

## **BOROUGH OF REIGATE AND BANSTEAD**

### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the New Council Chamber - Town Hall, Reigate on Thursday, 9 September 2021 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors M. S. Blacker, Z. Cooper, M. Elbourne, J. C. S. Essex, P. Harp, N. D. Harrison (Chair), A. King, N. C. Moses, S. Parnall, S. Sinden, M. Tary, R. S. Turner, S. T. Walsh and C. T. H. Whinney

Also present: Councillors M. Brunt, V. Lewanski, C. Neame.

#### **24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

There were no apologies for absence.

Councillor Buttironi was in attendance remotely.

#### **25. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the last meeting on 9 September 2021 were approved.

#### **26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

#### **27. PRESENTATION ON THE WORK OF RAVEN HOUSING TRUST**

The Committee received a presentation from social housing provider, Raven Housing Trust Directors, Amy Cheswick, Director of Customers and Partners, and Jo Hills, Director of Assets & Services. As the largest social housing provider in Reigate and Banstead, Raven Housing Trust (RHT) gave an overview of the core activities of the organisation, performance of their housing services, challenges during the pandemic and beyond, planned development and joint venture schemes, affordability, regeneration of homes, its Net Zero Carbon programme, health and safety matters including fire safety. The [Raven Housing Trust presentation](#) was published as part of the O&S agenda pack.

Members made observations and asked questions which included the following areas:

- **Homelessness** - Members raised the issue of a rise in potential evictions for housing tenants as court orders and bailiff enforcement restarted following the COVID-19 emergency which paused this temporarily. Councillor Neame, Executive Member and Portfolio Holder for Housing & Support, told

the Committee that the Council's housing team had worked hard during the COVID-19 crisis to keep tenants affected in their current tenancy in order to prevent them becoming homeless. This included negotiation with all social housing and private landlords on deposits and rent arrears and assisting with money advice. Raven Housing Trust had responded to this challenge by working closely with the Council to minimise evictions during the pandemic.

- **Damp, mould and condensation** – issues of damp, mould and condensation in homes was raised. It was suggested this was particularly a problem for residents who could not afford to heat their homes due to fuel poverty and those who had long-term health problems. Managing ventilation and moisture in homes was discussed. RHT confirmed that it was tackling damp, mould and condensation across 866 homes with a £1.2m investment from 2020-23 as part of the Healthy Homes initiative. Following a survey of homes and review of data from its call logs, RHT had prioritised repair work for elderly people and those living in the dampest properties. Reporting any issues for vulnerable residents and hidden sufferers so these could be identified in call data was important.
- **Building and fire safety including Nobel House, Redhill** – it was confirmed that RHT was investing £8.5m over 5 years to address building and fire safety concerns locally arising from the Grenfell fire in London as well as statutory changes set out in the Fire Safety Act and Building Safety Bill. Nobel House, Redhill was discussed which was an Avon Rents Ltd building. The fire alarm system and evacuation procedures had been updated in the flats following issues raised in a fire engineers' report. Cladding safety issues had been identified as costing £14m to fix with a potential cost to leaseholders of £100k per flat. RHT was supporting and informing residents alongside Members and the local MP.
- **Development of properties** – 933 homes over five years with an average of 130 affordable homes per year and 30 market sale homes per year were proposed in Raven Housing Trust's Development and Sales strategy 2021-22 to 2025-26. This was in line with RBBC's Housing Strategy which supported mixed tenure of housing. Preference was for land-led delivery by acquiring sites and investing in existing properties to enable better management of a whole site.
- **Southridge Homes** – this was a joint venture between Raven Housing Trust and RBB which targeted 50% of affordable housing on sites which was higher than government targets set on affordable housing. This aimed to build long term sustainable communities.
- **Social value assessment** – Members asked how conditions were improved for residents and the difference Raven Housing Trust (RHT) was making through social value. This was a tangible benefit to help bring about improved social, economic and environmental benefits. This helped to minimise payment debts and support people who were struggling financially.
- **Digital inclusion** – a digital support team at Raven Housing Trust helped residents who could not access services digitally. The organisation had worked with Voluntary Action Reigate and Banstead (VARB) to supply

refurbished laptops to support learning for children and set up one to one sessions to improve digital skills, and support elderly and vulnerable residents who struggled to access online services.

