



Minutes of the meeting of the **Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 1, East Pallant House on Tuesday 12 January 2016 at 9.30 am

Members Present: Mrs C Apel (Chairman), Mrs N Graves (Vice-Chairman), Mr P Budge, Mr M Cullen, Mrs P Dignum, Mr N Galloway, Mrs E Hamilton, Mr G Hicks, Mr S Lloyd-Williams, Caroline Neville, Mrs P Plant, Mr H Potter, Mr A Shaxson and Mrs J Tassell

Members not present: Mr J Ransley

In attendance by invitation: Mr A Finnamore (Chichester BID), Ms C Brown (The Hyde Group), Ms S Chatfield (The Hyde Group), Mr D Morrissey (The Hyde Group) and Ms C Wickins (Chichester BID)

Officers present: Ms P Bushby (Community Interventions Manager), Mrs C Dring (Benefits Manager), Mr R Dunmall (Housing Operations Manager), Mrs L Grange (Housing Delivery Manager), Mrs J Hotchkiss (Head of Commercial Services), Mr D Hyland (Community and Partnerships Support Manager), Mrs B Jones (Principal Scrutiny Officer), Mr S Oates (Economic Development Manager), Mrs L Rudziak (Head of Housing and Environment Services), Mrs E Thomas (Wellbeing Manager), Mr P E Over (Executive Director) and Mr J Ward (Head of Finance and Governance Services)

36 **Chairman's Announcements**

Mrs Apel welcomed the committee, members and officers.

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr J Ransley.

37 **Minutes**

The revised minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on Tuesday 17 November 2015 were circulated.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) held on Tuesday 17 November 2015 are approved as a correct record.

Accordingly, Mrs Apel signed and dated the official versions of the minutes.

Mr Hyland, referring to the letter received from Mrs Goldsmith, Leader of West Sussex County Council (WSCC) in response to Mr Dignum's letter regarding infrastructure support to the voluntary sector, confirmed that Voluntary Action Arun and Chichester had been advised that as we had no knowledge of future funding from WSCC, the Council could not make a commitment to continue the contract at this stage. Notice had been served in October 2015 that funding beyond March 2016 could not be confirmed. It is hoped to give a further update to the Grants and Concessions Panel on 22 January 2016.

38 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

39 **Declarations of Interests**

No declarations of interest were received.

40 **Public Question Time**

There were no public questions.

41 **Housing Strategy Review**

The committee considered a report by the Housing Enabling Manager (copy attached to the official minutes). Mrs Grange advised that this mid-term review of the Housing Strategy took account of changes in Government policy, however the Housing & Planning Bill has yet to be approved by Parliament and detailed regulations are still awaited. She requested the committee to:

- Consider whether it agrees with the findings of the strategy review that the existing priorities and affordable housing targets remain valid
- Consider whether it supports the proposed allocation of capital funds
- Consider whether it has any concerns regarding performance to date and whether it supports the new targets and actions set out in italics in the delivery plan

The Committee made the following comments:

- Requested comment on the Prime Minister's comments regarding public land released for house building and Chichester being one of the five national sites. *The site in question was the lower Graylingwell site. The Government was willing to consider 50% starter homes affordable to local people and possibly with local connections. The application was due to be reconsidered by a special Planning Committee on 20 January.*
- Questioned priorities 2 and 3; whether downsizing was not working; sheltered accommodation in Midhurst outdated and difficult to let and what new Government emphasis was on older people and how this might be helped in Chi and Midhurst. *Mr Dunmall had worked with Hyde and run a number of workshops on downsizing. Those wishing to downsize were given priority on housing register, however it appeared that they were particular about*

properties they wanted to move to. It was difficult to encourage this unless providers offer an incentive to move. Mrs Grange advised that we are in discussion with regard to two out-dated sheltered schemes, but potentially a total redevelopment of the area is required and registered providers are generally not considering redevelopments at the current time due to lack of available funding. A new Planning Policy was introduced in 2015 which requires Local Planning Authorities to consider the housing needs of older people.

