
HOUSING AND HEALTH COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 17 January 2023 from 7.00 - 8.10 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Alastair Gould, Ann Hampshire, Angela Harrison (Vice-Chair), Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Ben J Martin (Chair), Lee McCall, Pete Neal, Richard Palmer, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting and Corrie Woodford.

PRESENT (Virtually): Councillor Ken Ingleton.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Charlotte Hudson and Kellie MacKenzie.

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Billy Attaway and Zoe Callaway.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Tim Gibson and Roger Truelove.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillors Steve Davey, Ken Rowles and Tony Winckless.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Ken Pugh and Bill Tatton.

580 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

581 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 November 2022 (Minute Nos. 422 – 427) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

582 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

Part B Minutes for Information

583 **Temporary Accommodation Purchase**

The Head of Housing and Communities introduced the report which provided details of proposals to address the shortage and costs of Temporary Accommodation Purchase (TAP) in Swale. She drew attention to the proposals set out under paragraph 3 on page 9 of the report which included the purchase of up to 50 properties for Temporary Accommodation (TA) use within Swale at a cost of £11m.

The Head of Housing and Communities referred to the tabled addendum to the report which detailed the new £500m Local Authority Fund (LAHF) from the Department for Levelling-Up, Housing, and Communities which would run over the 2022-23 and 2023-24 financial years. In response to a question, she said the Council needed to make a decision on the funding by 25 January 2023.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Sought clarification on what was meant by TA and what happened once residents left it;
- the Government had put little-to-no thought into how those from Ukraine and Afghanistan would be supported once they were here;
- the Government were spending £72m a day on bridging hotels. Why had they not looked at long-term solutions such as using empty barracks and modular builds;
- appalled that the Government were asking for 60% of taxpayers money to sort out the mess they had created;
- would not support the 'bridging' element set-out in the tabled addendum as it was a "step too far" and would be far too much extra work for officers;
- did not support paying 50% of residents money on long-term housing;
- what was the average time someone would be in TA in Swale?;
- would the proposed 50 houses be spread across the Borough?;
- supported the TAP report and agree they should be spread evenly across the Borough;
- concerned that the Government had rushed into this and Local Authorities were left to pick up the pieces;
- the Government made a firm commitment to house refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan and should fully fund their housing, so could not support the addendum;
- could the Council improve management of the proposed housing over the longer-term?;
- welcomed the TAP proposal;
- for the bridging element, what did the property general stock refer to?;
- felt 'ambushed' by the tabled paper and did not think Members were in a position to make a decision on it;
- the addendum paper did offer a large sum of money from Government that the Council was not expecting and should be accepted;
- concerned about the lack of financial detail in the report considering Members were being asked to consider such a large sum of money;
- requested that the Policy and Resources Committee be given a more substantive report detailing all of the financial implications of the proposal;
- would like to see the Council negotiate terms in advance with valuers and structural surveyors;
- did not think the bridging scheme in the tabled addendum was viable and how much would both schemes cost long-term?;
- considered there was an undervaluation in the report for purchasing properties, especially larger houses;
- agreed that refugees should be housed but the Government should fund, not local authorities; and
- agreed central government should fund but it was an opportunity to acquire six more housing units and needed to consider the human aspect and show some compassion to the refugees.

The Head of Housing and Communities clarified that there were a number of exit routes from TA and people were actively encouraged to seek their own housing. She said approximately 70% of people that left TA were moved into social housing, whilst others moved into the private rented sector. Officers also ensured that all those in TA were on the Housing Register and were bidding.

In response to questions, the Head of Housing and Communities said the average time someone in Swale would spend in TA was approximately two years. She said that the proposed 50 houses would be spread across the Borough, however there were financial constraints and the purchase price and areas where demand was highest would need to be considered. The Head of Housing and Communities said that management capacity would be regularly reviewed to see if it was an option. The general stock would become general needs accommodation and retained by the Council.

The Head of Housing and Communities said that with regard to costings, the figures included in the report were from a tried and tested model already used by another local authority. She added that the Section 151 officer had confidence in the figures. The aim was to buy in professionals to purchase and manage the properties and there might be opportunities to buy former social housing stock and other options.

The Chair moved Recommendation 1, which was seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer.

The Chair moved Recommendation 2 which was seconded by Councillor Ghlin Whelan.

The Chair moved Recommendation 3 which was seconded by Councillor Mike Whiting.

The Chair moved Recommendation 4 which was seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison.

The Chair moved Recommendation 5 and 6, as set-out in the tabled addendum, which were seconded by Councillor Alastair Gould.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Council purchase up to 50 properties for TA use within the borough of Swale, with a capital budget allocation of £11m.**
- (4) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Housing and Communities in conjunction with the Director of Resources to purchase properties that meet the criteria used to develop the model.**
- (5) That the LAHF main element allocation towards the Temporary Accommodation purchase scheme and allocate 4 of those properties to Ukraine resettlement households that are accessing statutory services be utilised;**
- (6) That with local registered providers provision of the Bridging element properties utilising the grant provided and seeking matching funding be explored.**

Recommendations to Policy and Resources:

- (2) That a capital programme of £11m to spend over the next 2 years be established.**
- (3) That the Director of Resources be given delegated authority to vire the relevant budget from the existing TA budget to new revenue budget for the TAP Project and to account for the capital financing as the scheme progresses.**

Members considered the Forward Decisions Plan and the following points were raised:

- Requested a schedule of Temporary Housing across the Borough;
- Members were often not clear on how residents could apply for temporary housing and a clear background needed to be provided;
- training for Members was also required in respect of health provision in the Borough; and
- concerned there was no confirmation of when the Housing Assistance Policy and the Nightly Let Procurement Award would be considered by the Committee.

In response, the Head of Housing and Communities explained that the Housing Assistance Policy currently in place complied with current legislation and she had delegated authority to make any minor amendments required to the Policy and was confident the Council were legally compliant. With regard to the Nightly Let Procurement Award, she explained that officers were working with other Kent authorities and timescales for the tender were unknown.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

Chair

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