

CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING POLICY & CITY DEVELOPMENT

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Planning Policy & City Development held on Tuesday, 21 February 2023 at 3.00 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Lee Hunt (in the Chair)

Councillors Ryan Brent
George Fielding

4. Apologies for absence

There were none.

5. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of members' interests.

6. Housing numbers and the Portsmouth Local Plan

Ian Maguire, Assistant Director Regeneration and Lucy Howard, Head of Planning Policy were present to introduce the report. Lucy Howard described housing numbers as a complex and contentious issue. There is a national housing target to build 300,000 new homes each year and local planning authorities must address objectively assessed housing need. She explained that it was likely that the new Portsmouth Local Plan will include a capacity based housing target as the area of the city is only 43km² and much of the undeveloped land is restricted by flooding and nature conservation designations. This will result in an inevitable gap between housing need and delivery. It was timely for the council to develop a new Portsmouth Local Plan and it will strengthen the council's position on refusing unsuitable applications as the current position results in the need to prepare a Housing Delivery Test Action Plan each year. The council relies on developers and housing associations to build housing which has been granted planning permission.

Councillor Hunt commented that as costs have increased in recent years, some developers have not been able to build properties they have planning permission for. Councillors Lee Hunt and Judith Smyth commended the Kingston prison development including its contribution to social housing.

Councillor questions

In response to comments and questions from the group spokespersons it was confirmed that:

- The council has ambitions to deliver the right homes in the right places, and irrespective of the targets set by Government, remains committed to working to deliver the housing that the people of Portsmouth need.
- The annualised target for new homes in the city, based on the Portsmouth Plan adopted in 2012; 291 new homes were built in the last monitoring year (April 2021 to March 2022).
- The new housing target for the Local Plan is likely to be based on capacity while finding a balance between providing land for housing and other structural issues facing the city caused by its unique geography, market position and environmental factors.
- The council had made the decision in October 2021 not to build as many new homes as originally envisaged at Tipner West development, but to balance development with habitat protection as possible.

The Assistant Director Regeneration reminded group spokespersons that the workshops which will inform the new Portsmouth Local Plan start on 23 February and all members have been invited to attend. Councillor Judith Smyth commented that she would attend all the workshops.

DECISIONS - that the Cabinet Member noted the importance of housing numbers in the emerging Portsmouth Local Plan and its implications for having it found sound and legally compliant at examination.

7. Development Management Report

The report was introduced by Ian Maguire, Assistant Director Regeneration, who informed members that the general position was set out in the graphs on pack 13 of the agenda pack. He explained that the significant backlog had been cut roughly in half and although it had crept up again slightly, there had been a significant improvement on all indices. Nonetheless, Portsmouth was not performing as it would like and may be liable for designation for the speed of its decisions on applications for non-major development under section 62A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. He noted that his letter of response Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities which was attached to the report, set out the exceptional circumstances that affected the Council's performance and would make a designation under s62A inappropriate.

In response to members questions, it was clarified that:

- The council had not yet received a response from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and it was not clear when a response would be received.
- Portsmouth was one of 17 (out of over 400) authorities to receive a letter suggesting they may be liable for designation.
- Only one authority has ever been designated and it was a clear outlier.
- Portsmouth's processes are streamlined, and the staff are very competent, but the council needs more planners.
- Pay, retention, succession planning and a challenging development environment contribute to staff turnover.

- The council pays market supplement payments to most posts but remains a low pay authority and pay is a national challenge.
- Portsmouth has good junior planners, some on apprenticeships, on the team but once chartered and promoted to principal officers, they move on.

Member comments:

Councillor Hunt noted that the number of applications by Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) before the Planning Committee slowed the speed of processing applications and could be delegated to officers who were aware of required space standards and that spaces also needed to be functional.

Councillor Ryan Brent commented that he understood the pressures the Planning Department was under, adding that as he was not a member of the Planning Committee, he was not best placed to comment on whether HMO decisions should be delegated.

Councillor Judith Symth informed those present that as Vice Chair of the Planning Committee she was aware of the heavy agenda at many of its meetings. She added that the Committee aimed to be part of the solution and that it aimed to provide a consistent response to HMO applications to ensure that those that do not fulfil Portsmouth's space standards do not get through. She added further that if one elected member stopped calling in applications, pressure on the Committee would be relieved. She added that HMO applications contributed to the backlog, and this was not in the public interest.

Councillor George Fielding noted that the scrutiny provided by the Planning Committee cuts out the applications which do not meet space standards and added that the Leader of the Council was party to the decision to bring HMO applications to the Committee for determination.

Councillor Lee Hunt stated that he would write to the Group Leaders and members of the Planning Committee to establish if there was any appetite for delegating decisions on HMOs to officers. He added that the series of workshops on the emerging Portsmouth Local Plan included one on HMOs and encouraged members to attend.

DECISIONS - that the information report be noted.
The information report was noted and is not subject to call-in.

The meeting concluded at 3.45 pm.

Councillor Lee Hunt
Chair

