

---

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

## **MINUTES**

Of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on Tuesday 19 November 2019 between 7.30pm and 8.53pm.

Councillors present:

Andrew Scarth (Lead Member for Housing)	
Steve Drury (Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy)	
Margaret Hofman	Debbie Morris (for Cllr Ranger)
Tony Humphreys	David Raw
Peter Getkahn	Joanna Clemens
Joan King	Stephanie Singer
Sarah Nelmes (for Cllr Giles-Medhurst)	

Officers Present: Kimberley Rowley, Head of Regulatory Services  
Kimberley Grout, Head of Housing  
Temi Opeyemi, Finance Manager  
Sarah Haythorpe, Principal Committee Manager

**Councillor Andrew Scarth in the Chair**

### **IHED 20/19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen Giles-Medhurst and Reena Ranger with the substitute Members being Councillors Sarah Nelmes and Debbie Morris.

### **IHED 21/19 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Infrastructure, Housing and Economic Development Committee meeting held on 24 September 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **IHED 22/19 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

None received.

### **IHED 23/19 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

## IHED 24/19 BUDGET MONITORING

This report covered this Committee's financial position over the medium term (2019 – 2023) as at Period 6 (end of September)

The Period 6 comprehensive Budget Management report has already been presented to the Policy & Resources Committee at its meeting on 4 November 2019 which sought approval to a change in the Council's 2019 - 2023 medium-term financial plan.

Members raised the following points:

The Council had unpaid rent arrears for temporary accommodation of 0.022m how were the Council looking to get this money back.

On homelessness the variance showed the accommodation was cheaper. Were some people still being housed in office accommodation converted into housing?

Why were the figures in millions?

On the medium term capital investment programme why had the funding not been forecasted correctly?

On the parking schemes for 2019/20 why had the schemes slipped?

On controlled parking did the Council expect to spend more than originally planned.

Could details be provided on the £192,791 management fees for the South Oxhey project?

Officers responded as follows:

The temporary accommodation debts were usually individual debts and were quite small. It was not always possible to recover the debt. For larger debts, where a person had been in rent arrears and left the accommodation, they often left the District and so it became difficult to recover the debt. If the person owing the debt returned to the Council, we can re-instate the debt up to 6 years to reclaim the money. A debt recovery team were used to chase up debts and in some cases the debt was referred to the bailiffs.

A written reply would be provided on how much money the Council had received recently with regards to the reclaim of debts.

### **Post meeting note:**

*The debt reported on Temporary Accommodation at Period 6 totalled £91k of which £23k was le*

*ss than 30days old. As at the 3 December, £11k of this debt has been paid and £3,387 was from customers paying in instalments.*

On the homelessness positive variance the Council had been able to utilise properties in South Oxhey which had reduced expenditure and reduced the need for people to stay in nightly lets. The Council had originally used 23 properties in Harlow (office block conversion) as temporary accommodation but after a year this had reduced to 13 units and by October this year it was reduced further to

only 5. It was a priority to move people back into the District but each family's individual circumstances were considered in line with the Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy.

The Finance Manager would consult with the Director of Finance on the reasons for the figures being shown in millions.

**Post Meeting Note:**

*Reporting financial amounts in millions has been standard Council practice for several years. As the Council presents figures for three years on their budget reports, reporting in millions makes the numbers more attractive in appearance which in turn makes them more inviting to read. For example, reporting amounts over a three year period as £1.513m, £1.321m and £1.266m makes it easier for the reader to focus on the relevant digits and see the trend, rather than reporting this as £1,512,989, £1,321,026 and £1,265,876.*

The difference between the capital variances was reported in Period 4. There had been capital which had been re-phased so as not to lose the budget.

The controlled parking budget was not over budget by £85,000. The capital programme was a two year programme and there had been some slippage in the programme for some projects. Officers are required to report this to Members.

Officers would provide a written reply to Members on the £192,791 management fees for the South Oxhey project.

**Post Meeting Note:**

*The management fee is for the ongoing project management of the South Oxhey Initiative to ensure the project is delivered fulfilling the Councils objectives.*

*It provides for both internal resource retained for this purpose as well as the wider consultancy team, namely Deloitte (Development Agreement and property advice) and Womble Bond Dickinson (legal advice).*

*The Councils commitment to Countryside Properties Ltd is to deliver each phase of the development, as set down in the Development Agreement, in a timely manner.*

RESOLVED:

Noted the contents of the report and made the comments as detailed above.

**IHED 25/19 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT (PLANNING), LOCAL LAND CHARGES SEARCHES, STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING AND PARKING SERVICES FEES AND CHARGES**

This report provided an overview of all discretionary charges for Development Management, Local Land Charges Searches, Street Naming and Numbering and Parking.

The Head of Regulatory Services said it was proposed that the parking fees would remain unchanged and the land charges and street naming and numbering be increased to cover the cost of providing the service. There was no overall change to the planning pre application fees proposed. However, there was currently no option for a householder pre-application meeting, unless the property was a Listed Building. It was considered that the introduction of a fee for such meetings, when

considered appropriate by officers, would introduce an additional income stream with a fee of £174.24.

A Member raised concern that £174.24 was not a significant amount when compared to the application fee. The Head of Regulatory Services advised that the application fee was a nationally set fee. If the pre-application fee was too high the service would not be used and the Council were trying to encourage use of the service.

