

Policy Review Committee

Venue: Microsoft Teams - Remote
Date: Monday, 12 April 2021
Time: 5.00 pm

Present remotely via Teams: Councillor A Lee in the Chair

Councillors T Grogan (Vice-Chair), J Chilvers, R Packham and J Shaw-Wright

Officers Present remotely via Teams: Dave Caulfield – Director of Economic Regeneration and Place, June Rothwell – Head of Operational Services, Keith Cadman – Head of Commissioning, Contracts and Procurement, Michelle Dinsdale – Senior Policy and Performance Officer, Phil Hiscott – Property Management Team Leader, Victoria Foreman – Democratic Services Officer

34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Arthur, M McCartney and M Jordan.

35 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

36 MINUTES

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2021.

RESOLVED:

To approve the minutes of the Policy Review Committee meeting held on 16 March 2021 for signing by the Chair.

37 CHAIR'S ADDRESS TO THE POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE

The Chair and Committee paused briefly in remembrance of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, who had recently passed away, and expressed their condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and the rest of the

Royal Family.

38 UPDATE FROM THE LOW CARBON WORKING GROUP (STANDING ITEM)

The Committee received a verbal update from the Senior Policy and Performance Officer, and noted the following points:

- The newly recruited Low Carbon Project Officer had started in their role on 12 April 2021 and would be attending the meeting of the Low Carbon Working Group on Thursday 15 April 2021.
- Also attending the meeting of the Low Carbon Working Group would be Professor Andy Gouldson from the University of Leeds to give an overview of the work of the Yorkshire & Humber Climate Commission.
- Work on Scope 3 emissions by APSE for the Council would be commencing soon.
- The draft Low Carbon Action Plan had originally been due for discussion at the Executive on 1 April 2021, but this had been rearranged for a later date, which was to be advised by the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Place Shaping, Councillor R Musgrave.
- With regards to tree planting in the district, the Executive had proposed a target figure of 25% of low-risk areas by 2050 but had indicated that a higher target would be considered if there was suitable landowner and partner interest and external funding available to deliver at that level.

Some Members expressed frustration that the Executive had not yet considered the Low Carbon action plan and emphasised the importance of starting to implement the suggested actions. Officers explained that the aspirations of the Low Carbon Working Group had been reflected in the plan, and that the Executive were reflecting and considering these things. The Executive had expressed strong support for tree planting in the district and for the Scope 3 emissions work by APSE. There were a number of measures in the action plan that the Council was already doing, such as the low carbon work in the Local Plan.

Members queried why the Executive had suggested a tree planting target of 25% as opposed to the 50% identified by the Low Carbon Working Group. Officers explained that the Executive had been cautious about the rates of tree planting until they had a clearer picture of space available for such work in the district and availability of external funding. An early priority of the Low Carbon Project Officer as they start in their role would be to move the work on tree planting forward.

Officers explained that the figure of 25% was still ambitious and comparable to other local authorities, and that there were a significant number of opportunities in the district to deliver it. Some Committee Members still felt that

the target should be higher, were disappointed at the Executive's decision and emphasised the importance of moving on with the low carbon work imminently. The Lead Executive Member for Housing, Health and Culture was present at the meeting and explained the reasoning of the Executive for the target of 25%.

The Committee noted that there needed to be a significant cultural shift in order to convince landowners that such space should be used for tree planting as opposed to housing or agriculture.

RESOLVED: The Policy Review Committee

- i) requested that the Executive give them a definitive answer within two weeks as to how the Low Carbon Action Plan would be taken forward; and**
- ii) expressed their disappointment at the Executive's decision to reduce the tree planting target from the 50% of low risk areas recommended by the Committee down to 25% by 2050.**

39 UPDATE ON CAR PARKING - VERBAL UPDATE

Officers gave the Committee a verbal update on the current situation with the upcoming installation of upgraded car parking machines in the Council's car parks and explained why there had been a delay. Members noted that the biggest delay had been experienced due to setting up new international merchant banking codes, which were required to facilitate the use of the new machines. There had also been the additional complication of traffic regulation orders, but these were ready for amendment once a start date for the change of tariffs was supplied.

The banking codes had now been supplied to the relevant pay and display provider, and the new machines would take approximately two weeks to install. Officers were aiming to have an installation engineer booked and undertaking the work in the next couple of weeks.

Members expressed their surprise at how long the process had taken but acknowledged the reasons why. Officers explained that a nearby local authority, Harrogate Borough Council, had experienced similar delays for the same reasons. The global pandemic and staff working from home had also complicated matters further.

Officers were confident that the new machines would be installed and ready for use by the end of the month (April 2021).

RESOLVED:

The Committee thanked Officers for the information and requested that a further update be provided in July 2021.

40 HOUSING REPAIRS PRESENTATION

Members received a presentation from the Head of Operational Services and the Property Management Team Leader about the recent performance of council house repairs and maintenance.

The presentation set out the role and responsibilities of the Council when it came to housing repairs, as well as the performance standards for emergency, urgent and non-urgent repairs, responsive repairs, the improvement programme, safe working during the Covid-19 pandemic (including government guidelines on working in tenants' homes), the assessment of risks and repairs, the effect of the pandemic on the capacity of the Repairs Team, access to homes during the pandemic and the roadmap to recovery for the service.

