

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION
HELD ON MONDAY, 12 APRIL 2021
(FROM 5.30 PM – 7.22 PM)**

PRESENT: Councillor Chris Aldred in the Chair. Councillor Sam Gibbs, Councillor Nick Brown, Councillor Michael Harrison, Councillor Sue Lumby, Councillor John Mann, Councillor Pat Marsh, Councillor Nigel Middlemass, Councillor Victoria Oldham, Councillor Tom Watson and Councillor Robert Windass.

In Attendance: Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities,
Councillor Mike Chambers

Late Arrivals: None

Early Departures: Councillor Nick Brown at 7.10 pm
Councillor Robert Windass at 7.10 pm

74/20 – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES:
Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Norman Waller. Councillor Victoria Oldham was acting as a substitute for Councillor Bernard Bateman.

(5.34 pm)

75/20 – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

(5.35 pm)

76/20 – MINUTES: The Minutes of the meetings of the Commission held on 18 January 2021 and 1 February 2021 were approved as a correct record.

(Ten Members voted for the motion and there was one abstention)

(5.35 pm – 5.37 pm)

77/20 – EXEMPT INFORMATION: There was no exempt information.

(5.39 pm)

78/20 – PUBLIC ARRANGEMENTS- QUESTIONS: There were no public questions.

(5.39 pm)

79/20 – FEEDBACK FROM CABINET HELD ON 3 FEBRUARY 2021:

The Scrutiny, Governance and Risk Manager submitted a written report that provided formal feedback to the Commission on items considered by Cabinet on 3 February that related to Overview and Scrutiny Commission referrals. The Chair explained that this was the first opportunity to provide this feedback due to the cancellation of a meeting in March.

The Commission had referred comments relating to three items, these were:

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1. Consideration of 2021/22 Draft Budget and 2022/23 Indicative Budget and Draft Housing Revenue Account Budget 2021/22 – Overview and Scrutiny Response
2. 2020/21 January Financial & Service Plan Performance Update
3. Corporate Performance Report, Quarter 3 2020/21

The Chair explained that he had attended Cabinet to present comments on behalf of the Commission and one of the outcomes was that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities had been invited to attend a future Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting to discuss housing matters, this was at Minute 80/20.

The Commission had made comments about salary savings during the scrutiny of the budget. The process had provided assurances to the Commission that, whilst there had been significant salary savings in the 2020/21 year which had helped to offset the costs associated with the pandemic, the budget for future years allowed for vacancies to be filled once services returned to normal. Councillor Pat Marsh requested that all Members be informed about senior management roles that were vacated or filled. It was **agreed** that this matter would be referred to Management Board.

(5.39 pm – 5.46 pm)

80/20 – HOUSING MATTERS:

The Chair explained that the review of quarter three performance information by the Commission at their meeting on 1 February 2021 had raised some queries relating the housing function at Harrogate Borough Council (HBC). He welcomed to the meeting the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities, Councillor Mike Chambers, and the Head of Housing.

Councillor Chambers stated that whilst the housing department performed well there was not room for complacency, especially regarding achieving energy efficiency and net zero carbon goals. He referred to the areas the Commission had asked for more details on. These were:

- Energy efficiency/environmental initiatives
- Longer term support for those leaving temporary accommodation
- The delivery of affordable homes in the district

There were around 3,900 properties within the Housing Portfolio. All council and housing association properties had to meet the Decent Homes standard, which was higher than the standard private landlords had to meet. There were forthcoming changes to the housing health and safety rating system, but specifications had not yet been confirmed. This was a factor in terms of the approach to enhancing existing properties. To ensure that all requirements would be met, the majority of planned improvement work would be considered fully when the government had confirmed specifications.

Councillor Chambers introduced the Head of Housing and Property who delivered a presentation with information on the areas identified by the Commission. It explained the range of actions taken by the service over the last year and outlined future plans.

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As the Housing Authority the rent-roll was over £16.3 million each year. The income management team had worked with tenants over the difficult COVID-19 period to ensure that tenancies were secure and could be maintained. Rent arrears were currently the lowest since before 2015/16.

There were currently around 1700 households on the housing waiting list and approximately 600 allocations (within HBC stock) and nominations (to partner housing associations) were made each year. There were very high levels (99.4%) of customer satisfaction with the housing repairs service.

HBC also did a lot of work with disabled owner occupiers and private tenants which allowed people to remain safe and independent within their own homes. This included £755k spent on adaptations in 2020/21.

The Commission were informed about the energy efficiency of council housing stock, which was graded from A – G under the government's Standard Assessment Procedure rating system for home energy. Most of the properties were in bands C and D. There would be improvements which were outlined in the zero carbon housing roadmap. Stage one of this involved defining the goals in terms of new build and retrofitting, developing a long-term plan and budgeting. Stage two would involve a full survey examining the stock condition of each property and pilot archetypes to allow for detailed budgeting. Stage three was the roll out.