- *Are there further cut backs in the pipeline to providing services versus underwriting housing as the rising cost of housing will become a greater issue? The capital reflected in the report is money already in place and includes commuted sums from S106 agreements. The lower part of table sets out proposed changes to the use of these capital funds. The strategy money is safe and isn't threatened by anything else the Council may want to use it for. The only funds not yet secured are the receipts expected from Church Rd.*
- *How many tenants have used the right to buy (RTB) scheme and is this a problem if too many properties have sold? Are landowners not keen on releasing land because of this? Prior to 2013 RTB numbers dropped off to 2-3 sales per annum but they have increased since the Government revitalised this scheme (13/14 -15 RTB sales, 14/15 – 9 RTB sales. It is expected that property owned by a Community Land Trusts (CLTs) will be exempt from RTB. One way of moving forward will be if the Trusts can work with registered providers to develop affordable housing for them.*
- *The figure of £2m – does this mean the Council would build houses? The money is from when we transferred our properties to Hyde Martlet in 2001 and is allocated for housing. We are not proposing that the Council builds houses however the money is ring fenced for housing. One member stated that the Council should consider raising bonds to help building houses.*
- *Will the Council adopt the optional space standards brought in this year? If the Council wish to adopt this we have to show in reviewing the Local Plan that there is both a need to adopt higher space standards and that they will be financially viable for developers.*
- *Have we started on a brownfield register yet or already there? Estates may be dealing with this but not us.*
- *Had the Council considered developing caravan parks as other countries have done with trailer parks to help with housing situation? We have problems with the sites with regard to occupation for only eight months of the year, the cold and issues such as quality of stock. There are no plans to extend this use at present.*
- *There is a potential site in West Wittering for a CLT – is this being progressed? We will be attending a national CLT conference next month and meeting with Action in Rural Sussex, the umbrella CLT for the area later this week. We intend to write out to parish councils to talk to them where they are interested in developing CLTs.*
- *Is the shortage of available housing driving up rents? Are the add-on charges of CIL driving up costs of all housing? It is certainly making it more difficult for us. In areas of high land value and low salaries it is far more difficult.*

RESOLVED

1. That the Housing Strategy Review be noted.
2. That the progress achieved in delivering the milestones and targets in the Housing Strategy Delivery Plan be noted and the new target dates be endorsed.

42 Hyde Report

Mr Morrissey (Director of Core Operations, Hyde) introduced the report (copy attached to the official minutes). He reiterated the recommendations which had been made by Cabinet to Hyde requesting further information from them at this meeting. He acknowledged that Hyde could have been far better at communicating to residents in advance of the service charge increase and he had rearranged communication plans to build in prior discussions with residents. Ms Chatfield, Service Charge Manager, had attended these group meetings which had enabled Hyde to listen to residents re service charge issues and other items they had raised.

The Committee made comments including:

- A short notification time was given to a member to attend a local residents meeting at Bishop Luffa.
- The effect of Hyde service charges on housing benefits paid? *Most service charges are eligible for housing benefit. The Council receives a subsidy back from the Department for Works & Pensions (DWP) for claims.*
- Did Hyde realise the enormous impact these increases would have on residents? *At the time they were very close to issuing statements and there was a naivety on their part, however lessons have been learned and in future more consultation will be carried out.*
- There are surpluses on your books over the last few years of £25m, £31m and £45m and your profit margins have increased from 6% to 14%. Hyde appears to be a large capital company with a certain arrogance rather than a registered provider charity with an ethos to help people. *Hyde has a well-documented procedure to assist tenants with financial issues. Income services team talk to residents and offer to extend payments or to provide support in covering the costs. The last resort is eviction action. The charity is a not for profit organisation and remains so. Any surplus is used to develop new properties. We are trying to increase the housing stock and generate a surplus to reinvest it.*
- Feeling from residents that more complex complaints are not getting attention and going on for months? *Hyde has recruited 2 additional staff responsible for resolving complaints to ensure that they are not passed around. Ms Chatfield undertook to let members have their names.*
- How far back is Hyde legally allowed to recover service charges? Could charges have been introduced over a longer time to alleviate residents' financial problems? Will we see a reduction in service charges in future years? *Hyde can only charge going back 18 months and then only in the year that the service is carried out. There will be a spike in the first rollout as there are*

charges in that year for services which are only required to be carried out every five years such as electrical maintenance.

