

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 1 September 2021)

1. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY (MINUTE NO 17)

The Cabinet, having considered the comments of the Housing and Homelessness Overview and Scrutiny Panel, are recommending the adoption of an Empty Homes Strategy.

The strategy identifies three key priorities to assist private owners to bring empty homes back into use within the District:-

- Pro-actively work to identify long term empty properties and target those which have a significant detrimental impact to the neighbourhood
- Provide support, advice and information to homeowners to bring empty properties back into use
- Enforcement – Use of Legislative powers

The Cabinet welcome this strategy at a time when demand for housing in the district remains high, whilst there are nearly 200 properties empty for over two years in the district.

RECOMMENDED:

That the proposed Empty Homes Strategy (Appendix of Cabinet Report 4 of the Cabinet Agenda), be adopted.

2. CONSULTATION ON DRAFT PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2021-2026 (MINUTE NO 18)

The Cabinet confirmed its support for the vision, objectives and actions of the Draft Partnership Plan 2021-2026 and delegated authority to the Executive Head of Planning, Regeneration and the Economy to respond to the National Park Authority's consultation, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Infrastructure.

All national parks are required to have a management or partnership plan for their area. There is a national focus on how the country rebuilds after coronavirus; how to recover the economy, society as a whole and crucially, the environment – a 'green recovery'. To reflect this the draft Partnership Plan sets out a refreshed vision for the New Forest's future in this context of crisis and recovery.

The Cabinet welcome the opportunity to work together with partners to address modern pressures whilst respecting the traditions that have moulded the national park into such a rich and idyllic place.

3. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT (BASED ON PERFORMANCE APRIL TO JULY 2021 INCLUSIVE) (MINUTE NO 19)

The Cabinet, having noted the latest budget forecasts of the General Fund and Capital, is recommending the approval of additional budget provision to Council.

During the first lockdown, the Council ceased turning around empty properties to focus entirely on the continuation of providing essential services. This created a backlog of empty properties and, following the recommencement of works, the Council sourced a contractor to support the in-house team in turning around empty properties again. While progress was made during 2020/21, it has been necessary to continue with this

arrangement in this financial year, at an estimated cost of £300,000. While efforts will be made to offset these additional costs, an additional budget provision of £300,000 is recommended at this stage. This has been essential to bring properties back into occupation to provide homes for families and individuals on the Homeseach Register, and to minimise the loss of rental income, which is currently estimated to be £180,000 greater than the original budget provision.

The Cabinet welcome the relatively strong Council wide financial position at this stage of the year and endorse the relatively minor adjustments to address the latest forecast position.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Council approves additional budget provision of £300,000 for Housing Void works and notes the latest budget forecast, including £180,000 shortfall in rental income within the Housing Revenue Account.

4. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021 ONWARDS (MINUTE NO 20)

The Cabinet, having considered the initial development of the Medium Term Financial Plan 2021 onwards, is recommending to Council.

The funding assumptions driven by the Business Rate Retention Scheme revisions will require review when further clarity from the Government comes forward. The Cabinet remains committed to the effective and efficient delivery of services, and is keen to identify and explore options for partnering and collaboration with others where it will be to the benefit of New Forest residents and Tax Payers, through the County Deals process. Further details are expected as part of the Levelling Up White Paper.

The Cabinet also welcomes the positive impact of the partnership arrangements with Freedom Leisure, including the upcoming centre enhancement programme.

RECOMMENDED:

(a) That the revised MTFP as outlined within Cabinet Report 7 of the Cabinet agenda, be adopted; and

(b) That the reporting timeline as set out in section 8 of the Cabinet Report, be agreed.

5. DEVELOPMENT OF LAND AT CROW LANE, RINGWOOD (MINUTE NO 21)

The Cabinet, having considered the recommendations of the Commercial Property Investment Panel, is recommending to Council on the development of employment land at Crow Lane, Ringwood.

The proposed development seeks to aid the economic development of the district whilst providing an income producing property, in accordance with the Council's Asset Investment Strategy and it is recommended that the full development of the site is progressed. The well established Property Investment Panel will provide governance on the scheme and will receive regular updates from the Project Delivery Team.

The Cabinet endorse the many areas that this development will deliver across, including local economic growth, employment, the greener credentials of the project and a long-term financial return to the Council.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) That the allocation of £8,445,000 in funding to complete the project, this figure being inclusive of construction costs, supervision and marketing of the development as well as contingency, be approved;***
- (b) That the contractor identified in Confidential Appendix C of Cabinet Report 9 of the Cabinet Agenda, be appointed as the preferred bidder to design and build the industrial and office units on land at Crow Lane, Ringwood; and***
- (c) That marketing and letting of the units to potential tenants be commenced at the earliest opportunity.***

6. MEETING DATES FOR 2022/23 (MINUTE NO 22)

The Cabinet agreed the following meetings dates for 2022/23:-

1 June 2022	7 December 2022
6 July 2022	1 February 2023
3 August 2022	1 March 2023
7 September 2022	5 April 2023
5 October 2022	3 May 2023
2 November 2022	

**COUNCILLOR E HERON
CHAIRMAN**