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

## **MINUTES**

of a virtual meeting held by remote access on Tuesday 11 August 2020 from 7.30pm to 9.15pm.

Councillors present:

Andrew Scarth (Lead Member for Housing)	
Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Transport and Economic Development)	
Steve Drury (Lead Member for Infrastructure and Planning Policy)	
Alex Hayward	Reena Ranger
Tony Humphreys	David Sansom
Joy Mann	Stephanie Singer
Joan King	Margaret Hofman (substitute for Cllr Sokalski)

Officers Present: Kimberley Grout, Head of Housing Services  
Jo Welton, Committee Manager  
Mike Simpson, Committee and Web Officer

**Councillor Andrew Scarth in the Chair**

### **IHED 09/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dominic Sokalski, substituted by Councillor Margaret Hofman.

### **IHED 10/20 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Infrastructure, Housing and Economic Development Committee meeting held on 23 June 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed virtually by the Chair.

### **IHED 11/20 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

### **IHED 12/20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **HOUSING**

### **IHED 13/20 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY**

The Chair of the meeting introduced the report, which detailed proposed changes to the way by which the Council allocated affordable rented accommodation through the Housing Register (the waiting list), and explained that the report was due to be published on the website for consultation purposes, after which it would return to the Committee later in the year.

Members raised the following points:

- whether an update to the housing allocations policy was performed every seven years.
- the exemption for victims of Domestic Abuse be amended to reflect abuse generally, as such incidents are often perpetrated by individuals from outside the family unit.
- how are customers fleeing domestic abuse referred to on the Three Rivers Housing Register.
- clarification regarding the Worker Priority statement.
- whether the four weeks threshold at which an unborn baby would be considered part of the household was statutory or Three Rivers' own figure.
- to not know where one would be living four weeks before giving birth was a terrible thought.
- Wished to make an amendment to the policy in relation to non-dependent children no longer being considered part of a customer's household unless they are unable to live independently due to care or support needs was wrong. Grown-up children lived at home longer nowadays due to financial necessity and the Council risked breaking up families. The amendment should be removed. Another Member agreed this.
- How long it would reasonably take to allocate larger accommodation to someone about to have a baby.
- Further clarification was required before the policy could be moved forward.
- Whether a young person doing an apprenticeship, earning less than the living wage would also be exempt.
- Clarified that the Housing policy is not being changed, but that what was discussed were recommendations that formed part of a review that may not come into effect.

The Head of Housing Services responded as follows:

- the overview was carried out at this time due to changes in legislation.
- the authority might be contacted directly by customers fleeing domestic abuse or referrals can also be made via several agencies and the Police. The priority for allocating housing is the safety of customers so potential victims of abuse, whether domestic or otherwise, would always be looked at as a priority.
- the worker priority change was to include those unable to work due to illness, injury or disability but not jobseekers.
- it was the Council's decision to apply a four week rule in order to help expectant families obtain suitable housing, but would be happy to consult further on the matter. The Chair of the meeting said it would be raised as a discussion point when the entire document is published for consultation.
- would provide a response to Cllr Alex Hayward with regard to how long it would reasonably take to allocate larger accommodation to someone about to have a baby.

- the amended policy was based on housing needs. Those in full time education would not be considered self-sufficient.
- customers leaving privately rented accommodation and applying now to join the Housing Register would be means-tested to establish eligibility.

The Chair of the meeting restated that the policy was due to go for public consultation and then back to the Committee, during which time anomalies or issues would be picked up.

The Chair of the meeting moved, duly seconded, that the recommendation to submit the revised Housing Allocations Policy to public consultation prior to its return to the Committee later in the year.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation to proceed with the consultation was declared CARRIED by the Chair of the meeting, the voting being 5 For, 4 Against and 0 abstentions. One Member was not able to vote as they had not been part of all the debate due to IT connectivity issues (Virtual meeting protocol Point 26).