- It is understood that S20 notices are a way of consultation with tenants to charge one off charges according to Building Control legislation dating back to 2000. *The regulations changed in 2002 to allow consultation for any changes in charge.*
- Those tenants who are covered by housing benefit will cover the payments but those who are not have found it very hard financially. Pilgrim Court tenants are now paying £55.92 per week service charges which equates to £3,000 annually. How can you justify such a high service charge? *Tenants are entitled to come and talk to us regarding clauses in their tenancy agreement they don't understand and to get legal information regarding the tribunal service for challenging service charges. Tribunal numbers are low. Pilgrim Court is supported more than general blocks; there are communal areas and on site support. We are looking closely at these charges.*
- Are you charging over and above your statutory responsibility? *Private landlords do not include health and safety checks in rents. Statutory charges should be your expense. It is the law to charge for health and safety requirements. All registered providers operate in this way.*

At the Chairman's request Mrs K Moss, a resident of Merle Court Gardens, spoke about her experience of communicating with Hyde regarding decreasing services at this property.

Ms C Brown (Director of Residents Services (Regions)) thanked the committee for considering the report from Hyde and undertook to continue to update the committee with progress made in the original recommendations. Mrs Rudziak advised the committee that she would review the way regular meetings are held with Hyde.

RESOLVED

That the report from Hyde be noted.

43 Review of Business Improvement District (BID)

Mrs Apel welcomed Ms Charlotte Wickins (BID Manager) and Mr Andrew Finnamore, (BID Chairman) to the meeting.

The Economic Development Manager introduced the report (copy attached to the official minutes). Mr Finnamore then took members through the BID's reports, introducing Ms Wickins, the new BID Manager, who had been in post for a year. He acknowledged that public relations needed to be addressed to ensure that business leaders understand that the BID is the independent voice representing businesses and the city and to make clear what the BID's contribution achieves and its value. Members of the BID currently pay a levy of 1% of rateable value; business will be consulted on whether they would like to increase this levy percentage in the second term.

Ms Wickins advised that businesses would go to the vote on 27 October 2016 to decide whether to continue with the BID. An Ambassador has been taken on to help with business consultation in this regard. A Ranger would also be employed to be the 'eyes and ears' of the BID on the street. Mr Fynamore would be standing down at the end of the 5 years term in March 2017 and a new Chairman would be sought. If the vote is in favour, the second term of the BID would focus on income improvement possibly with added services, raising Chichester's profile nationally, improving the night time economy, discount codes and Wi-Fi access.

The Committee made comments including:

- With Thursdays shut it appears that the town is not that busy. *The BID is concerned at the slowing down of the night time economy and is having regular meetings with Chibac (the business security partnership). They are looking to support the City Angels as part of the BID. They would like support from the district council to look for a place for a central nightclub as there is a need for the town to be attractive to a younger audience.*
- What are you using the knowledge from the new mobile mapping system for? *This will be used to monitor smart phones coming into the city to identify where people go and by their regularity can identify a city worker or visitor. It will be a more accurate indication of footfall in the city.*
- The city maps are a success, but who fills the map pockets up? *The job of the new Ranger will be to fill up map pockets.*
- Questioned whether peer pressure could be used to utilize all areas of business i.e. above shop floors? *Most businesses require landlord's permission and change of use approval and they may not want the disruption of trying to let the space.*
- The use of a cherry picker to clear vegetation from gutters above shops and spread the cost/benefit? *This is a good example of an additional service which could be charged for.*
- The pedestrianised areas are not attractive. Are we able to apply pressure to WSCC to upgrade the condition of the street/pavement surface? *WSCC have budgetary constraints as we do. The district's cleansing department does a good job of cleaning the streets. How we fund planters needs to be considered between the three tiers of government.*
- Are there any threats to the future vitality of Chichester business district? *This is being considered through the work on the Chichester Vision to ensure a strong future for Chichester considering the impacts of new housing and employment space. Mr Fynamore is on the Steering Group and Ms Wickins is on the Project Team.*
- Issues with the availability of coach parking? *Coach parking is available but coach companies don't necessarily research the location of these before setting out. We need to consider doing some advertising to coach companies. A representative from Stagecoach is on the Project Team for Chichester Vision.*

Members thanked Mr Fynamore and Ms Wickins for a thorough progress report and remarked on some of the excellent projects being carried out.