- **Supporting community activities** – the organisation had supported local community activities such as a litter pick day and worked closely with ward councillors to support these local initiatives.
- **Performance and benchmarking** – Raven Housing Trust reported that overall satisfaction from residents on their housing services was 84% in 2020/21 compared to 80% in 2019/20; 78% believed they listened to and acted on residents' views. It was confirmed that wider housing association comparison data showed that RHT performed well and better than other housing providers.
- **Regeneration programme** – a long term programme of regeneration of properties was taking place in areas that were in need, starting with Chavcroft. This was part of the aim to make homes desirable, comfortable and affordable to run. Unpopular homes and unviable homes in terms of investment were disposed of and replaced with high-quality, sustainable and affordable homes. In response to Member questions, RHT confirmed that this did not mean fewer properties as 531 net extra new homes were planned over five years.
- **Net Zero Carbon programme** – this programme of work and grant funding was discussed with benefits to residents that included lower net carbon emissions and more efficient homes. Partnership with RBBC included a range of grant funding from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) and Local Authority Delivery (LAD) Scheme to fund energy efficient upgrades to low income and low energy efficiency rated homes. Retrofit plans were completed on 12 homes in 2021 using £0.6m funding with £1.8m proposed funding over the next two years.

In addition, written responses to the Committee had been provided in advance on numbers of socially rented properties, current number of voids in social housing across the borough and numbers on the waiting list and transfer for social housing.

Committee Chair, Councillor Harrison, thanked Raven Housing Trust directors for their presentation and attending the meeting to respond to Member questions.

**RESOLVED** – to note the Raven Housing Trust presentation and observations of the Committee.

## 28. **QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021/22**

The Committee received reports on the Council's performance for the first quarter of 2021/22 including Key Performance Indicator (KPI) reporting, as well as revenue and budget monitoring. The reports were due to go to the Executive on 19 September 2021.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Policy and Resources, Councillor Lewanski, introduced the KPI report by noting that, out of the 10 KPIs, 2 were red rated:

- KPI2 which related to business rates collection.
- KPI10 which related to recycling.

Members discussed and asked questions on the following areas:

**Recycling** – It was noted that the target of 60% was a stretch target, although this was open to discussion. It was noted that the target remained 60% and that the Committee would be consulted on the setting of future targets later in the year. It was noted that the large increase in overall tonnage collected was disproportionately in favour of residual waste.

**Business Rates** – It was identified that the unallocated business rates in a suspense account had not yet been allocated due to the need to ascertain the correct payer. The Committee noted that, once allocated, the indicator would be within tolerance.

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance, Councillor Schofield, outlined the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme performance for Q1 2021/22. The projected full year outturn for the Revenue Budget was £17.67m against a management budget of £17.696m and there were no material variances to report. A cautious approach continued to be taken in relation to the Financial impacts of the pandemic; the main area of concern remained forecast income shortfalls compared to budget. The Capital Programme forecast was 60% below the approved Programme at £56.29m. This was due to forecast slippage of budgets to 2022/23 and a small net underspend.

During the discussion:

- It was noted that major concerns existed which related to COVID-19 income losses which were forecast for the year on a prudent basis at £2.3m, with offsetting government funding which had ended after Q1 of just under £0.5m. A £2.0m Earmarked Reserve had been set aside for these income losses in 2021/22.
- It was noted that this would be a serious challenge for the 2022/23 budget, requiring additional steps to re-establish income streams or to identify cost savings to offset them.
- In relation to Car Parking income, members confirmed that they expected long term decline with more people working from home, and reduced retail and leisure activity. In relation to Leisure Services, the fee due from the contracted Leisure Provider had been waived during the pandemic; the Interim Head of Paid Service noted that the provider had now put in a proposition for the management fee going forward that was due to be considered soon. It was noted that the impact of the pandemic on commercial income/rents at £40k was substantially less than the loss experienced by many other councils.
- Overall, it was identified that, despite being early in the 2021/22 budget cycle, it appeared there were some improvements to the income forecasts.
- In relation to Capital, it was questioned whether the delays in the Commercial Investments and Housing Delivery programmes would provide savings in the cost of borrowing. This was confirmed.

