

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **11th October 2022**

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman)

Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Barrett, Blanford, Brooks, Burgess, Farrell, Hayward, Ledger, Meaden, Mulholland

Apology:

Cllr. Krause

Also Present:

Cllr. Wright

Also in Attendance (virtually)

Cllrs. Harman, Howard-Smith, Forest

Head of Policy & Performance, Development Partnership Manager, Service Lead Finance, Senior Accountant

In attendance:

Housing Development & Regeneration Manager, Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Member Services Officer

178 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Burgess	Made a 'Voluntary Announcement' as he was Deputy Portfolio Holder for Housing	180

179 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 13th September 2022 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

180 Future Plans for the Affordable Housing Programme - Presentation

The Housing Development & Regeneration Manager and Development Partnership Manager gave a comprehensive presentation on Land Acquisition to the Committee, which covered the following topics:

- Background – self-financing and delivery
- Good Foundations - identifying and searching for land
- Being competitive in the Marketplace – cross departmental working, being municipal and social value
- Building the HRA Business Plan – Accelerating delivery, aligning with other projects and viability
- Where do we want to go – Housing Delivery Framework and corporate thinking
- Next Steps – Possible Land Acquisition Group, partnering with Community Land Trust consultation and stakeholders.

The presentation was then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- A question was asked about the development of Community Land Trusts (CLT) going forward, with particular reference to Tenterden. The Development Partnership Manager explained they were working in various ways. Some delivered homes via S106 agreements and traditionally CLT land was gifted land, but ABC was not in a position to gift land, particularly in the Tenterden area. Currently more discussions were needed with the Diocese about a specific piece of land that may be of interest, and potentially then work with a CLT. The Rural Housing Enabler (who ran the Kent Community Housing Hub) were also working alongside to deliver meaningful housing. Cllr. Mulholland asked to be kept abreast of any development within Tenterden.
- It was noted that in reference to community led housing, a Point of Contact within ABC would be very beneficial, particularly for rural areas and Parish Councils. The Development Partnership Manager explained that initially people would be referred to the Kent Community Housing Hub or the English Rural Housing Association, but he was happy to be a conduit for that issue.
- Stodmarsh was highlighted by a Member as a long-standing issue that had influenced housing development and the idea of a Land Acquisition Group was welcomed. He spoke about increasing the amount of land parcels being acquired and that it needed to be a unified, joined up and bold approach, once the issue of Stodmarsh had concluded. He applauded the constant progressive, approach to affordable housing and procurement of land. The Development Partnership Manager went on to speak about finding the balance between demand and supply, whilst decarbonisation placed additional pressure on the Business Plan. He added that ABC had been nominated for two awards at the UK Housing Awards in November.

- A Member asked whether the recent increase to interest rates, would result in an increase to tenants rent rates. The Housing Development & Regeneration Manager explained that this was already being factored in and business models were being revised. Rent had been kept below 80% of market rent to stay affordable, and negotiations with Homes England would continue, since social rent demanded greater grant levels, than they could provide. Government were currently consulting about rental increases, with the three potential options being 3, 5 or 7 %, and traditionally it had been Consumer Price Index plus 1%. Affordable rent was deemed around 80% Market Value whilst social rent was around 60%. ABC collection rates were very good, but any arrears were in those higher rate rental properties. The Service Lead Finance explained that the interest rates in correlation to rents did not move linear, since rents were based on the CPI whilst interest rates affected borrowing.
- A Question was asked about the number of uninhabitable properties that ABC owned, and if funds were available to make those properties fit for purpose. Those statistics would be provided after the meeting.

Resolved:

That the presentation be received and noted.

181 Budget Scrutiny Introduction - Presentation

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer gave a short presentation on Budget Scrutiny 2023/2024. This covered an introduction to what Budget Scrutiny was about, the key considerations and the three stages of the Budget Scrutiny process. The meetings would take place virtually and at 6pm. Councillors Chilton, Barrett, Ledger, Hayward and Ovenden volunteered to sit on the Budget Scrutiny Task Group.

182 Reports Tracker and Scrutiny Matrix

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced the report and highlighted that the Committee had proposed to review the recent implementation of the Planning IT system with Arcus Global. A Task Group would now be assembled, with the first meeting to be held at the end of October, and those meetings would be held virtually and at 6pm. Councillors Barrett, Ledger, Mulholland, Harman and Ovenden volunteered to sit on that Task Group. The Chairman added that the meetings would be privately held, as they would take the form of one on one meetings with Officers.

A Member asked about an Officer Wellbeing Group that reviewed homelessness, social care and food banks. It had been suggested that the reports from that Group were presented to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and he sought clarification on this. The Policy & Scrutiny Officer would find out what the report was and feedback to Members.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted

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