RESOLVED

That progress to date against the BID's five year Business Plan be noted.

44 Budget Review Task and Finish Group

In Mr Ransley's absence, Mr Ward (Head of Finance & Governance) gave an oral report on the considerations of the Budget Review Task and Finish Group.

The amount of Revenue Support Grant (RSG) we will receive is worse than predicted. Those authorities who run out of Revenue Support Grant (RSG) will still have to contribute by way of a negative RSG. Our New Homes Bonus (NHB) grant has been confirmed for 2016-17 which is more than anticipated. The overall position in the draft budget assumed no Council Tax increase and the outsourcing of the Council's leisure function.

This authority does not rely on NHB to resource the base budget and therefore we are in a better position than some of our neighbours. It was surprising that the split of business rates 80% district and 20% county had not been consulted upon by Government.

RESOLVED

That the oral report be noted.

45 Think Family Expansion Programme

The Community Interventions Manager introduced this report (copy attached to the official minutes).

The Committee made comments including:

- What is the latest on the Charles Avenue plans? *A number of residents are willing to be involved. There is a risk that the building could be lost unless we get on with it. There is money in WSCC budget to bid for.*
- Why is key worker paid retrospectively? *The wages are paid by the Council and then we invoice WSCC.*

Members were pleased with the excellent partnership work going on to achieve the outcomes on the various projects and wished thanks to go to all those involved.

RESOLVED

That the work of the Think Family Expansion Project and the changes to the project going into Phase 2 be noted.

46 Improving the Health of our Communities and Workforce

The Community Wellbeing Manager introduced this report (copy attached to the official minutes).

The Committee made comments including:

- How popular was the standing desk? These had been well used well in the contact centre and it was proposed to introduce these in a few more areas.
- Had the sickness absence rate decreased? This was on a downward trend.
- Workplace stress? A staff survey carried out last year had identified some service areas which suffer from more stress than others. A new employee assistance programme is being developed and when approved with start in April had been introduced and a 'mindfulness' course which was open to members as well.
- What would sugar reduction champions be doing? WSCC Public Health is a pilot area for the national sugar reduction campaign. Mrs Lintill is the Council's sugar champion. WSCC had not yet progressed their campaign. A new mobile phone app will be promoted which allows barcodes to be scanned to identify sugar levels. Work with local food establishments is ongoing to develop their menus to provide healthy options. There are national initiatives such as advertising calorie content on wine bottles.
- Environmental Health Services are working with local food establishments to deliver the Eat out Eat Well project to develop their menus to provide healthy options.
- What is active transport? Cycling or walking - not using the car. There are pool bikes for staff; green transport is encouraged etc. A running club had been introduced.

RESOLVED

That the progress achieved on this work stream be noted.

47 Cultural Grants Task and Finish Group

The committee considered the report under this item (copy attached to the official minutes).

RESOLVED

1. That Mr N Galloway, Mr G Hicks, Mrs J Tassell, Mrs C Apel and Mrs N Graves be confirmed as members of this Task and Finish Group with Mr Hicks as Chairman.
2. That the Terms of Reference, scope and outline plan be approved.

48 West Sussex Joint Scrutiny

Mrs Apel provided an update on proposals of the West Sussex Joint Scrutiny Steering Group for future joint scrutiny work.

Mr Potter provided feedback on the recent follow up Flooding review.

Mrs Apel requested nominations from members to act as a representative on the Housing and Care Leavers Panel. There were none so it was decided to open this representation out to the wider membership.

49 **Late Items**

Mrs Apel announced that a workshop would take place on Tuesday 29 March 2016 at 2pm to discuss the future 2016-17 scrutiny work programme. Members were requested to make a note of this date and time.

The meeting ended at 13.05 pm

CHAIRMAN

Date: