

Minutes of the Meeting of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 June 2022 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Allen Mayes (Chair), Colin Churchman (Vice-Chair), Steve Liddiard, Augustine Ononaji, Joycelyn Redsell and Lynn Worrall

Carol Purser, Housing Tenant Representative

In attendance: Ryan Farmer, Housing Strategy and Quality Manager
Ewelina Sorbjan, Assistant Director of Housing
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on the 2 March 2022 were approved.

Councillor Worrall referred to the C01 - Redevelopment Update and questioned when this item was due back onto the work programme, officers agreed to take this away and report back to members.

2. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items of business.

3. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

4. Housing Strategies 2022-2027

The report presented to Members summarised the strategic aims and objectives of the Housing Strategy 2022-2027. With the previous Housing Strategy being adopted in 2015, this had expired in 2020 to which this was the earliest opportunity to report back to committee. Since then, a lot had changed in regard to legislation, regulation, welfare and of course COVID. The Housing Strategy addressed a range of things not just the housing the Council owned. Two other critical documents, Housing Asset Management Strategy and Housing Resident Engagement Strategy, had been presented alongside the Housing Strategy to provide supplementary information. The Housing Strategy was evidence based and also aligned with and supported the work of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Members were briefed on the Housing Strategy aims and objectives, the objectives of the Housing

Support and Services, the Housing Need, Protect Resident Safety and the Strengthening of Community Engagement and Empowerment. Members were also briefed on the Housing Asset Management Strategy that detailed how the Council would manage, maintain and invest in its assets and the aims of that strategy were highlighted to Members. Finally, an overview of the Housing Resident Engagement Strategy was presented to Members on the aims and ambitions of the Housing Strategy to improve its interaction and communication with those that lived in and around Thurrock.

Councillor Mayes thanked officers for the report.

Councillor Liddiard thanked officers for the very comprehensive report and although he agreed with the strategy, he questioned whether this was the time to discuss those areas that were not working as well as they should. Ryan Farmer stated between the time of the previous strategy and now some significant changes had been made with the most difference being the person-centred approach looking across all the services that families were accessing. Members agreed a comparison of changes should be provided by officers in the form a briefing note.

Councillor Liddiard stated COVID had changed how residents had access to officers and how vital this was in resident engagement and questioned how this and how information being provided to residents could be provided.

Councillor Redsell thanked officers for the ambitious report and stated Council properties should be inspected more regularly than every six months and that work on garages was not being undertaken quickly enough. Councillor Redsell suggested “lock-ups” could be an alternative means of offering storage facilities to residents.

Councillor Worrall thanked officers for the work undertaken on the strategy and recommended as the strategy was a working document should be returned to committee more regularly to which Ryan Farmer stated as part of the monitoring and reviewing of the strategy an annual report would be provided to this committee.

At 7.26pm, Councillor Ononaji arrived at the meeting.

Councillor Worrall referred to the 373 new Council-owned homes to be delivered by 2027 and stated the Council needed to be more ambitious. Councillor Worrall questioned what consultation had been undertaken for Teviot Avenue and referred to the specific considerations for the needs of different identified in the study found on page 32 of the agenda that building homes for younger people had not made it onto that list. She recommended a further bullet point be added to identify the need to build for Thurrock’s younger people to encourage them to stay local. Councillor Worrall also referred to Head Start Housing and noted this had not made the list and questioned whether any further Head Start Housing would be built. Ryan Farmer stated the bullet points mentioned on page 32 related to the categories the strategic marketing assessment had identified but he

recognised Councillor Worrall's comments. Regarding Head Start the strategy stated it would continue to support the Head Start initiative in order to provide suitable accommodation by the end of 2027 for care leavers. Ryan Farmer stated the strategy referred to the appropriate accommodation for HAPPI Homes to which Councillor Worrall stated HAPPI Homes and White Acres deserved to have been mentioned in the strategy. Ewelina Sorbjan stated a lot of work had been undertaken in the background on this item which would come to committee following engagement with members and cabinet. Councillor Worrall questioned why Grays High Rise Flats had not made it into the strategy to which Ewelina Sorbjan stated this formed part of the options available on what was possible on the Estate Program. Councillor Worrall referred to the Housing waiting lists and with 6500 people on that list the Council had to be more ambitious. As part of the state regeneration those residents moving out of flats would move into those 373 properties and questioned how the Housing waiting list was being tackled. Ryan Farmer stated the Strategy aspired in providing houses for as many as possible on the waiting list and agreed could be more ambitious in the proposal of the number of properties and agreed to speak with colleagues outside the meeting.

Councillor Ononaji referred to the affordable home definition in paragraph 3.3 of the agenda and stated that affordable homes should be affordable and needed to be reachable for everyone. He asked how homes could be built for those young people who had grown up in the borough, those on low incomes and how to prevent Thurrock residents having to move out of the area. Councillor Ononaji also stated a policy should be implemented to build homes, flats or properties that were affordable. Councillor Redsell agreed young people were unable to afford these homes and a different vision of the options available was required so that younger people could make that start onto the property ladder. Councillor Worrall also agreed that a way forward needed to be found in tackling what was affordable in Thurrock and for this to be measured against local salaries. Councillor Worrall referred to the new modular homes being built in Stanford Le Hope which were part rent, part pay and suggested the committee visited this site to see how ambitious these different types of housing were being built. Members agreed this would be a good idea and asked officers to organise. Ryan Farmer agreed new house builds and development options would be considered through the lifetime of the strategy. Councillor Worrall concluded that teachers being encouraged to work in the borough could not possibly afford to buy or rent properties in the borough and that different options and visions needed to be considered alongside the local plan. Councillor Ononaji stated there had to be a solution for everything to which Ryan Farmer stated as part of the strategy there was a commitment to try and set the standard by looking at what affordable meant as this was subjective to all the different needs and circumstances. Also as mentioned in the strategy all council-owned homes that were provided would be within the housing allowance rates and over the lifetime of the strategy would be committed to look at the best ways to give as many people as possible that opportunity.

Councillor Mayes stated the report was ambitious and there was a need to look at what could be achieved by means of affordable housing, visiting sites, listening to residents, actioning and delivering for residents of the borough. Councillor Mayes questioned whether the 373 new Council-owned homes to be delivered by 2027 were aside from more homes being generated as part of the Local Plan to which Ryan Farmer stated those homes would contribute to the needs of the borough and would contribute to the overall total rather than being in addition to.

Councillor Redsell gave praise for the work that had been undertaken on the 53 new Council homes in Chadwell St Mary and questioned why the Council could not be undertaking more of these projects.

RESOLVED

- 1. Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the contents of this report and commented on the vision, aims, objectives and actions proposed in the draft Housing Strategy 2022-2027.**

- 2. Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented on the aims, objectives and actions proposed in the draft Housing Asset Management Strategy 2022-2027 and draft Housing Resident Engagement Strategy 2022-2027.**

5. Work Programme

Members discussed the work programme.

Councillor Worrall requested that C01 - Redevelopment Updates item be a item on the work programme and will be added to the 29 September 2022 committee.

Councillor Redsell requested Mears be invited to a meeting to give members the opportunity to ask questions.

Councillor Redsell requested the item on Garage Project Updated be brought forward from the 22 November 2022 meeting. The Chair suggested that at this time, a briefing note would be more appropriate and asked Officers to provide.

The meeting finished at 8.07 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**