

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting held on Thursday, 9th December, 2021 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr M.D. Smith (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs. D.B. Bedford (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Gaynor Austin
Cllr Jib Belbase
Cllr M.S. Choudhary
Cllr K. Dibble
Cllr L. Jeffers
Cllr Mara Makunura
Cllr Nem Thapa

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr R.M. Cooper and Cllr S.J. Masterson

18. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28th October, 2021 were **AGREED** as a correct record.

19. RUSHMOOR HOUSING LIMITED - SHAREHOLDERS REPORT

The Committee welcomed Rushmoor Housing Limited's Chief Operating Officer, Tim Mills and Chief Financial Officer, Steve Ward, who were in attendance at the meeting to give a presentation on the background and content of the latest Shareholder Report.

The Committee noted that Rushmoor Housing Limited (RHL) had been set up in April 2020 to provide quality homes for rent in the Borough. The Council was the company's only shareholder and the Council's Chief Executive had been appointed as the shareholder representative. Governance arrangements required a shareholders report, which monitored the company's progress against its business plan, to be submitted to the Chief Executive every six months. The Report could then be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or the Corporate Governance, Audit and Standards Committee for consideration.

It was noted that between April 2020 – September 2021 a number of milestones had been reached. These included the purchase of RHL's first property, it's first tenant taking up residency and it's first planning permission granted on two properties. In addition, the company had drawn down its first funding tranche to start the important role of income generation. The first audit had also been undertaken, which had established that the company had a reasonable level of assurance. As part of the

audit, a number of actions had been identified to further strengthen the company's position moving forward.

The Committee reviewed the balance sheet and profit and loss account. It was noted that RHL borrowed funds from the Council at a commercial rate of 5.5%, (the Council borrowed at a rate of around 1.5% equalling an average 4% profit) to fund property development and the acquisition programme. It was expected that the company would be in loss whilst undertaking the development and purchase programmes but this loss would, in time, be recovered through rental income. In response to a query regarding future profits, it was noted that, initially, any outstanding debt would be paid off. Any further profit could then be used to either investment in more properties, discount rents and/or make dividend payments to shareholders.

It was noted that professional expertise was in place to support RHL. External architects, solicitors and employment agents had been engaged to support the work and a procurement process was underway to set up a panel of valuation surveyors. It was also noted that a contract was in place with Romans Estate Agents to manage the properties on behalf of RHL. However, as the property portfolio increased consideration could be given to bringing the management in house.

It was reported that the business plan estimated that property delivery would be in the region of 60 properties by 2023/24. However, it was noted that the Council had approached RHL to purchase 80 properties in Union Yard and the revised business plan, to be presented to the Council at its meeting in February, 2022, would reflect this increase. The revised business plan would also reflect revised timings of the programme to take account of a better understanding of resources required to deliver the programme, delays in transferring sites to RHL and subsequent delays in rental income. These would be reflected in budget planning.

The Committee noted issues the shareholder had been asked note as part of the Report, in particular:

- To achieve best consideration on lower profit rented properties
- To reduce development risk by preparation of sites, obtaining planning permission and dealing with issues of title in advance of transferring properties to RHL
- Provision of a new financial model – jointly developed to help assess viability of schemes
- Consideration being given to changing the Articles of Association to allow leasehold property purchases moving forward

With regard to staffing, the Committee noted that RHL had been operated by Council staff on a charged basis. Costs for October 2020 - March 2021 had been £27,500 and this would increase as the workload increased over the next two years as the company developed. In response to a query, it was noted that the additional workload had been added to existing staff contracts to ensure no time would be taken away from their existing roles. In respect of conflicts of interest, especially in relation to planning applications, it was advised that the internal audit report had stated that no conflicts had been found and that the Head of Economy, Planning and Strategic Housing had no input to planning applications made by RHL.

The Committee discussed the option of becoming a Registered Provider, however it was noted that becoming a Registered Provider would not be worthwhile at the present time. In respect of affordable rents it was noted that a subsidy would be required to make it work economically, therefore this would not be an option at the present time.

The Committee **ENDORSED** the report on Rushmoor Housing Limited and the Chairman thanked Mr Mills and Mr Ward for their presentation.

NOTE: Cllr K. Dibble declared a personal but non prejudicial interest in this item in respect of his involvement as a Member on the Board of Rushmoor Housing Limited and, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, remained in the meeting during the discussion. Cllr M.S. Choudhary also declared an interest in that he is an Estate Agent by profession and, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, remained in the meeting during the discussion.

