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# **INFRASTRUCTURE, HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES**

Of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on Tuesday 19 March 2019 between 7.30pm and 8.05pm.

Councillors present:

Andrew Scarth (Lead Member for Housing)	
Martin Trevett (Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy)	
Joanna Clemens	Angela Killick
Paula Hiscocks	Joan King
Chris Lloyd (substitute for Cllr Giles-Medhurst)	Heather Kenison
Sarah Nelmes (substitute for Peter Getkahn)	Jon Tankard
Margaret Hofman	

Officers Present: Kimberley Grout, Head of Housing Services  
Kimberley Rowley, Head of Regulatory Services  
Temitope Opeyemi, Finance Manager  
Sally Riley, Assistant Finance Manger  
Mike Simpson, Committee and Web Officer

Also In attendance:

Geof Muggerridge, Director of Community & Environmental Services  
Councillor Joy Mann

**Councillor Andrew Scarth in the Chair**

**IHED 42/18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Cllr Chris Lloyd substituted) and Councillor Peter Getkahn (Cllr Sarah Nelmes substituted).

**IHED43/18 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Infrastructure, Housing and Economic Development Committee meeting held on 8 January 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**IHED 44/18 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

**IHED 45/18 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

**IHED 46/18 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT - PERIOD 10 (end of January)**

The Finance Manager introduced the Budget Management report, which had previously been presented to the Policy and Resources Committee. She said the revenue variance of £91,000 was due largely to the absence of large scale Planning applications.

The favourable figure which related to capital was because of the rephrasing of the budget into the following financial year.

A Member said the figure of £173,730 listed as 'other variances' was too high to not be supported by further information, and asked the Finance Manager for written details of the surplus. The Chairman said the figure was a total for all Committees, and that the business in hand related to the Infrastructure, Housing and Economic Development Committee only.

The Member asked for clarification of the budget surplus in relation to shops owned by the Council, and was informed by the Finance Manager it was due to the re-evaluation of Business Rates.

A Member asked about the budget for the Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme not being utilised. The Head of Housing Services explained that the amount guaranteed is much higher and this budget is used if claims are made by landlords on the guarantees.

A Member asked why, according to the report, no money was spent on the fuel voucher scheme and energy efficiency, to which the Finance Manager replied she would provide a written response.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Budget Monitoring report be noted. A Member said although she noted the report, that was not to say she agreed with it.

**POST MEETING NOTE**

The following response to the Member's question was provided by the Section Head, Financial Planning & Analysis

**Fuel Voucher**

This is a match funding budget for the Council's 'beat the killer cold' scheme. The Council's contribution is usually paid out at year end, when all donations received and amounts sent to eligible applicants is completed after the winter period. However, following a review this long-running scheme which was almost run single-handedly by the late Ann Shaw came to an end in the winter 2017. The use of the budget is now under review and may be directed to support the food banks.

### **Energy Efficiency**

The budget is for the Herts Warmer Homes Scheme. Monies have been committed for energy efficiency measures through the scheme but we will not receive an invoice from HCC until the end of the financial year.

## **IHED 47/18 SERVICE PLANNING 2019/2022**

The Chairman asked Members of the Committee to consider the following service plans:

- Economic and Sustainable Development
- Regulatory Services
- Housing Services

### **RECOMMEND:**

That the Service Plans be recommended to Council for approval.

## **IHED 48/18 HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY**

The Chairman introduced the report by congratulating the Housing team on its quality and thoroughness.

A Member concurred that the report was very well written. She said it was a pity that the online consultation with homeless residents produced just 11 responses as the number was too small to be indicative.

The Chairman suggested that in future Councillors could use their network of contacts within their wards to elicit a larger number of responses.

The Head of Housing Services said it was typical to receive a low level of replies to surveys, and the use of social media had probably resulted in more replies than had been received in the past.

A Member said it was unlikely many homeless people had access to computers and social media, and if the Council was not reaching those most in need of assistance it was wasting its time. The Head of Housing Services said it was known that most homeless individuals were able to access the online survey.

A Member asked for clarification of parental eviction, described in the report as being one of the main reasons for homelessness. The Head of Housing Services said that there are numerous reasons as to why parents may evict their children; collusion in order to facilitate a homeless application did also happen, and for that

the reason the Council had developed a more robust approach towards applicants which included more checks.

A Member asked why the Easy Let scheme was terminated. The Head of Housing Services said it was run in conjunction with Watford Community Housing (WCH), who managed the properties on behalf of the Council. The scheme had become financially unviable due to the high level of management fees payable to WCH, although a Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme still operated.

A Member asked about the shared room rate. The Head of Housing Services said that previously those up to the age of 25 would only be entitled to the shared room rate rather than the one-bedroom rate. However, the Government increased this to 35 years old meaning that those under 35 are expected to live in a shared house if they need help from benefits.

A Member asked about the temporary accommodation available from Thrive Homes. The Head of Housing Services said the Council had not fully utilised 25 units of temporary accommodation from Thrive Homes as it was not, in effect, additional stock and would have prolonged the wait of those already on the list for accommodation.

A Member said it was evident that some people were living in poverty in the District and asked whether anything further could be done. The Head of Housing Services said this was a reference to the benefits cap, and the Council was unable to help further as it was bound by Government policy.

The Chairman said that he directed people in such circumstances to the Citizens' Advice Service, which had a number of good outreach people available to residents.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy be agreed.

#### **IHED 49/18 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee reviewed the work programme, and a Member asked whether the reports on Conservation Appraisals, deferred until 2020 due to the Local Plan taking priority, would eventually comprise two reports. A Member said his understanding was it would be delivered as one report, consisting of two sections.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be noted.

#### **IHED 50/18 OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

The Chairman said that the thoroughness of the reports was really helpful, and expressed his thanks to all concerned.

**CHAIRMAN**