

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Held at:	Remote meeting
Date	Tuesday, 1 December 2020
Present	Councillors Gary Fuller, Peter Gane, Anthony Hills (In place of Miss Susan Carey), Michelle Keutenius (Vice-Chair), Connor McConville, Terence Mullard, Rebecca Shoob (Chairman) and John Wing
Apologies for Absence	Councillor Miss Susan Carey and Councillor Patricia Rolfe
Officers Present:	Andy Blaszkowicz (Director of Housing and Operations), Kate Clark (Case Officer - Committee Services), Ewan Green (Director of Place), Adrian Hammond (Housing Lead Specialist), John Holman (Assistant Director of Housing), Andy Jarrett (Chief Strategic Development Officer), John Bunnett (Development Director), Amandeep Khroud (Assistant Director), Susan Priest (Chief Executive), Charlotte Spendley (Director of Corporate Services) and Jemma West (Committee Service Specialist)
Others Present:	Councillors Godfrey, Mrs Hollingsbee and Monk were also in attendance as the relevant Cabinet Members.

29. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Shoob declared a DPI in respect of the item relating to Draft Business Plan – Otterpool Park LLP (Minute No 33), in that she was a Director of the Board of Otterpool Park LLP. She left the meeting prior to the consideration of this item of business, and Councillor Keutenius took the Chair.

30. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 October 2020 were submitted and agreed. The Chairman confirmed that her electronic signature could be added to the minutes.

31. Minutes of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Sub-Committee

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2020 were submitted and approved. The Chairman's signature will be added to these minutes as approval.

32. Draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2020/25 Consultation Responses

The Cabinet Member for Housing, Transport and Special Projects, and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities introduced the report which set out the responses received during the public consultation for the draft Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2020/25. The 8 week period of consultation ended on 2 October. Subject to the proposed amendments in the report, it was recommended that the Strategy be adopted by the Council.

- The strategy had been shared with all partners on the CSU for their comments.
- The street count the previous week had shown 11-12 cases, but this was being verified by partners.
- Those who had been sofa surfing were not necessarily classed as intentionally homeless, and each case was judged on the individual circumstances.
- There had not been any recent increase in homelessness presentations due to rent arrears or domestic abuse, but this was being closely monitored, and the council continued working to maximise the accommodation options available.
- Affordable rents made up a large proportion of new affordable homes. The key issue was due to government policy, and the funding available. The council's programme had been agreed in line with government policy.
- The rainbow centre provides daytime facilities for those living on the streets. The council were also looking at a strategy for the use of Next Steps funding, which included the delivery of units to support those with more complex needs, such as addiction. This work was in progress, and suitable accommodation was being sought. It was hoped six units would be acquired and in use by the spring of 2021. A support service will be in place to support people living in the accommodation.
- The Next Steps units and Housing First units were different projects.
- The Homelessness Forum would move the Working Group forward. The Working Group is likely to be a sub-group of the forum, made up of key local partners.
- Cabinet would be considering the Strategy at their meeting on 9 December, and both Cabinet and the Council would be very committed to the Strategy.

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- There were around 35-40 people presently in temporary accommodation, but this changed on a daily basis. The council tried to avoid placing people in Bed and Breakfasts, but around 15 households (couples and single people) were presently placed in B&B accommodation.
- An annual review of the strategy would take place, involving all partners, and would be reported back to Members.
- In general terms, some single households were in Bed and Breakfast accommodation for longer than anticipated, sometimes 8-10 weeks. The council's aim was that families were in temporary accommodation for no more than 3 months. More detail on these figures would be provided to Members after the meeting.
- More one bedroom accommodation was being sought.

Proposed by Councillor Shoob,
Seconded by Councillor Keutenius; and

RESOLVED:

1. **That report C/20/54 be received and noted.**

(Voting figures: 8 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

33. Draft Business Plan - Otterpool Park LLP

The Leader of the Council, in his capacity as Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park, introduced the report which presented the draft proposed business plan of Otterpool Park Limited Liability Partnership for the Committee's consideration.

Prior to the consideration of the report, Councillor Shoob left the meeting and Councillor Keutenius took the Chair. Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee also left the meeting.

The Chairman read out a statement reminding all members that it will not be possible for Officers to discuss commercially sensitive/confidential information during the open session of this meeting, and if members wished to discuss commercially sensitive / confidential information then it was recommended that a vote take place to move into private session.

The Director of Place, as representative of the council, gave a brief introduction and advised that consideration of the Draft Business Plan was a significant milestone in the development and delivery of the project.

The Director of Development, as representative of the LLP, outlined the Business Plan and introduced the Consultants (Tim Mitford-Slade from Strutt and Parker and Victoria Seal from BNP Paribas Real Estate) who were present at the meeting to address any detailed technical questions, should they be asked by members.

The Committee Members commented on various issues including the following:

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- With regard to community engagement, how were current communities, such as Lympne, being engaged? This was vital in order for the new community to blend in.
- Under Phase one of the infrastructure, were other incomes being pursued?
- Could the project commit to zero carbon housing as the council could act as a trail blazer.
- Was there a transport strategy, particularly in relation to walking and cycling links?
- The term relating to new schools 'opening and filling up from the bottom' would benefit from clarification.
- There appeared to be inconsistencies between the report (paragraph 3.1.1) and business plan (paragraph 5.2) around enabling the LLP to deliver without further approval being required.
- How did the council arrive at the decision to form the LLP?
- Members asked whether the term 'shareholders' should be removed from the plan, given that there were no shareholders?
- What process was in place for the LLP to draw down additional funding?
- Members had control over the council and its processes.
- The project was ambitious and exciting.

The Director of Development and the Leader of the Council both responded to issues raised by Members, and made points including the following:

- Consultation and engagement was resource intensive. Due to the importance placed on the matter, a new member of staff had recently been recruited to provide more capacity to help develop relationships within the local communities. The team were tendering to establish a 'virtual community' to bring together the community and local businesses, with an opportunity to engage on different aspects of the project such as design, etc.
- The numbers reflected the assessed need of the development. If there was a need for more funding, other ways to bring in investment would be considered and sought with the necessary approvals being put in place. This could, e.g. include investment from Homes England who had expressed an interest in funding part of the infrastructure.
- The aspiration for zero carbon was there, but at the present time this would incur additional costs and the council's ambition is to create a low carbon new town, not a zero carbon town.
- The design did respond to the council's aspiration for environmental sustainability. It was also important to retain the ability of the scheme to be profitable. Other examples of zero carbon housing elsewhere in the country had been subsidised by local authorities. In the industry, there were many different definitions of zero carbon.
- Work continues on the Transport Strategy and this would be submitted in the spring, prior to the consideration of the outline application. The

promotion of more walking and cycling, and more use of public transport would be included in the strategy, as well as connectivity to surrounding areas, including Hythe.

- The intention is that the first primary school would be delivered before the first house was occupied. The phrasing around 'filling from the bottom up' could be clarified as the draft documents were finalised.
- A range of legal documents govern the relationship between the council and the LLP, and the business plan was also a means by which the LLP would be controlled, which is why the plan would be reviewed annually by members, and would act as an opportunity to reaffirm the activities of the LLP's business plan. There were also two of the District Councillors appointed as Board Members.
- With regard to the formation of the LLP, the council could have employed a company to act as the delivery vehicle, but creating its own LLP would retain an element of control. Extensive external legal and financial advice had been sought as reported throughout the year in earlier decision-making reports.
- Although there were no other shareholders of the LLP at this point, it was something that could be considered in the future, for partners to come on board, should that be an appropriate action to progress.
- It was anticipated that over time the LLP would become self-sustaining. The LLP was only authorised to operate within the context of the business plan. Anything outside of the agreement would require an exceptional report. The necessary appendices to the plan were being worked up at present, but would clearly show how the LLP could draw down funding within the agreed range of activities. Members were reassured that there would not be unlimited uncontrolled finance for the LLP.

Proposed by Councillor McConville,
Seconded by Councillor Wing; and

RESOLVED:

That given the importance of this piece of work, a task and finish group be created to work alongside members and officers to get the Business Plan to its best possible version prior to consideration by Cabinet in January 2021.

(Voting figures: 5 for, 1 against, 1 abstention).

Proposed by Councillor Keutenius,
Seconded by Councillor Fuller; and

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and noted.

(Voting figures: 7 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).