

CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

RECORD OF DECISIONS taken by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Darren Sanders, at his meeting held on Tuesday, 30 July 2019 at 5.00 pm at the Executive Meeting Room - The Guildhall

Present

Councillor Darren Sanders (Cabinet Member)

Councillor Cal Corkery
Councillor Scott Payter-Harris, Conservative
Spokesperson

Residents' Consortium members present

Adrian Blackwood, Maria Cole and Mada Abrams

16. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

17. Declaration of Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations of members' interests.

18. Forward Plan Omission (information item) (AI 3)

For the following item relating to Doyle Avenue Development of Council Homes the Cabinet Member for Housing noted:

- (1) the omission to the Forward Plan for July 2019;
- (2) publication of the omission notice.

19. Doyle Avenue Development of Council Homes (AI 4)

James Hill, Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services and Jo Bennett, Head of Business Relationships, Growth & Support, introduced the report, setting out the background to the proposals for 16 new, purpose built homes, with three of the homes specifically designed for disabled needs. The proposed occupants of the disabled homes had been on the housing waiting list for a long time and these properties will be exempt from the Right to Buy scheme.

Wayne Layton, Finance Manager, reported a correction to the report under the Director of Finance's Comments (paragraph 7.1), as whilst all the narrative reflected the cost of £4.2m, the table showed £3.8 which was incorrect. The

tables should have stated the total cost of the scheme was £4.2m and would be funded by prudential borrowing of £2.94m and £1.26m of Right to Buy receipts. The scheme at this cost would not be viable if rented at Social Rent but is viable at Affordable, which is defined as being the same as the Local Housing Allowance Rate.

Councillor Sanders invited comments from the Residents' Consortium representatives. Mada Abrams was pleased to see these good plans for the community and for the City Council. Adrian Blackwood welcomed disabled homes being provided. Maria Cole raised some queries regarding Ravelin Housing Company as the Residents' Consortium had not received information on this, the need for drying space, and who would occupy the homes. Maria Cole also welcomed the help being given to disabled families and the carbon neutral considerations.

In response to the points raised it was confirmed that families had been identified and the design level was not yet so advanced as to show drying areas. These properties would remain within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and was not a site being developed by Ravelin Housing Company.

Councillor Cal Corkery, Labour Housing Spokesperson, raised queries regarding the process of reviewing the rent levels. Jo Bennett explained that the process for the development was to seek planning permission before contracts could be entered into, at which point the final build costs would be known (which could include unforeseen land issues) and the relevant rent level would then be set. Councillor Corkery was glad to see PCC bringing forward disabled high needs adapted properties and that these would all be for rent on the site, but had some concerns regarding the calculation of rent levels as "affordable" when people's circumstances can change. He referred to the Norwich example of providing properties at social council rent levels and wanted to ensure that all had been done to ensure these are affordable. Councillor Corkery asked Councillor Sanders to consider bringing back a decision, rather than delegating power to officers, should the rents need to be reviewed.

Councillor Scott Payter-Harris, Conservative Housing Spokesperson and a ward councillor, asked questions regarding how the composition of the scheme might be amended; Jo Bennett responded that this was to ensure the adapted properties, when designed to incorporate the required adaptations for the families, would fit on the site. At that point the Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer would need to review the financing of the scheme. It was acknowledged that adapting an older property could be expensive and had restrictions, whereas these properties would be designed for the whole life of the disabled occupant. Councillor Payter-Harris felt this was a positive use of the site and asked if assisted living had been considered for the flats? It was reported that there was higher demand for 2 bedroom general needs properties.

Councillor Sanders responded to the points made regarding Ravelin Housing Company; the full Cabinet had received a report on its establishment and the original 5 sites as a way of progressing development before the borrowing cap

had been removed. He would discuss with the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services how further information on Ravelin was shared.

Councillor Sanders also explained that the social rent levels had to factor in the government's 1% cut in rents and the tenants would only take up residency if they could afford the agreed rent level. Councillor Corkery raised the risk of homelessness; James Hill responded that housing officers were experienced in dealing with changes of circumstances of tenants.

Councillor Sanders wished to reiterate that the viability of the scheme was crucial for it to proceed. He was working with officers to ensure that the rents were as low as possible to be consistent with the affordability of the scheme. Therefore there was a built-in stage at which costs would be reanalysed. This addressed the needs of those on the waiting list with physical disabilities and was providing more high quality family homes in the city. The next stage would be the stakeholder engagement, which would include ward councillors. Councillor Sanders heralded the inclusion of an environmental impact section in this report and welcomed the building of council houses.

James Hill would brief the Cabinet Member for Housing on the progress of the scheme. If a decision needed to come back to a public meeting on revised rent levels this may cause some delay to the progress of the development. Councillor Sanders undertook to seek legal advice on whether a decision to change rent levels would require another report, and reiterated it was his intention to charge the lowest rent consistent with the viability of the scheme.

DECISIONS

- (1) the Cabinet Member for Housing approved the following:**
 - (i) Capital Expenditure amounting to £4.2m: a development of 16 units (a mixture of flats and houses) on the Doyle Avenue Site at a total cost of £4.2m**
 - (ii) to fund the £4.2m of Capital Expenditure, with unsupported borrowing of £2.94m and Right to Buy receipts of £1.26m**
 - (iii) that subject to the requirements of recommendation (iv), authority be delegated to the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building in consultation with the Head of Finance & S151 Officer to amend the composition and spending profile of the proposed schemes in order to meet planning and design requirements.**
 - (iv) that a financial appraisal approved by the Head of Finance & S151 Officer must be completed prior to the commencement of any scheme, that confirms that the proposed scheme remains viable and provides an overall benefit to the 30 year HRA Business Plan**

- (2) the Cabinet Member for Housing approved immediate consultation with relevant stakeholders to ensure the community are engaged and informed about this development.**

The meeting concluded at 5.46 pm.

Councillor Darren Sanders
Cabinet Member for Housing