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POLICY, FINANCE AND HOUSING CABINET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting held via Skype on Tuesday, 18 January 2022 from 7.00 - 7.48 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Derek Carnell, Tim Gibson (Vice-Chairman), Alastair Gould, Mike Henderson (Substitute for Councillor Hannah Perkin), Alan Horton, Ken Ingleton, Marchington (Substitute for Councillor Lloyd Bowen), Ben J Martin, Lee McCall (Chairman), Paul Stephen, Roger Truelove, Mike Whiting and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, Lisa Fillery, Charlotte Hudson and Jo Millard.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Oliver Eakin, Angela Harrison, Elliott Jayes, Pete Neal, Ken Rowles, David Simmons and Tony Winckless.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Roger Clark, Simon Clark, Hannah Perkin and Bill Tatton.

537 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 October 2021 (Minute Nos. 370 - 376) were taken as read, agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

538 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

539 BUDGET 2022/23 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which set-out the draft 2022/23 revenue and capital budgets and the draft Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). He drew attention to paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5 of the report and said that the administration's goals had been to keep a firm hold on the budget and provide one-off funds for improvements in the Borough and without the use of reserves that would not have been possible. He drew Members attention to page 11 of the report and explained that the original estimated gap of income and expenditure made in July 2021 was £3.7m, but that had now reduced to £1.6m due to savings. He said provisions had been made for the gap by creating a budget contingency fund as well as the Covid-19 pandemic contingency fund.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance told the committee that over the last three years, £3m had been allocated to the Special Projects Fund and, £1m had been allocated to the improvement and resilient fund. The Business rates could not support the revenue funds and were funds spent on the one-off activities. He said that the administration was pleased to put money back into the community and aimed to continue improving the Borough in the future.

Members were asked to comment on areas relating to the Policy, Finance and Housing portfolio and the following points were raised:

- Suggested the savings made not be used to fund the Special Projects Funds, so less could be taken out of the reserves;
- wanted the Oare Gunpowder Works website to be an administrative priority; and
- it was good to see the basis of the reduction in shortfall covered in paragraph 3 of the report.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance responded and said that the £1.6m budget gap was to be covered by the new contingency fund reserves. He said that the revenue budget needed to stay in the revenue budget. A business fund had been used to create a business resilient fund to provide £1m to carry out a series of projects that were planned over this and the next financial year.

The Director of Resources told Members that management team were in discussions about the Oare Gunpowder Works website and whether funding could be found to help update it.

540 HOUSING PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the update which included the updated Quarter 3 figures. These were summarised as follows:

- The total number of Affordable Housing delivered was 145, which included 33 affordable rent, 48 social rent and 64 shared ownership;
- the number of Housing options the Council were statutory responsible for at the end of December 2021 was 323 households;
- the number of rough sleepers in temporary accommodation was 45;
- the number of private sector housing with Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) referrals was 175;
- DFG referrals completed were 101;
- DFG budget spend was £1,089,199 and £1,697,079 had been committed;
- long-term properties put back into use were 45;
- had served 103 enforcement cases with 23 notices being served;
- a further one new application for Licensable Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's) had been made taking the total to 5;
- £20,374 had been spent on the winter warmth grants;
- 1373 Home Improvement enquiries had been made to the service;
- 588 jobs had been completed by the handy-man scheme;
- 154 health referrals;
- 67 hospital discharge works completed;
- 112 health and safety checks completed; and
- 384 preventive cases completed.

Further to the updated figures, the Cabinet Member for Housing told the Committee that Kent County Council's (KCC) draft budget had been released and included proposals to cut the contract for Kent Homelessness Connect Contract which provided additional services for vulnerable people and had created concerns from the Cabinet Member and officers on the impact this had on the Borough if the service disappeared. He spoke of having conversations with those that

administered the contract to gather the impact that the removal of the contract would have. The Cabinet Member for Housing was preparing a letter to KCC with all the Council's concerns and worries about the cut of this service, but he understood the position KCC were in with their budget in these difficult times.

Members considered the update and raised points which included:

- The cut from KCC was devastating and asked if other Councils were in a similar situation?;
- even though KCC had proposed to remove funding, they had committed to £4m spend on putting empty homes back into use;
- how many DFG bids were still waiting to be actioned?;
- how were the 45 homes that had been put back into use been funded and what was the cost?
- what percentage of the winter warmth grant had been used?; and
- how many homes have been created as a result of the new administrations housing policy?

The Leader advised Members that a meeting had been scheduled with all District Leaders and the KCC Leader to discuss the recent cut in housing services and he hoped that KCC would listen to the comments made in the meeting and withdraw their proposal.

The Cabinet Member for Housing responded to the questions raised and said he did not have the DFG figures, or the winter warmth percentage used to hand. He told Members that there was no cost for putting homes back into use, as all 45 of the homes were already built and fit for purpose, the only cost incurred was officers' time. The Cabinet Member for Housing said that he would get official figures of the number of homes the administration had created circulated to Members.

The Head of Housing and Community Services added that the Covid-19 pandemic had created pinch points in the DFG system and that, although the number of waiting households were zero, this might not be the true figure. She added that labour shortages and required Occupational Health Assessments had also created problems with getting housing applications completed.

Chairman

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

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