

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 2 November 2016)

1. COUNCIL HOUSING BUY-BACK AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE 2012/13 – 2015/16 AND FUTURE STRATEGY 2016/17 – 2018/19 (MINUTE 32)

Following a review of the Council's performance in securing additional Council housing the Cabinet is recommending the adoption of a revised Housing Strategy to secure additional council-owned housing over coming years.

To date, the sources of additional housing have been housing buy-backs, the development of new dwellings on Council owned land and the purchase of dwellings from private sector developers through partnership arrangements.

Over the past 4 years the majority of additional dwellings have been obtained through buying back former Council properties. The original target of 100 has been exceeded with a total of 135 acquired by this means by the end of the 4th year of the current Strategy. The lead-in time on new developments means that this source has, to date, made only a modest contribution, but is expected to play an increasing role in the future.

While, in theory, purchasing housing units from private developers as their S106 affordable housing contribution should be relatively easy, in practice it has proved more complex and time consuming than expected and has only so far contributed 4 two-bedroom units in Milford on Sea. This option will however continue to be explored, particularly in association with larger developments, such as that under Policy Ring3 at Ringwood.

The Council is currently losing around 30 properties per annum through the Right-to-Buy and it is important that, at the least, this housing stock is replaced. The Cabinet is very pleased with the progress that is now being made.

Changes to Government policy are being monitored and assessed for their potential effect on the Council's ability to maintain its housing stock. Recent policies have already had a significant effect on the financial context, with rents being required to be reduced by 1% per annum from 2016/17 for the next 3 years. Planning policy changes mean that the Council can no longer require social housing contributions from developments of fewer than 10 dwellings, reducing the funding available from that source. The Council Housing Finance Regime allowed the Council, as part of the overall financial package, to borrow funds to allow the provision of additional Council housing, but the annual repayments, of £4.1million, will become due from 2017/18. The repayments will be met from Housing Revenue Account reserves, reducing the ability to provide additional homes.

Other options for the provision of additional housing will continue to be explored as they become available.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Housing Strategy 2016/17 - 2018/19, as set out in Agenda Item 4 considered by the Cabinet, be adopted.

2. REVIEW OF TOURISM SERVICES (MINUTE 33)

The Cabinet has agreed that significant changes should be made to the delivery of 2 aspects of the tourism service, following a detailed review of options, as set out in Report item 5 considered by the Cabinet. At this stage the principle of the model for future delivery has been agreed, which will allow more detailed negotiations to continue with key partner organisations over the coming months.

The Council has a continuing commitment to promoting business development in the area and the tourism industry will remain a key component of that.

With the growth in the use of the Internet and electronic means of accessing information about an area and to book accommodation, the role of visitor information centres has reduced considerably over recent years. The number of visitors to the Visitor Information Centre at Lyndhurst has reduced by around 50% and it no longer has any meaningful role in the booking of accommodation. The main residual roles for the Visitor Information Centre's staff are therefore in sales and in providing information and advice to visitors. Negotiations are continuing with the 9th Centenary Trust on what additional roles they might be prepared to take on. The sales element of the VIC business generates opportunities to earn commission and could therefore be attractive to the Trust. The Cabinet are also aware that, elsewhere in the District, other models for the delivery of visitor information have evolved and provide this service in a more targeted and cost-effective way to meet the needs of local businesses.

The proposal to withdraw the Visitor Information Centre does not affect the overall operation of the New Forest Visitor Centre in Lyndhurst, which is run by the 9th Centenary Trust. The Cabinet was reassured that the Trust will not be prejudiced financially by the withdrawal of the Visitor Information Centre from their building.

Consultations with the New Forest Tourism Association have established that they no longer consider that the Visitor Information Centre is essential to support the tourism industry, provided that the Forest continues to be marketed effectively as a destination for visitors.

The comments of consultees and employees are set out in Appendix 1 to the report to the Cabinet.

The Cabinet went on to consider proposals for changes to the marketing of the New Forest as a destination for visitors to the New Forest and has agreed that the model for delivery should change, with the establishment of a stand-alone Company under the auspices of the New Forest Tourism Association to take on this role in future. The proposals, together with consultee responses, including the views of employees, are set out in Appendix 2 of Agenda Item 4 to the Cabinet. There would be a transitional funding arrangement for 3 years to allow the Company to become established.

The New Forest Tourism Association considers that destination marketing, and the promotion of information to allow visitors to access local businesses and attractions, is essential. The website run and hosted by this Council is particularly important in this respect.

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Panel had considered this issue in detail. The Panel strongly supported both the withdrawal of the Council-run visitor information centre in Lyndhurst and the transfer of destination marketing to a stand-alone company under the auspices of the New Forest Tourism Association. They suggested that the New Forest National Park Authority should be requested to redeploy some of its mobile visitor information resource to Lyndhurst; and also that the Council should seek observer representation on the Board of the proposed new Company to ensure proper oversight of the public funds invested in the enterprise in the first 3 years of operation.

3. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER (MINUTE 34)

The Cabinet has adopted an updated strategic risk register following its review to ensure that it is consistent with the Council's new corporate plan "Our Corporate Plan 2016-2020". In addition, the strategic risk register will now reflect the priorities set out in the Corporate Delivery Plan and Portfolio Plans. It is important that the strategic risk register recognises the most significant risks to the Council in achieving the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan.

The continuing financial constraints imposed by Government policy remain the overriding risk to the delivery of the Council's objectives.

The strategic risk register is part of the Council's overall risk management framework, which is required by Government Regulations.

The revised strategic risk register, which again takes a pragmatic and proportionate approach to this requirement, is attached as Appendix 2 to the report considered by the Cabinet.

4. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT BASED ON PERFORMANCE TO OCTOBER 2016 (MINUTE 35)

The Cabinet has been updated on the Council's financial performance to October 2016.

Further positive variations of £1.061 million have been identified against the General Fund budget, together with new budget requirements of £279,000. Further details are set out in Section 3 of the report to the Cabinet. The estimated outturn on the General Fund is now £15.756 million. Once again there are significant elements of projects being rephased, which will affect future year's budgets.

A combination of additional budget requirements of £100,000 and the rephasing of £2.95 million to future years has reduced this year's Capital Programme to £21,343 million, as set out in Section 4 of the report to the Cabinet.

The Housing Revenue Account currently shows a variation of £1.9 million, largely as a result of delays in the major repairs programme under the Capital Programme, which is financed from the Revenue Account. Further details of the variations are set out in Section 5 of the report to the Cabinet.

The Cabinet has welcomed the continuing progress being made towards achieving essential savings, while protecting the delivery of front line services.

RECOMMENDED:

That the new budget requirements set out in sections 3.5 and 4.3 of Report Item 7 considered by the Cabinet be approved.

**Councillor B Rickman
CHAIRMAN**