

Folkestone & Hythe District and Parish Councils' Joint Committee

Held at:	Remote Meeting
Date	Thursday, 17 March 2022
Present	Councillors Graham Allison, Michael Boor, Peter Coe (In place of Paul Thomas), Laszlo Dudas, Gillian Heywood (In place of Roger Joyce), Frank Hobbs, Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee and Terence Mullard
Apologies for Absence	Councillors Roger Joyce and Paul Thomas
Officers Present:	Andy Blaszkowicz (Director of Housing and Operations), Gill Butler (Chief Officer - Housing), Kate Clark (Case Officer - Committee Services) and Ellen Joyce (Democratic Services Trainee)
Others Present:	None

23. Appointment of chairman

Proposed by Councillor Graham Allison
Seconded by Councillor Terry Mullard

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Frank Hobbs be appointed as Chairman for the meeting.

24. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

25. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2022 were agreed.
Councillor Peter Coe abstained as he was not present at the meeting.

26. Housing Asset Management Strategy

A presentation was given to members on the Housing Asset Management Strategy. The presentation has been attached to these minutes.

Mr Andrew Blaszkowicz, Director – Housing & Operations, introduced Gill Butler as the new Chief Officer for Housing. Both officers then proceeded to give the presentation, asking for any comments and questions along the way.

Councillor Hobbs asked how many social housing properties do we have?

Mr Blaszkowicz advised there are around 3460 council properties, approximately a third of which are sheltered accommodation.

Councillor Mullard raised concerns regarding how much decision making is being given to tenants and regarding the costs surrounding repairs for tenants. He also noted that the estimated cost to reach Net Carbon Zero is very high.

Gill Butler advised that when consulting with tenants the Council ultimately makes the final decisions but it is important to bring the tenants with the Council on the journey to making any decisions.

Mr Blaszkowicz also highlighted that the My Account service will link to the NEC Housing management system which will inform tenants when looking to log repairs what is their responsibility to repair and what would be repaired by the Council. He also clarified that the Council and others have declared a climate emergency and that we will need to provide budget within the HRA to meet the demands of meeting Net Carbon Zero.

Councillor Boor asked for clarification regarding Right to Buy for tenants and if the investment in properties to be energy efficient may encourage current tenants to take up the Right to Buy and then deplete the housing stock the Council currently have?

Mr Blaszkowicz advised that he could not give a clear answer on this as can't predict the movement of tenants but that Right to Buy is available to current tenants and they will have to put in a level of risk management to keep housing stock at a good level.

Gill Butler advised that officers can give a number on take up of Right to Buy but does know the uptake on this is low. Tenants can buy the properties but not immediately sell them, as the Council have a buy back option on the properties within a certain time frame.

Councillor Dudas commented on having previously worked in local government and particularly within housing capital teams and wanted to make two points regarding the HRA. One regarding being surprised that only 6% of the housing stock had been surveyed prior to the management of the properties coming back in house from the ALMO and how low that is. Secondly regarding thinking a 25 year plan is too long and a lot can happen in that time and that 5 – 7 or 10 years is a more realistic time frame to plan for.

Mr Blaszkowicz thanked him for his comments.

Councillor Hobbs asked the officers how the council decides on where the new housing stock is located?

Mr Blaszkowicz advised that Section 106 means that 22% of new housing developments have to go to affordable housing. This can be offered out to other housing associations and the Council but they try to maintain a good working relationship with developers to encourage them to bring units forward to the Council.

He also advised that the Council have a development portfolio highlighting pockets of land where they can build and brown field sites that the Council can look to use. Examples of Biggins Wood and Ship Street were provided where the Council has stepped in to regenerate derelict sites and the Council are able to apply for grant funding government bodies.

Mr Blaszkowicz also highlighted that there would be a public engagement evening regarding Ship Street at the Quarterhouse in Folkestone on the following Thursday between 4pm and 7pm and councillors were welcome to come along.

Councillor Heywood queried how much of the housing in Otterpool Park will be affordable housing?

Mr Blaszkowicz advised that 22% of the properties in Otterpool Park will be affordable housing. He also advised that is yet to be defined how much will come into council stock, but that his hopes are that a third of that will be brought into the Council housing stock, however, this has not yet been agreed.

Councillor Heywood clarified if that would make the proposed number around 700.

Mr Blaszkowicz confirmed this would be around 600-700 properties but did highlight that this could also be taken on by Housing Associations. It should be noted that this would be over the life of the Otterpool Park development which spans 30 years.

He also advised that the Council are hoping to have 1200 new homes over the next 13-14 years with stock coming from the developments at Ship Street, Biggins Wood, Otterpool Park and Princes Parade among others.

Councillor Heywood asked how many of the 1200 properties were likely to be Council or Housing Association or is the 1200 to be all Council properties?

Mr Blaszkowicz advised that the aim is for the properties to all be part of the Council housing stock and is what is planned but will depend on the retrofitting journey and other demands on the HRA finances.

Councillor Boor noted that he does not believe that percentage of properties will be met at Otterpool Park.

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Councillor Hobbs thanked the officers for their time and hard work on the presentation and pack.