In response to a Member question on how many pre-applications were received and whether it was above budget the Head of Regulatory Services agreed to provide a written response.

**Post Meeting Note:**

*In 2018/19 116 pre applications were received through the paid service. For the first 6 months of 2019/20 93 pre applications were received.*

**RECOMMEND:**

Agreed to recommend the following:

There is no change to the fees and charges associated with the Development Management pre-application service with the exception of the introduction of a householder meeting fee. The existing fees and charges are accepted into the Committee's budgets, which are recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee;

There is no change to the fees and charges associated with the Parking Service. The existing fees and charges are accepted into the Committee's budgets, which are recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee; and

Fees and charges for Local Land Charges and street naming and numbering are increased in line with inflation at 4%.

**IHED 26/19 STRATEGIC, SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PLANNING 2020-2023**

This report enabled the Committee to comment to the Policy and Resources Committee on the strategic priorities, the Committee's draft service plans, and the growth bids to support them for the three years commencing on 1 April 2020.

**Regulatory Services Service Plan**

Members raised the following points:

Was sufficient parking provided for new developments and were checks made on public transport in the area. In South Oxhey there was insufficient parking for the number of vehicles and insufficient public transport.

There were issues with the No.8 bus reliability and not all parts of South Oxhey were on the bus route. It was noted that the Council was providing subsidies for some bus services.

If the Council were experiencing a recruitment shortage were market factor incentives considered.

What were the Council doing to provide more charging places for electric vehicles.

The Council should be looking to reduce car usage and increase the use of public transport. Future developments must look to fund bus routes.

There was a Herts Infrastructure Planning Partnership with all Councils working together across Hertfordshire.

In response to Member questions Officers advised:

Whilst local parking standards apply this was influenced by national policy which aims to reduce the reliance on the private motor car. Officers are looking at sustainable transport initiatives across the District. Officers are aware of the concerns expressed about parking in South Oxhey.

Some posts within Planning and Environmental Health have a market factor supplement which is reviewed on an annual basis. If the Council are not able to recruit the role and salary would be reviewed and consideration may be given to a market factor supplement.

This Committee had recently agreed a project for off street Electric Charging Points in Rickmansworth and Officers were currently looking at a procurement exercise. The County Council were looking at on street charging points as part of a county wide programme. The Council would look to try to secure electric charging points for new developments within planning policy.

Large scale public transport was beyond the remit of the Council to provide individually but the Council are always willing to consider inclusion in new initiatives. The Council were currently working on initiatives for cycling, walking, electric vehicle charging points, and provision of and replacement of bus shelters.

The scale of development needed to fund a bus route was significant. The Council worked on joint initiatives with other partners and received Section 106 funding from new developments.

### **Housing Service Plan**

A Member asked about Performance Indicator HN01 "Maximum number of households living in temporary accommodation on the last day of the quarter (snapshot)" why was the target increasing. What assurances could Officers give that they would look to prevent people from becoming homeless?

The Head of Housing said it was very difficult to predict. The Council were working to try and prevent people from becoming homeless but this was not just a District issue but a national issue. The Council also have a Performance Indicator (HN10) to measure the number of households that are prevented from becoming homeless, this was also set to increase. The Council did not have enough properties for everyone therefore needed to prioritise allocations.

In response to a question on how many children of school age were in temporary accommodation and how many get permanent accommodation the Head of Housing advised they were unable to give a figure now but around 80% of the people requiring temporary accommodation were families or people expecting a child. It was also explained that not everyone that moves into temporary accommodation receive housing at the end of it. There may be some that the Council do not owe a housing duty to and so would be evicted from temporary accommodation or others that lose their temporary accommodation due to their own actions or inactions.

A Member asked if the temporary housing went to local people first. The Head of Housing advised that the Council must comply with legislation and homeless people must have a local connection to the area although there were exceptions to that. If a person came to the Council advising they could not go back to where they had lived as it was unsafe the Council would need to consider this.

In response to a question on whether the Council provided permanent accommodation it was advised that the Council no longer had any housing stock as this was transferred in 2008. For those that the Council accept to house, this can be done in the private rented sector or social housing sector. In the private rented sector the minimum tenure was 12 months and through the social rented sector the minimum tenure was 5 years.

### **Property Services Service Plan**

Noted the draft service plan and welcomed how successful Rivertech had been.

### **Corporate Services GIS Officer growth bid**

The Head of Regulatory Services advised that the bid had been put forward to allow the Council to have a corporate resource responsible for the Council's GIS software and spatial data.

Members raised the following points:

The database would only be as good as the data in it. More clarification was needed on the role as the role could easily escalate into requiring a team of people. Had Officers thought about setting up a steering group for the project?

What would the role bring to the Council what savings or efficiencies could be generated?

The Head of Regulatory Services advised that GIS was being used by different teams and the creation of the role was a starting point for the Council to manage the data corporately. The Council's GIS capabilities were falling behind with other Councils and there were very few Councils without a GIS team or Officer.

**RECOMMEND:**

Made comments on the draft service plans attached at Appendix 1 and made comments on the growth bid contained within Appendix 2 to the Policy and Resources Committee.

## **IHED 27/19 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee reviewed the work programme. Members raised concern that some items had no date for when reports/details would be received and asked that Officers consult and provide dates for these items.

**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme be noted subject to the comments raised above.

**CHAIRMAN**