member said he would not wish to increase the burden on the Senior Transport Planner

A Member said she would like to see a full timeline for parking projects.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation was declared CARRIED by the Chairman the voting being unanimous

RESOLVED:

That the parking management programme 2018/19 and proposed programme for 2019/21 be agreed, subject to target dates for project completion being included.

INFRASTRUCTURE

IHED31/18 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT, LOCAL LAND CHARGES SEARCHES AND PARKING SERVICES FEES AND CHARGES

The Head of Regulatory Services presented the report which provided an overview of all discretionary charges for Development Management, Local Land Charges Searches and Parking.

The Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy moved, duly seconded the recommendations as follows:

- i) There is no change to the fees and charges associated with the Development Management pre-application service or the Parking Service. The existing fees and charges are accepted into the Committee's budgets, which are recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee.
- ii) Fees and charges for street naming and numbering are increased in line with inflation at 2.5%.
- iii) A further review of search fees will be required if HCC increase their fees from April 2019. This review will be conducted on the basis of cost recovery.

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chairman the voting being unanimous

RESOLVED:

That the recommendations for development management, local land charges searches and parking services fees and charges be agreed.

HOUSING

IHED 32/18 PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR OFFER POLICY UPDATE

The Head of Housing Services introduced the report which required a review of the policy following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.

A Member asked for clarification with regard to how local connections were prioritised when trying to accommodate homeless people. The Head of Housing Services explained that different criteria applied for local connection under homelessness duties to local connection for the Council's Housing Register. The homelessness local connection rules are statute and have a lower threshold than those currently listed in the Council's Housing Register. Therefore, this is taken into account when prioritising households for the private rented sector.

A Member was concerned that some private landlords did not accept tenants claiming benefits. The Head of Housing Services said that while some potential tenants were unemployed, many do work but were low-paid and therefore claimed benefits to top-up their income, and it was a problem if landlords applied a blanket embargo. The Member asked whether the Council knew of a sufficient number of landlords that accepted clients receiving benefits, and the Head of Housing Services said that a bigger issue was more a case of finding enough available and affordable properties.

The Member asked whether clients were housed in Three Rivers or if some were relocated to other areas. The Head of Housing Services said personal circumstances were considered when arranging accommodation, such as family ties, schooling, and employment, all of which are covered within the policy to ensure that any property offered is suitable.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee Agreed the updated policy to ensure Council compliance with relevant legislation.

IHED33/18 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee reviewed the work programme.

The Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy was committed to ensure a revised date was included for the Cedars Estate conservation area report, A new date of 2020 was included as there was a need to prioritise the Local Plan.

RESOLVED:

That the items included in the work programme be noted.

CHAIRMAN