
HOUSING AND HEALTH COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 5 July 2022 from 7.00 pm - 7.40 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Alastair Gould, Ann Hampshire, Angela Harrison (Vice-Chair), Ken Ingleton, Ben J Martin (Chair), Lee McCall, Pete Neal, Richard Palmer, Ken Pugh, Ken Rowles, Bill Tatton, Ghlin Whelan and Mike Whiting, Tony Winckless (substitute for Councillor Carole Jackson), Corrie Woodford (substitute for Councillor Elliott Jayes).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Charlotte Hudson and Jo Millard.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Peter Marchington.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Elliott Jayes.

OFFICER PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Billy Attaway.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Carole Jackson and Elliott Jayes.

165 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

166 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ben J Martin (Chair) declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 7 - Training for Swale Rainbow Homes Shareholder Panel - as he sat on the Board.

167 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 May 2022 (Minute Nos. 16 - 20) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

168 FORWARD DECISIONS PLAN

In response to the Chair's request for questions on the Forward Decisions Plan, a Member asked if Committee Members could request future items? The Chair advised that items could be added, subject to resource and the fit with aims and objectives of the Committee.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

169 HAND OVER REPORT

The Head of Housing and Communities introduced the report which gave a summary of work carried out by Housing and Health Services. She drew attention to statutory responsibilities and prevention work. The Head of Housing and Communities highlighted the successful outcomes around rough sleepers which was a new function over the previous three years that had grown with the support of central Government funding. She advised the allocation of funding from the Government for the next three years had just been received but was currently embargoed, and details would be released as soon as possible.

The Chair drew attention to topic areas the Committee might wish to consider in the future including the two new Government white papers, one on Levelling Up and one on housing in general. Issues to be considered within those papers were the ability to fine rough sleepers, the expansion of the Right to Buy scheme and statutory licensing for private sector landlords.

Members asked questions and raised points including:

- What could the Community Housing Grant fund be spent on?;
- how many empty dwellings were there currently in the borough?;
- clarification of process in the Homes for Ukraine scheme, if refugees had to move;
- some issues crossed over into other Service Committee and Sub-Committees;
- clarification on what 'firm deliveries' of housing meant as at the bottom of paragraph 4 on page 10 of the report;
- suggested a RAG rating system in order to manage projects and ensure there was enough resource;
- Service Committees were decision-making and the committee should not need a RAG rating report but did need to be made aware of issues that might need directing to the Policy and Resource Committee for additional resource;
- needed to consider how performance was monitored and then make decisions;
- Housing and Health Committee held a heavy responsibility for the community and it was important the members of the Committee had training on the interventions that could be used, in able to support Officers carrying out the work;
- Members of the Housing and Health Committee should have appropriate training such as Children and Vulnerable Adult safeguarding training;
- requested a regular update on roughsleepers, including those using tents;
- should refer back to the Constitution Working Group that Service Committees might need to consider information reports in order to make decisions; and
- issues could be raised with officers outside of meetings.

In response, the Head of Housing and Communities explained that the Community Housing Grant fund was ringfenced for community-led housing enablement work such as architects fees or scoping work, funding had to be applied for and was then assessed. The Chair added that the grant could not be used for development. The Head of Housing and Communities agreed to circulate the current number of empty dwellings to the committee. She explained that there had been two re-matches of Ukrainian families in the Borough and the newly matched homes had to be re-assessed to ensure compliance with the criteria.

The Head of Housing and Communities explained that firm deliveries of housing were schemes that had been granted planning permission and a registered provider was in place. Those schemes 'in the pipeline' had planning permission but no housing association allocated yet.

The Head of Housing and Communities said that relevant information would be reported through the committee and may feed into revised policies and strategies, and the Committee would need to consider how it was delivered in Swale. She said there were regular monitoring indicators, some of which were out of the Council's control, and that quarterly information reports could be provided without operational detail.

In response to a query on the breakdown in the homing of Ukrainian refugees, the Head of Housing and Communities explained that the Homes for Ukraine scheme was different to the family scheme that sponsored their own family members. She said that four months in, and heading towards the initial six month placement, there was a re-matching process into the homes of other volunteers, for those refugees that needed it and if not matched they would then be placed in the private rental sector through employment or benefit-related funding. Otherwise, they may be declared as homeless and processed as any other homeless family, and there had only been one family in this position in Swale to date. Three year visas had been granted to Ukrainian refugees to enable them to stay, work and claim benefits in the UK. The Head of Housing and Communities stressed that feedback was that most families would prefer to be in the Ukraine and were grateful for the support being given in the UK. The Chair added that many Ukrainian refugees had key worker skills.

During the discussion on training, the Chair said that the safeguarding training for children and for adults should be delivered separately as the subjects were distressing. The Senior Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the Member Development Working Group had highlighted Safeguarding training for members as a priority and this would be arranged.

The Head of Housing and Communities advised that currently there were six known rough sleepers in the Borough although this figure was fluid. She explained some of the reasons why accommodation had not been taken up or kept by rough sleepers and said that during the winter months, accommodation would be offered again to those that had not taken it up previously. Referring to those living in tents, the Head of Housing and Communities advised that it was an issue, support was being offered and the relevant agencies were involved.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

170 TRAINING FOR SWALE RAINBOW HOMES SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE

The Head of Housing and Communities drew attention that membership of the Swale Rainbow Homes Shareholder Committee was agreed at the Housing and Health Committee meeting held on 18 May 2022.

The Vice-Chair said that training should be extended to other Members in order that they may substitute.

The Chair outlined the benefits of receiving training.

Resolved:

(1) That Shareholder Training be mandatory for all members of the Swale Rainbow Homes Shareholder Committee.

(2) That training be offered to all Members of the Housing and Health Committee in order that they substitute for Members on the Committee.

171 MEMBER APPOINTMENT TO INTEGRATED CARE PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE

The Chair sought nominations for a Member to be appointed to sit on the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) Joint Committee.

Councillor Ghlin Whelan proposed that Councillor Angela Harrison be appointed to sit on the ICP Joint Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Tony Winckless.

Councillor Mike Whiting proposed that Councillor Pete Neal be appointed to sit on the ICP Joint Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Ken Ingleton.

On being put to the vote, Members agreed to appoint Councillor Angela Harrison to sit on the Integrated Care Partnership Joint Committee.

Resolved:

(1) That Councillor Angela Harrison be appointed to sit on the Integrated Care Partnership Joint Committee.

Chairman

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Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel