
INFRASTRUCTURE, HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES

of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth on Tuesday 21 September 2021 from 7.30pm and 8.13pm.

Councillors present:

Andrew Scarth (Lead Member for Housing)	
Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Lead Member for Transport and Economic Development)	
Margaret Hofman (sub for Cllr Matthew Bedford)	
Reena Ranger OBE	Lisa Hudson (Sub for Cllr Alex Hayward)
Tony Humphreys	Paul Rainbow
Stephanie Singer	Shanti Maru (Sub for Cllr Ciarán Reed)
Joanna Clemens	

Officers Present: Nigel Pollard, Section Head – Financial Planning and Analysis
 Sally Riley, Finance Manager
 Kimberley Grout, Head of Housing Services
 Mike Simpson, Committee and Web Officer

Councillor Andrew Scarth in the Chair

IHED 07/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Matthew Bedford, Alex Hayward, Ciaran Reed and Joan King with the substitute Members being Councillors Margaret Hofman, Lisa Hudson, Shanti Maru and Stephen Cox

IHED 08/21 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Infrastructure, Housing and Economic Development Committee held on 22 June 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

IHED 09/21 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

None received.

IHED 10/21 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None received.

IHED 11/21 BUDGET MONITORING (PERIOD 4)

The Section Head – Financial Planning and Analysis introduced the report, which covered this Committee’s financial position over the medium term (2021 – 2024) as at Quarter 1 (end of June) and comments from Members were invited.

A Member referred to the Licences outturn (at item 2.7) and questioned whether the £20 difference in forecast outturn was a typo or a sum unaccounted for. The Section Head confirmed it was a typo.

A Member referred to item 2.9, Unpaid Rent, and asked if such sums were written off, and if so when and how much. In response it was stated that writing off a debt was a last resort and the debt recovery team would do all possible to claim the money back, by instalments if necessary. The threshold for the Shared Director of Finance to write off a debt was £3,000, after which the matter would be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee, and related to a cumulative year.

The Head of Housing Services said £3,000 was for one individual, and was therefore an infrequent occurrence. If, however, the individual returned within six years the debt could be reactivated.

The Section Head – Financial Planning and Analysis said there were two notable areas of unfavourable variances, Car Parking and Planning, and that 70% of the £200k deficit would be claimed back via the Government’s Covid compensation scheme.

Revenues from Car Parking and Planning applications were both at just under the forecasted 50% mark, however, in spite of the reduced budget.

RESOLVED;

That the Budget Monitoring (Period 4) report be noted.

HOUSING

IHED 12/21 TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PLACEMENT POLICY UPDATE

The Chair asked Members of the Committee to consider the policy and invited questions.

The Head of Housing Services said there were three minor additions to the policy which was agreed by this Committee in January 2019, and was being reviewed after three years, in line with standard practice.

The amendments were the Homelessness Suitability Order, which was to be considered as part of policy per item 2.10, and at item 4.2 which related to 16/17 year olds in B&B accommodation having to be approved by the Housing Supply Manager and to make allowances for any personal circumstances.

A Member asked for an example of personal circumstances that did not exist before. The Head of Housing Services cited item 5.1.2 and said the size and condition of a property may not be suitable for all, due to medical reasons etc.

A Member said the report mentioned statutory responsibility and criteria and asked whether they were set by the Government or the Council. The Head of Housing Services replied that the criteria were statutory but implementation was down to the local authority as it deemed appropriate. A question was asked as to whether refusals of offers of temporary accommodation had ever been known, to which the response was affirmative. There were numerous reasons for refusing temporary accommodation and it was a matter of personal choice and circumstances. Once interim temporary accommodation was offered the Council's duty ended and there was no right of appeal, although the customers' homeless application for housing would continue.

A Member referred to item 5.1.2 regarding customers having to use a living room as a bedroom, and questioned how long would they be expected to do so and why, as a housing authority, the Council didn't have more three and four bedroomed properties available. The Head of Housing Services said the average length of stay varied between weeks and in some cases years, due to specific requirements. While the question of housing stock related more to Planning than Temporary Accommodation, the highest demand for housing is for two bedroomed dwellings.

The Member asked why the report was not going to full Council, to which the Head of Housing Services replied that this Committee had delegated authority as the recommendation was within policy and budget and this was just an update.

A Member said customers not being able to view a property prior to moving into temporary accommodation (item 4.5) sat uneasily if the length of stay was likely to be several weeks or months, although it was reasonable if just for a week or so, and asked why longer-term residents don't have the opportunity to view a property first. Does the Council try to accommodate within the area with which customers are familiar?

The Head of Housing Services said the Council would try to offer accommodation in the area to which customers have a social support infrastructure in place, but if no properties were available they would be offered somewhere else within the District. Failing that, they may be offered somewhere out of District but with a view to moving them back as soon as possible. Sometimes customers will be placed elsewhere on the grounds of safety.

The Head of Housing Services said Watford Community Housing managed Temporary Accommodation on behalf of the Council and viewings in advance were not feasible as customers moving into temporary accommodation generally needed to move quickly. Customers moving into non temporary housing were entitled to view a property first, and if housing providers said otherwise the Council needed to be informed, as customers had a right to refuse them.

Repairs to temporary accommodation were the responsibility of the managing agent, but the Council would ensure they were undertaken.

A Member cited an example of someone who was offered temporary accommodation two hours away from their place of employment and asked whether the Council considered cost of travel in such cases. The Head of Housing Services said affordability was considered when an offer of temporary accommodation was made, and an attempt would be made to relocate customers nearer to their place of work as soon as possible.

A Member asked what percentage of new housing development was allocated for Temporary Accommodation, to which the Head of Housing Services replied that it was not part of Social or Affordable Housing targets. The Chair said there were

several specific temporary accommodation sites in the District including three in South Oxhey and one in Rickmansworth.

A Member asked how the need for customers to move quickly into temporary accommodation without seeing the property in advance compared to other local authorities' policies. The Head of Housing Services was not aware of any local authorities that had a different policy. The Council would give as much notice as possible when customers were moving from one temporary accommodation site to another, and was sometimes able to give a week's notice. The Council would try provide at least 24 hours' notice, but could not commit to it.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation to agree the updated policy was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

Agreed the updated Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy to ensure compliance with relevant legislation.

IHED 13/21 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee's work programme was discussed and agreed.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be agreed and noted.

CHAIR