Members asked several questions of Officers, who confirmed that non-essential external works had resumed from 12 April 2021. Officers confirmed that some urgent repairs were done during lockdown, but that the policy and primary message sent to tenants was that only emergency repairs would be performed. Some voids work had also been booked and done.

Officers explained that the software system that was in use for managing housing repairs was old and struggling to keep up with the current workload. A great deal of the data was produced manually from records not always held in the system, which made some information difficult to retrieve and interrogate in a meaningful way, i.e., information could not be produced by ward from the system. It was also unable to tell Officers how long jobs had been outstanding for.

Having examined figures in the Officer's presentation, Members asked about the backlog of P2 (urgent) and P3 (routine) repairs and if there was a record of tenants agreeing to allow workers into their properties. Officers informed the Committee that some tenants had done jobs themselves, but that in general the Repairs Team had caught up on the backlog quickly; there was no record kept of tenants allowing work in their properties during the lockdown.

Members expressed concerns around the handling of requests for repairs from tenants and enquired about the training given to those taking such calls, and how the staff were able to judge how urgent a requested repair was. Officers confirmed that all staff taking such calls were trained comprehensively, but that as tenants were not often technical themselves, there could be some misunderstanding as to what work was needed, and advisors on the phones often had to tease out the detail from tenants and did what they could. There could often be a multitude of issues in one single property.

Officers were currently reviewing the backlog of repairs and looking at government guidance on the matter. One of the options being considered was a job scheduler which would be used to manage a small team who would be tasked with working through the backlog of repairs.

There were 1,383 outstanding non-urgent repairs in 924 properties, some of which were likely to be multiple jobs in single properties, most of which had not yet been contacted. Members noted that as there was no way to record on the system how long such jobs had been outstanding, the length of time for which the requests had been awaiting action was unclear. Officers estimated that the longest period for which tenants had been waiting for repairs was around four months but acknowledged that there could be longer timescales than this due to the recent lockdown.

Officers advised the Committee that in a normal year it would be expected that almost all repairs would have been dealt with; there had been some previous issues with works needed in void properties, but in general the performance of the team had been very good, with very few outstanding.

In terms of a reasonable timescale in which to clear the current backlog, Officers believed that with the usual levels of resource and an additional three members of staff, the repairs could be completed in around three to four months. However, if there were difficulties in recruiting the extra staff, such as electricians, this timescale could be longer. The current restrictions due to coronavirus also meant that each job often took longer, which stretched out the timeline.

Members were pleased to note that Officers would, as a priority, be looking at how the data and information relating to housing repairs was presented to make it more understandable.

The Committee queried whether the Council was potentially being too prescriptive in its risk assessments for trades staff, as some Members had employed both domestic and commercial tradesmen during lockdown and were readily available. Officers explained the legal obligation to tenants and staff as landlord and employer to ensure safety and to balance the risk of potentially spreading coronavirus versus that of undertaking repairs; it was important to be risk averse.

Members expressed the importance of ensuring that the outstanding repairs were done quickly and felt that if figures remained high it may be appropriate to revise or review the current risk assessment criteria.

Lastly, Members were of the view that all tenants calling for repairs should be proactively asked if they were happy for members of the Repairs Team to come into their properties at present; Officers would inform the Contact Centre of this request the following day.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the information presented by Officers in the update and requested that all tenants calling for repairs be asked if they were happy for members of the Repairs Team to enter their properties at present.

41 ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

The Committee considered the Annual Report 2020-21 which was introduced by the Democratic Services Officer.

Members asked that the Local Plan Consultation item resolution be amended to change the word 'endorse', as it was not felt that this accurately reflected the decision taken by the Committee.

RESOLVED: The Committee

- i. agreed the Committee's Annual Report for 2020-21 submitted by the Chair of the Policy Review Committee, subject to the amendment to the Local Plan Consultation item as detailed above; and**
- ii. authorised the Chair of the Policy Review Committee to agree the final version of the Annual Report 2020-21 following the inclusion of details from the meeting on 12 April 2021.**

42 WORK PROGRAMME PLANNING FOR 2021-22

The Committee considered the work programme for 2021-22, and made several comments and suggestions:

Members were of the opinion that the future of the Summit building in Selby should be considered and discussed as a starting point for extending to a wider watching brief of other properties purchased by the Council, e.g., the Natwest bank in Tadcaster. Such Council assets should be monitored accordingly to ensure that the most was being made of them, with one property or asset per meeting of the Committee.

The Committee agreed that the Summit was a particularly pertinent case, as it had been a large investment by the Council and as such posed a risk to the authority if unused; the next meeting of the Committee in July was suggested as a potential meeting date to look at it.

Officers were asked to include some brief background information, as well as medium to long term plans, financial implications and what the future held for the building.

RESOLVED:

The Committee agreed the 2021-22 work programme, with the addition of a per-meeting assessment of Council property assets, starting with the Summit Centre in Selby in July 2021.

The meeting closed at 6.41 pm.