

MINUTES of a meeting of the COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on TUESDAY, 26 OCTOBER 2021

Present: Councillor J Houtt (Chairman)

Councillors R L Morris, C C Benfield, T Eynon, J Geary, M D Hay, G Houtt, J G Simmons and M B Wyatt

Officers: Mr J Arnold, Mr A Barton, Mrs C Hammond, Mrs R Wallace and Miss E Warhurst

**9. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Bridgen.

**10. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

Councillor C Benfield declared a pecuniary interest in item 7 - Recommendations from the Increasing the Supply of Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group, as the Managing Director of a timber frame manufacturing company.

**11. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

None.

**12. MINUTES**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2021.

It was moved by Councillor J Geary, seconded by Councillor C Benfield and it was

RESOLVED THAT:

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2021 be approved as a correct record.

**13. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION IN THE FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman referred to the Committee's work programme and invited Members to make requests for any additional items.

Advic was sought on which of the Scrutiny Committees would be best fit to review the choice of premises for the Customer Services Centre within Coalville Town Centre when it was relocated in 2022. Members were informed that that this would fall under the Corporate Scrutiny Committee but were reminded that the matter had already been through the Committee for consideration.

In relation to the 'Flood Management in NWL' item scheduled for consideration in February, a suggestion was made that flooding pollution, particularly sewerage, be a focus within the report. A further request was made to include both Whitwick and Hugglescote Parish Council's when preparing the report as they would like to submit comments in relation to their flooding concerns. The Strategic Director agreed to take the comments back to the officers preparing the report.

By affirmation of the meeting, it was

Chairman's initials

RESOLVED THAT:

The Future Work Programme be received and noted.

The Chairman advised Members that due to the nature of the reports it was beneficial to change the order of the agenda to discuss item 7 – Recommendations from the Supply of Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group prior to item 6 – Draft Housing Strategy.

#### **14. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE INCREASING THE SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

Having declared a pecuniary interest in the item, Councillor C Benfield left the meeting during discussion and voting thereon.

The Strategic Director of Housing and Customer Services presented the report to Members.

During discussion, a query was raised on the confidence of officers that the proposed annual figure of 199 new affordable homes could be delivered. The Strategic Director reported that data indicated the target was likely to be met in the current year as numbers were projected at 220 new affordable homes, but acknowledged that it was an aspirational figure as guarantees could not be made on the amount developers would build. Members were reminded that this figure was recommended following the work of the Task and Finish group but ultimately was a decision of the Committee.

Members congratulated the work of the Task and Finish Group as it was felt that a thorough review had been undertaken.

It was moved by Councillor T Eynon, seconded by Councillor J Simmons and it was

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET THAT:

- 1) The Council write to Government encouraging a reform of the Land Compensation Act.
- 2) A target level of 199 new affordable homes (rented and low-cost home ownership) be included in the new Housing Strategy for new affordable housing development in the district subject to:
  - a) An enhanced joint working partnership with other housing providers, including increasing the frequency of meetings with registered providers active in the district.
  - b) Officers looking into waiting times targets for the various housing need bands on the housing waiting list.

#### **15. DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY**

The Strategic Director of Housing and Customer Services presented the report to Members.

In response to a query in relation to how the information was gathered to understand the future needs for housing, the Strategic Director explained that data was constantly changing so a snapshot of time was taken for each update to make sure it was as accurate as possible. It was confirmed that the Census was used along with the HEDNA, both of which would be updated soon.

Chairman's initials

A concern was raised that private renting seemed more affordable than buying a low-cost home and it was highlighted that the most affordable way to get on the housing ladder was through renting from the Council and then to purchase through the Right to Buy Scheme. It was asked that reference to this be included within the strategy.

A request was made that going forward, any questionnaires used as part of a consultation be included within reports to allow for a further understanding into the matter. It was agreed for the two questionnaires referred to in the report to be forwarded to Members outside of the meeting for further information.

In relation to the improved housing standards in the private sector, a Member requested further information on how this was achieved and what the improvements were. The Strategic Director agreed to provide this information outside of the meeting.

A Member disagreed with the point made within the report in relation to private renting being a short-term solution to those saving up for a deposit. Comments were made that private rents were very high which would make it difficult for savings to be made, therefore residents were often trapped into renting permanently.

A comment was made on the recognition within the strategy that there was an oversupply of large property sizes and an undersupply of smaller property sizes. It was felt that this was an important statement as there was a desperate need for smaller affordable homes within the district. It was questioned what could be done to resolve the problem. The discussion then moved on to creating clear planning policies for minimum room sizes and increasing the number of bungalows within developments; and also, the never-ending cycle of justifying the need for development in areas where there is business growth even though the properties were not fit for purpose due to the large property sizes and lower-income jobs. The Committee was advised that the discussion was more suited to the Local Plan Committee and that all concerns made would be passed on to the relevant officers for consideration. In response to a question, the Strategic Director confirmed that the Planning Cross Party Working Group could possibly look at some of these concerns in more detail.

A discussion was had on the reference in the strategy to the district having good transport links. Several Members disagreed with this comment as they felt that although there was a link to the two motorways, the infrastructure in between was very poor and not fit for purpose. Reference was also made to the lack of a rail link in the district and calls were made to put more pressure on the Government to deliver on the reopening of the Ivanhoe line.

A Member asked for evidence that officers were working on the reopening of the Ivanhoe line as it seemed that little had been done on the matter for some time. With the Chairman's permission, Councillor C Benfield, in his capacity of Deputy Chairman of the 'Campaign to reopen the Ivanhoe Line Group', reported that officers were being very supportive and the current pause in the campaign was due to a pending response from the Transport Authority.

It was moved by Councillor J Geary, seconded by Councillor R Morris and

RESOLVED THAT:

Comments made by the Committee be presented to Cabinet when it considers the Draft Housing Strategy.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm

The Chairman closed the meeting at 7.08 pm

Chairman's signature