**RESOLVED:**

1. To note Key Performance Indicator (KPI) performance for Q1 2021/22 as detailed in the report and at Annex 1;
2. To note the Budget Monitoring forecasts for Q1 2021/22 as detailed in the report and at Annex 2.

**29. LOCAL PLAN SCRUTINY PANEL REPORT - CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION SPD**

Members considered the Minutes from the Local Plan Scrutiny Panel which met on 25 August to review the public consultation responses to the Climate Change and Sustainable Construction Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Councillor Parnall, Chair of the Panel, noted that the SPD was an advisory document designed to give residents and developers advice at pre-planning stage and taken alongside the Local Plan Core Strategy which was due to be reviewed by July 2024. The public consultation had taken place successfully and was well received by residents and planners alike.

Chair, Councillor Harrison, requested that the Planning Policy team take on board Panel Members' comments and whether there were changes that the Executive needed to know whether this had been acted upon. He requested a detailed response about how the Panel recommendations were being acted upon for discussion at Executive on 16 September 2021.

Members made observations and comments on matters which included:

- **Pre-emptive tree felling** – a real matter of concern to residents. A number of representations had been received by Members on this issue.
- **Historic England** and heritage sites which were not always coordinated as part of the planning process.
- **Gas boilers** –new gas pipes with extended life for next 80 years could be used for hydrogen.
- **Electric vehicle charging points** – residents were not necessarily aware of some of the policies already in place.
- **Water resources** including use of grey water to conserve and use water.

**RESOLVED** – that the Committee:

1. Approve the Minutes of the O&S Local Plan Scrutiny Panel on Climate Change and Sustainable Construction Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which met on 25 August 2021 to review the public consultation responses.
2. Agree that the Executive, were asked when considering to adopt the Climate Change and Sustainable Construction SPD on 16 September 2021, to note the observations of the Committee and its Scrutiny Panel.

**30. HYBRID WORKING SCRUTINY PANEL UPDATE**

Members received the Minutes and recommendations from the Hybrid Working Scrutiny Panel which met on 19 August 2021 to review progress on developing a

blend of remote and office-based work for the organisation following the emergency pandemic.

Panel Chair, Councillor Walsh, gave an overview to the Committee of the Panel discussions. This included:

- Maintaining the positive elements of hybrid working in a post-pandemic world was an opportunity to improve delivery of Council services for the benefit of residents.
- There were benefits and disadvantages to different models of hybrid working that Members and officers had experienced during the pandemic. Further work was needed to understand these changes.
- A fundamental shift in working practices for Members and officers had taken place as a result of the pandemic and the resulting cultural changes for the organisation needed to be analysed.
- The current legislative position on hosting remote Council meetings was hampering those Members who wanted to participate fully in the democratic process but could not vote if they attended meetings virtually (due to current legislation).

Members raised points about the democratic process and voting remotely, the pros and cons of working remotely, being office-based and a blend of both types of work, benefits to the environment, improved work/life balance and flexibility for Members and staff able to work from home and staff welfare.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. The Committee agree the Minutes and recommendations from the O&S Hybrid Working Scrutiny Panel meeting on 19 August 2021.
2. The observations of the Committee be considered by the Hybrid Working Steering Group. A future meeting of the Panel to be scheduled, if required.

### **31. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered the future work programme for the Committee as set out in Annex 1 to the report.

It was noted that the Companies Performance Update – Autumn 2021 was due be discussed at 21 October meeting. The Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022-2027 was listed for 9 December.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the proposed future work programme of the Committee.

### **32. EXECUTIVE**

It was reported that there were no items arising from the Executive that might be subject to the 'call-in' procedure in accordance with the provisions of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

**33. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business.

The Meeting closed at 9.59 pm