

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Thursday, 18th October, 2018

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), Councillor Debbie Chance (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Salman Akbar, Michael Chalk, Andrew Fry, Julian Grubb, Pattie Hill, Anthony Lovell and Jennifer Wheeler

### Also Present:

Dr. Frances Howie and Sue Harris (Worcestershire Health and Care Trust)

### Officers:

Matthew Bough, Kevin Dicks and Sue Hanley

### Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and F Mughal

## 51. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - COUNCIL HOUSING GROWTH PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report in relation to the Council Housing Growth Programme. The Housing Strategy and Enabling Team Leader provided information on the proposed development sites.

It was reported that on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2017, the Council agreed the Council Housing Growth Programme and funding of £12.5 million was allocated to this project. A number of options to increase the Council's housing stock were agreed including commissioning the construction of new Council houses.

Following a desk top exercise, the Council identified a number of sites that could be added to Phase 2 of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) New Build Programme.

The sites identified were considered to be HRA assets with the exception of Hawthorn Road Community Centre (the former

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Redditch Play Council site) which was a General Fund asset and the proposal was to transfer this to the HRA.

Officers had assessed the possible numbers and type of properties that could be delivered on the suggested sites. It was anticipated that the ten sites that had been identified could provide a total of 67 new council homes, subject to planning. Having considered the housing needs of the Borough, it had been found that there was a high demand for two bedroom bungalows.

The cost of development for the number of properties on each of the sites was estimated to be £8.173 million.

The Housing Strategy Manager was undertaking a process to appoint a development agent to assist in delivery and provide support to Council officers. Subject to approval, it was proposed that the sites would undergo detailed discussions, in terms of, design and layout, and be submitted for planning permission to achieve a rapid start on site. The project would progress through a number of processes toward delivery, including, consultation with stakeholders and planning approval.

The Council was proposing that properties delivered through the Council Housing Growth Programme be let at affordable rent, where permitted. As part of the Council Housing Growth Programme £3.285 million had been spent on purchasing from the open market, 'off plan' and through s.106 agreements. The remaining budget was £9.215 million.

Members supported the Housing Growth Programme and expressed the view that this was beneficial for the housing needs of the Borough. Members therefore agreed that it would be appropriate for the Hawthorn Road site to be moved from the General Fund into the HRA, in order that it could be developed for new Council housing.

In response to Members questions, the Housing Strategy and Enabling Team Leader explained that off-site housing would be considered if the Council concluded this was a more efficient way to reduce construction times and could lead to cost savings. It was further stated that a practical decision would be agreed after all elements had been considered in relation to what was best to meet the housing needs of local residents in Redditch.

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Team Leader confirmed, in terms of affordable rent, that this was set in accordance with government guidance, which stipulated that this could be up to a

maximum of 80% of private market rents. The Council could determine its own level of affordable rent under that 80 % threshold.

**RESOLVED that**

- 1) the sites in Appendix 1 be included in Phase 1 of the HRA (Housing Revenue Account) new build programme and proposals to progress the development of HRA new build council housing on them be approved;**
- 2) properties delivered through the Council Housing Growth Programme be let at Affordable Rent, where permitted; and**
- 3) the appropriation of the Hawthorn Road site from the General Fund into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in order that it can be developed for new council housing.**

**52. PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN**

The Chief Executive presented the Corporate Peer Challenge and advised the Committee that other local authorities had also participated in similar exercises.

Since 2012 the Local Government Association (LGA) had provided, as part of its support to the sector, the facilitation of Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) reviews whereby senior Members and Officers from other local authorities, supported by LGA staff, visited the Councils with the objective to inform their improvement plans and how to develop corporate learning. It was designed to be forward looking, and to facilitate reflection on issues and how they might be resolved. While it could be used as an external 'health check' on the authority's corporate governance, the peer challenge was not a form of inspection.

The report outlined the outcomes and next steps resulting from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPS) which took place in January and February, 2018.

The Peer Team considered the following five questions which formed the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges. These were the areas that were believed to be critical to the Councils' performance and improvement:

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- Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Did the Council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?
- Financial planning and viability: Did the Council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and was there evidence that it was being implemented successfully?
- Capacity to deliver: Was organisational capacity aligned with the Council's priorities and did the Council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?
- Political and managerial leadership: Did the Council provide effective political and managerial leadership through its elected Members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
- Governance and decision-making: Was political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that responded to key challenges and enabled change to be implemented?

The Peer Team were based at both the Redditch and Bromsgrove offices during the four day review. There was an initial 'scene setting' and 'checking the brief' discussion with the Chief Executive and Leader. These were done separately for each Council.

Meetings and discussion sessions then took place with a range of officers, Members and other stakeholders enabling the peer team to explore the issues relevant to the purpose, scope and suggested terms of reference for the peer review.

At the end of the initial on-site activity there was a feedback session and members of the Executive Committee (Redditch), Cabinet (Bromsgrove) and Corporate Management Team were invited to attend and presented with the findings of the initial three day review. A further day in February was then held for the team to review their initial findings based upon further discussions and investigations. Again the Executive Committee, Cabinet and Corporate Management Team were invited to attend. This was followed by a written feedback report summarising the peer team's feedback with their recommendations for improvement.

Following consideration by the Senior Management Team and Leaders of both Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove District Councils, an action plan had been produced. Due to the change of political control in Redditch this report had been delayed in

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order to allow the new Leader and Executive in Redditch to discuss this with their counterparts in Bromsgrove.

In terms of the establishment of a single workforce, the Corporate Management Team had concluded that there was not sufficient benefit in terms of moving to a single organisation at this point in time for the following reasons:

- Work was ongoing around the harmonisation of policies and procedures which would address some of the issues that gave rise to this recommendation. This would include reviewing the Scheme of Officer Delegations, particularly around the HR delegations.
- Work was ongoing around the harmonisation of the Job Evaluation Schemes and the potential costs associated with this – dependent on this, consideration would be given to the positives and negatives of moving to a single employer.
- Work continued to be undertaken to change the culture of the workforce across both authorities.

Although these arrangements were not appropriate at this time, it's not to say that this would not be considered again in the future.

It was clarified that the lead people identified in the Action Plan which stated "Leaders" this was referred to Leaders of the Redditch Borough and Bromsgrove District Councils rather than to political party group leaders. It was agreed that the action plan should be amended to reflect this accordingly.

The Chair sought clarification in relation to actions 9, 10 and 11 and questioned why Redditch Borough Council needed to undertake a review in respect of the Constitution, as he felt that the current constitution and procedures worked well in Redditch. The Chief Executive informed the Committee that at the last Council meeting Members had endorsed changes to the constitution. Those undertaking the Corporate Peer challenge had concluded that in Redditch too many decisions were taken by Council, and many could be taken by the Executive committee. Changes had to be made to the constitution to reflect this.

As the Chair felt that actions 10 and 11 were related more to Bromsgrove, he requested that these actions be specified as applying to Bromsgrove District Council only.

The Chief Executive clarified that he had frequent meetings with the leaders and would discuss and monitor progress in relation to the Corporate Peer Challenge at these meetings. Members were

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advised that progress would also be monitored in the performance reports.

## **RECOMMENDED that**

**Actions 10 and 11 in the Action Plan arising from the Corporate Peer Challenge should be amended to refer to Bromsgrove District Council only.**

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm  
and closed at 8.15 pm