

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Held at:	Council Chamber - Civic Centre, Folkestone
Date	Tuesday, 17 January 2023
Present	Councillors Peter Gane, Michelle Keutenius (Chairman), Connor McConville, Rebecca Shoob (Vice-Chair) and John Wing.
Apologies for Absence	Councillor Miss Susan Carey, Councillor Terence Mullard and Councillor Patricia Rolfe.
Officers Present:	Andy Blaszkowicz (Director of Housing and Operations), Gill Butler (Chief Officer - Housing), James Clapson (Case Officer (Committee)), Ewan Green (Director of Place), Susan Priest (Chief Executive), Andrew Rush (Chief Officer Place & Regulatory Services) and Karen Weller (Environmental Protection Senior Specialist).
Others Present:	Councillor Stuart Peall (Folkestone & Hythe District Council).

1. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

2. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting dated 8 November 2022 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

3. **Minutes of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Sub Committee**

The minutes of the meeting dated 6 December 2022 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

4. **How the Council Can Assist Parish and Town Councils with Legally Moving on Illegal Encampments**

Mrs Weller provided members with a presentation that outlined the ways in which Folkestone and Hythe District Council (FHDC) currently supported parish

and town councils in responding to unauthorised encampments on their land. The presentation slides have been attached to the minutes for reference.

During consideration of the item it was noted that:

- Parish councils often had a very limited number of staff, they may find it difficult to complete the paperwork needed to get unauthorised encampments moved on.
- Negotiated stopping agreements could be useful for private landowners in certain circumstances; it could save money on legal costs.
- When an incident occurred, it was very important to keep the public informed about what was happening. Information would be shared on FHDC's website and parish and town councils could link to this information on their websites. The Customer Services department were also kept up to date in order to respond to public enquiries.
- If parish or town councils were concerned that an area was particularly vulnerable, the Police could carry out a target hardening review. This looked at what could be done to make access to the site more difficult. Members could potentially allocate some of their ward grant monies towards target hardening schemes.
- The officers who conducted welfare checks were well trained and had a housing background. Although there was no legal requirement or national standard for welfare checks, the checks carried out by the FHDC were very thorough. FHDC would carry out welfare checks for parish and town councils.
- It was very important that people reported incidents of antisocial behaviour to the Police. The Police could only act upon the information that was reported to them. Cases of anti-social behaviour allowed the Police to use Section 61 powers to move unauthorised encampments on. These reports could be made anonymously using the non-emergency 101 phone number.
- Officers will produce an information sheet for parish and town councils which will outline the processes and supports available from the Council.

5. **Housing - HRA Business Plan and Carbon Reduction Approach**

Mrs Butler and Mr Blaszkowicz provided Members with a presentation detailing the strategic priorities and themes for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 30 Year Business Plan and Housing Carbon Reduction Approach. The slides have been attached to the minutes for reference.

During consideration of the item it was noted that:

- Objective 3 of the Asset Management Strategy – to improve the housing stock to energy rating C by 2030 was a key focus of the team.
- There was a balance to be struck between keeping rents low for council tenants, and maximising rental income that provided funding to improve the housing stock for those tenants in the future.
- The method to improve the housing stock's energy efficiency would be to take a fabric first approach, initially this would target the lowest performing properties. This approach would prepare the properties for whatever the heating systems maybe in the future.

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- There would be some properties where retrofitting energy performance improvements would not be viable; in these cases, consideration would be given to rebuilding or selling the building.
- A larger housing stock would provide more income, however purchases through the right to buy scheme reduced the number of council houses. The potential impact of the right to buy scheme sales would be considered in the 30 year business plan.
- The new build budget may need to be reduced, this was in recognition of the current economic climate and the many competing demands on the HRA capital finances. The Council was open to opportunities to acquire new stock and regularly looked for potential properties to purchase.
- A lot of research was going on into the use of hydrogen as a heat source for houses.
- There would be a need to educate and inform tenants about how to live with new technologies and make behavioural changes to minimise their energy usage. One method for this would be Housing Online which can be accessed via the Council's 'My Account' system, which around 1000 tenants had signed up to so far. Since going live, this system has been continuously improved and now allows tenants to digitally report issues.
- There was £450,000 of decarbonisation funding allocated to the Ross House project in the 2023/24 budget. This budget was carried forward from the 2022/23 year as works were not expected to be completed by the end of March 2023.
- Mr Blaszkowicz believed the current HRA debt was around £50,000,000, however he offered to confirm this with finance colleagues and arrange for a response to members outside of the meeting.
- The business plan had a complex finance model behind it that modelled different scenarios and assumptions over the 30 year period. Part of the model would consider various borrowing strategies.
- The Council could retain capital receipts from property sales, such as through the right to buy scheme.