The Head of Housing and Property outlined the funding programmes available to improve energy efficiency in the private sector. These were two funding schemes known as LAD1B and LAD2 that were co-ordinated by York City Council. It was reported that this was a successful long-standing arrangement and dedicated officers worked across multiple local authority areas to distribute funding. Harrogate Borough Council also operated a prevention grant, up to £15k was available for owner occupiers, the first £5k of this was not means tested. This funding could be used for a wide range of improvements to make homes warm, dry and energy efficient.

The Commission heard about the range and scope of services that supported those who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. The funding and associated staff resource were explained. This included a multi-agency approach with involvement from HBCs community safety hub. HBC had just opened new accommodation on Spa Lane, this provided high quality supported, independent living services for 19 single people who were homeless or facing homelessness. The Commission were shown a video explaining the specifications of the new accommodation. A holistic approach to supporting the complex needs of individuals would be taken. It was anticipated that the facilities and professional support available to those accessing the accommodation would develop valuable skills for independent living. The video was available on the HBC YouTube account.

Information on the delivery of affordable homes in the district was provided, in the 2020/21 year 365 new affordable homes were made available which included 52 new council homes. Details were provided about rent capping to make rents more affordable. For new affordable homes rents were set at 80% of the regular market

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price, this was further reduced as rents were then capped at Housing Benefit level which would mean that housing costs would be covered in full for so those who were eligible to receive Housing Benefit. The Commission heard that there had been a 25% reduction in long term empty properties since 2019. Affordable housing could also be delivered by Community Led Housing Groups. There were two groups based in Harrogate (Housing Our Community and Harrogate Affordable Homes) as well as groups in Masham and Knaresborough. These groups were given first refusal for purchase and development of an empty home acquired by the council.

The Commission thanked the Head of Housing and Property for the detailed presentation, it was **agreed** to circulate a copy of the slides to Commission Members.

In response to questions from Members about the housing waiting list it was confirmed that the allocation scheme was published on the HBC website and it was **agreed** that this information would be circulated to Members.

Councillor Marsh asked about the installation of gas boilers in council houses and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities explained that the council had dedicated staff resources into looking at viable alternatives to gas, such as ground source heat pumps. Where no alternative to gas was available the highest energy rated products were used.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and the Head of Housing and Property for their attendance which had addressed all the areas the Commission had requested further information on.

(5.46 pm – 6.59 pm)

81/20 – FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS:

The Chair explained that a number of Key Decisions that had been taken at Cabinet on 31 March 2021 were in the call-in period, which ended on 13 April 2021.

Councillors considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions document that was submitted and considered at each Overview and Scrutiny Commission meeting. The Scrutiny, Governance and Risk Manager confirmed that this was a summary document listing all the Key Decisions for the year (from May 2020 to May 2021). Members considered that it could be useful to include a version where only future decisions that had not yet been taken were listed.

(7.11 pm - 7.20 pm)

82/20 – FEEDBACK FROM OTHER COMMITTEES AND EXTERNAL BODIES:

Councillor Nick Brown was the Chair of the Commission's UCI Task and Finish Group and he provided an update on the progress of the Group.

The Group had received a lot of information and was grateful to the officers involved for their time and support with this. The Group had covered all aspects of the event itself. This included pre-event decisions and planning, the organisation and delivery of the event itself and the different roles and responsibilities of various agencies and parallel cultural activities including community grants.

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An area of the review that was outstanding was a consultation exercise and a survey had been developed by Members. This would be shared with residents, local businesses and the voluntary sector in the near future. Members of the group were keen to seek the views of retail businesses and potentially the emergency services, and health and social care professionals.

Councillor Brown confirmed the Group would aim to report back to the Commission by late Summer 2021.

Councillor Nigel Middlemass was the Commission's representative on the North Yorkshire Scrutiny of Health Committee. He provided the following update following a meeting of this Committee on 12 March 2021.

- COVID-19 vaccinations: the distribution of these was above government targets and it had been anticipated that the whole programme would be completed by July.
- Patient services: hospitals in North Yorkshire were operating full outpatient services including treatments for cancer. GPs in the district would continue to use telephone and video appointments in some cases but around two thirds of appointments were face to face.
- Emergency treatment: local people should be reassured that it was safe to attend hospitals if they needed to. There were rigorous COVID secure procedures in place to prevent the spread of the virus as much as possible.

(6.59 pm – 7.10 pm)

83/20 – FUTURE MEETING DATES:

The Chair confirmed the next meeting of the Commission was on the 10 May 2021. Updates on the Community and Economic COVID-19 recovery plans would be the main items for consideration at this meeting. These updates related to the agreed focus for the Commission for the year 2020/21 Civic year, which was the response and recovery to COVID-19.

The Chair explained that he had agreed an alteration to the meeting dates in January 2022, and the calendar of meetings on the Harrogate Borough Council website had been updated to reflect the agreed change. The change meant the date of a possible meeting had been moved and confirmed with the subsequent meeting cancelled. This change had been made to allow the Commission to consider Financial, Service Plan and Corporate Performance reports before they were considered by Cabinet on 2 February 2022 and therefore comments or recommendations from the Commission could be referred on an exception basis.

(7.20 pm – 7.22 pm)