The Committee Manager later brought to the Chair of the meeting and the Committee's attention an anomaly of the vote. Following a second vote it was declared that the voting was in fact 5 For, 5 Against and 0 Abstentions. Therefore the vote was TIED. The Committee Officer advised that the Chair of the meeting using his casting vote had voted in favour of the recommendation.

POST MEETING NOTE: it was established after the meeting that the Chair of the meeting had not been advised correctly when using his casting vote under the Council Constitution Procedure Rules therefore an Extraordinary meeting has been organised for Friday 21 August at 1pm to vote on the recommendation.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee agreed the recommendation to submit the updated Housing Allocations Policy to public consultation prior to its return to the Infrastructure, Housing and Economic Development Committee later in the year.

POST MEETING NOTE – due to the vote being TIED and the Chair not using his casting vote as required under the Council Procedure Rules, an Extraordinary meeting has been organised for Friday 21 August at 1pm to vote on the recommendation only. There will be no debate again on the item.

## **IHED 14/20 HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2017 - 2022**

The Chair introduced the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2017-22, which was developed through consultation with partners, stakeholders and residents. The strategy set out the key issues, challenges and priorities relating to the delivery of housing and housing-related services in the district over the five year period.

An annual review is required of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, with particular focus on the Action Plan, and the Chair invited Members' comments.

A Member referred to the figures in the Homelessness table (page 12) and questioned why they only went as far as 2016. The Head of Housing Services said it was a five year strategy and the data referred to the review that was

undertaken in order to produce the strategy and the significant data for the Committee to review was in the Action Plan.

A Member questioned why out of date data was being presented, as much may have changed during the past four years. The Head of Housing Services replied that the focus of the Committee should be on the Action Plan, which is what Housing Services was required to address.

In response to a Member's question, the Head of Housing said that in order to bring empty properties back into use, compulsory purchasing them was an option for the Council with a view to increasing housing stock, but the process was very long and there were many caveats to address. This was confirmed by a Member, who said owners had to declare a building vacant before a Compulsory Purchase Order could be considered.

A Member said the requirement was for more social housing, as opposed to affordable housing and longer term lets. The Council was not building communities. Larger homes for families was required, not one bedroom properties. A Member said much of this was outside the Council's control, and even more so once the Government's recent proposals for housing go through parliament.

A Member expressed their disapproval of the comment (on page 38) in which it was stated that "*Tenants affected by the Benefit Cap are encouraged to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and to seek employment. DHP is temporary in nature and for some employment may not be a practical or feasible option.*" They objected to the suggestion that those in need of housing are unemployed. The Head of Housing Services said that a formal review of the policy in Appendix 1 was what was legally required of the Council, and none of the text had been changed since it was previously agreed by the Committee.

A Member made reference to the Boundary Way housing project in Leavesden (Page 40) and referred to the mention of the 'Bedroom Tax' and that this should be accompanied by the actual name of the Act. This was accepted by the Head of Housing Services.

A Member said the number of rough sleepers in Three Rivers wasn't mentioned in the report, and asked what it was. The Head of Housing Services said the Council returns an annual figure of between one and two on any given night in accordance with the Government's requirements.

The Chair of the meeting moved, duly seconded, that the recommendation to agree the updated strategy to ensure the Council responds to current housing needs and priorities.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being 10 For, 0 Against and 1 Abstention.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee agreed to the updated Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2017-22.

The Chair of the meeting asked Members to comment on the work programme.

A Member asked whether it would be possible to have up to date statistics available at the next meeting on the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2017-2022.

The Head of Housing Services said the legal requirement was to publish a strategy, and due to the volume of work involved it was a five year strategy rather than one year, and there is no legal requirement to produce figures more frequently. More data could be circulated to the Committee once this had been completed but would be when resources allow.

POST MEETING NOTE: the Committee meetings do not receive any reports to note only reports where a decision is required. The data requested would be circulated to Committee Members once it was completed and included in a future issue of the Members' Information Bulletin.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

**CHAIR**