20. **SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES**

The Committee welcomed Andrew Colver, Head of Democracy and Community, Emma Lamb, Community and Partnerships Manager and Tony McGovern, Community and Partnerships Officer, who were in attendance to give a presentation setting out the planned work and progress of the Supporting Communities Strategy and Action Plan. An update was also provided on the newly opened Community Grub Hub based in Aldershot. The Portfolio Holder for Democracy, Strategy and Partnerships was also in attendance.

The Committee noted the objective of the Strategy, which had been "to tackle the effects of poverty and deprivation and to have a positive impact on people's daily lives". It was reported that there had been a complex history relating to deprivation in some areas across the borough and the situation had been made more difficult by the coronavirus pandemic. Through partnership working with local organisations such as the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Rushmoor Voluntary Services (RVS), Citizens' Advice (CA) and Hampshire County Council (HCC), amongst others, four priority areas had been identified, these were:

- Physical and mental health
- Young people
- Economic hardship
- Connecting communities

The way the Council had supported the work with the strategy was explained and the Committee was advised on spend to date, in particular on economic hardship and physical and mental health initiatives, in part due to the impacts of the pandemic. It was also noted that approximately £146,000 of external funding had been secured, partly due to specific funding relating to the pandemic.

The Committee noted areas of work in each of the four themes:

- Physical and Mental Health – activities included, mindfulness walks, “Talk Mental” a men’s mental health project, health inequalities and mental health support in schools
- Young People – raising aspirations through mock interviews/support to year 11 students, Kickstart placements, employment support via the North Hampshire Youth Hub, engagement with work on climate change and the potential creation of a Youth Panel
- Economic Hardship - the focus in this area had been the Grub Hub. Established as a Community Interest Company, the Grub Hub, Windsor Way, Aldershot had opened on 7th December, 2021. In the two days since opening its doors, 20 households had been supported, three volunteers had signed up, financial donations had been received and three requests for support, two for help with fuel bills and one for a fridge, had been dealt with. In addition, other projects to address economic hardship included the COVID Support Helpline, the Virtual Job Club and the community larder at Park Church.
- Connecting Communities – to tackle the issues around residents who were digitally excluded, this included initiatives such as the Keep Well and Stay Connected digital platform which offered advice, activities and video calling through the television, the Afghanistan resettlement programme and the wellness walks and heritage trails.

It was noted that partnership working had been essential to the projects that had been and would continue to be delivered as part of the Strategy. The relationships fostered with the NHS, local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Rushmoor Voluntary Services (RVS), Citizens’ Advice and the Primary Care Networks (PCNs) amongst others, had allowed for collaborative working on mutual priorities, data sharing and access to funding streams, which in turn had assisted in the delivery of joint projects to tackle issues within the community.

The Committee was advised of the challenges the team faced, these included engaging with young people, the pandemic and funding streams. However, moving forward it was advised that the Strategy would undergo a review to ensure it was fit for purpose and continued to address the priority issues within the Borough. Other areas of focus included tackling health inequalities, joint messaging, securing external funding and shared learning.

The Committee discussed the presentation and raised issues around engagement with young people and how this would be addressed, it was felt that an understanding of what young people wanted was needed to allow for successful engagement. A discussion was also held on funding, in particular the need for local authorities to fill the gaps left by the reduction in funding from county councils. It was noted that relationships with Hampshire County Council at officer level had strengthened during the pandemic and stronger levels of support for projects ran by the Council were evident. These relationships would continue to be nurtured moving forward.

The Committee **ENDORSED** the work of the Supporting Communities Strategy and Action Plan and suggested that a recommendation be made to the Cabinet to ensure that the Supporting Communities project funding for 2022/23 would not be impacted.

AGREED:

ACTION	WHEN	WHO
To arrange a formal visit to the Grub Hub, Windsor Way, Aldershot	March 2022	Andrew Colver, Head of Democracy and Community

21. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee **NOTED** the current Work Plan.

It was noted that the meeting on 17th February, 2022 would include items on education and the Primary Care Networks.

Suggestion for future items included:

- Frimley Park Hospital
- Disability/Access monitoring within regeneration projects etc.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm.

CLLR M.D. SMITH (CHAIRMAN)
