

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS, at 4.45 pm on Tuesday, 14 March 2023

Present: Councillor Ben Chapelard (Chair)
Councillors Warne (Vice-Chair), Hall, Fitzsimmons, Hayward, Pound and Rutland

Officers in Attendance: William Benson (Chief Executive), Lee Colyer (Director of Finance, Policy and Development (Section 151 Officer)), Claudette Valmond (Head of Legal Partnership and Interim Monitoring Officer), Gary Stevenson (Head of Housing, Health and Environment) and Caroline Britt (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors

LEADERS INTRODUCTION AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CAB123/22 There were no announcements.

APOLOGIES

CAB124/22 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Everitt.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

CAB125/22 There were no disclosable pecuniary or other significant interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS WISHING TO SPEAK

CAB126/22 There were no Visiting Members who had registered as wishing to speak.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 9 FEBRUARY 2023

CAB127/22 Members reviewed the minutes.

With reference to CAB112/22 the first bullet point was an incomplete sentence and should instead read "The Wesley Centre should be listed under the category of Operational Community Asset (as the Day centre was)".

No other amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting dated 9 February 2023 be approved as a correct record.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

CAB128/22 There were no questions from members of the Council.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

CAB129/22 There were no questions from members of the public.

CONSIDERATION OF THE FORWARD PLAN AS AT 6 MARCH 2023

CAB130/22 Members considered the plan. No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan as at 6 March 2023 be noted.

LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND APPLICATION

CAB131/22 Councillor Hugo Pound, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced the report and provided some background as to the reasons for the urgency which included the following:

- The deadline date for submitting the Memorandum of Understanding to Government was 15 March 2023. Given this deadline, agreement by the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny to waive call-in was very much appreciated.
- The issue had been taken to the Housing Advisory Panel, the Communities and Economic Development Cabinet Advisory Board and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Government were offering the Council the opportunity to purchase 15 properties of which they would make a contribution of 40% towards the cost of 14 properties and 50% towards the cost of one larger (4 bedroom) property.
- In addition, Government would provide £20k per property to cover the cost of any refit that might be required to make the property suitable for the tenant.
- TWBC would pay the remaining 60% which would be funded from S106 money that had been collected from developers over the years for the provision of affordable housing.
- TWBC would use up to £3.2m of developer contributions to fund the scheme.
- A number of issues were raised at the various Committees the report had been taken to prior to Cabinet which included the following:
 - o TWBC would aspire to ensuring the properties complied to more than the minimum of the EPC standard.
 - o TWBC would seek properties that already had alternative energy sources.
 - o All properties will be purchased within the Borough.
 - o Most properties would be 2 or 3 bedroom family houses. And one 4 bedroom home (as required by the Government).
 - o If TWBC were unable to purchase all 15 properties within the prescribed timescale, some of the funding (proportionate) would have to be returned to Government.
 - o The location of the properties would take into account local amenities, schools and the social networking opportunities of the families who would live there.
 - o TWBC should seek to purchase freehold properties, not leasehold properties.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- The process of allocating properties had yet to be finalised, but a set of criteria would be developed that would take account of circumstances such as location and size of property and other appropriate relevant factors.
- Once a property had been allocated, the rent would be set at social

- level rents.
- The length of tenure had yet to be defined but the current view was that both Ukrainian and Afghan families would want to aspire to having their own accommodation and be supported by a community of their own choosing.
- It was therefore expected that particularly for the Ukrainian families their tenure would not be very long. It was less clear at this stage on the possible length of stay for the Afghan families.
- Guidance would be sought from Government on the process for returning the properties for use within the Borough.
- The decision to be taken by Cabinet was not about the families or location of properties, but whether to sign the Memorandum of Understanding that would then allow the provision of a 40% contribution from Government towards the purchase of the properties, with TWBC paying the remaining 60%.
- Some details for the scheme were still to be determined but they would follow in due course.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Council's participation in the Local Authority Housing Fund be approved.
2. That the release of up to £3.2m in S106 commuted sums be used for the purpose of providing affordable housing in the Borough, as the Council's capital contribution to deliver 15 properties in line with the Local Authority Housing Fund's objectives be approved.
3. That delegated authority be given to the Head of Housing, Health and Environment to sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) be approved.
4. That delegated authority be given to the Head of Housing, Health and Environment, consultation with the Director of Finance, Policy and Development, the Director of Change and Communities, the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services, and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning, to negotiate and enter into any legal documents, contracts or partnership agreements to acquire and deliver the 15 properties be approved.

REASON FOR DECISION:

To enable the Council to deliver 15 units of affordable housing, initially to mitigate against increased housing and homelessness pressures arising from Ukrainian and Afghan nationals, and to also support the ongoing housing and homelessness needs of residents within the Tunbridge Wells Borough.

CALL-IN AND URGENCY

In accordance with the provisions Of Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 14 in Part 4 of the Constitution, the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny gave prior agreement that this decision was urgent and would not be subject to call-in as delay would seriously prejudice the Council's or the public's interest.

URGENT BUSINESS

CAB132/22 There was no urgent business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

CAB133/22 The next meeting would be held on Thursday 23 March 2023 commencing at 6:30pm.

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 5.10 pm.