

MINUTE FOR BOS/20/3 DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) 2021/22 BUDGET AND FOUR-YEAR OUTLOOK BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 18 JANUARY 2021

- 7.1 Councillor Ward – Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced paper BOS/20/3, and summarised the main points of the report to Members.
- 7.2 Councillor Grandon asked for a clarification of the service charges for sheltered housing tenants and what was included in the increase of 69 pence per week.
- 7.3 Councillor J. Osborne – Cabinet Member for Housing responded that the new residents in the de-sheltered houses had been offered to continue the same service as the sheltered houses at a cost. For the sheltered sites the services remained the same.
- 7.4 The Assistant Director – Housing, added that the service was a wraparound service and included Health & Safety and a warden on-call system and utilities costs which was all included in the service charges. A review would be brought to Cabinet later in the year. The 69 pence increase paying for increase in utility charges.
- 7.5 Councillor Grandon asked how many tenants live in the Council's sheltered accommodations and the Assistant Director- Housing response approximately 450 tenants but he would provide a more detailed response outside of the meeting.
- 7.6 Councillor McLaren referred to the national reports of thousands of council houses standing empty and asked if an update could be provided for the number of empty houses and garages across the District.
- 7.7 The Assistant Director – Housing responded that the demand for garages was higher in some area while other areas had a low demand. There would be a project around the consideration of strategic sites and the use of sites in the long term in due course. There was a turnover of houses becoming empty as tenants moved and the property had to be maintained between tenants. There was also a review of empty garage sites, some of which might be under consideration for redevelopment.
- 7.8 Councillor McLaren asked if the Council would provide 'pods' for rough sleepers, similar to Ipswich Borough Council.
- 7.9 The Assistant Director – Housing responded that this came under the General Fund Budget, but he reassured Members that the Council had made every effort to ensure that rough sleepers had been provided with accommodation. This could be either in the Councils own accommodation or in B&B and hotel accommodation in which the Council currently housed rough sleepers as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Cabinet had considered the options and made the decision that hotel accommodation was the best option, based on a business case, and was more cost effective and flexible for the Council.

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- 7.10 Councillor Jan Osborne added that some properties might appear to be empty when a resident has gone into temporary care as the property had to remain available as stated in the tenancy agreement until the resident went into permanent care.
- 7.11 Councillor McCraw asked when the last time was the Council had increased the council housing rent and he referred to the increase of 1.5% in recommendation 3.3 in the report.
- 7.12 The Assistant Director - Housing responded that the council housing rent had been increase last year based on the CPI, which was the first year of the new Government rent standards. However, prior to this Council had for the previous five years been obliged to reduce rents. He did not have the figure for Babergh available, but Mid Suffolk District Scrutiny Committee members had compared and contrasted figures for last week for 2015/16 and 2021/22, and drawn the conclusion that the rent increase was on average 11pence higher now than 6 years ago.
- 7.13 In response to Councillor Ayres' comments regarding the repairs on Minden Road in Sudbury the Assistant Director – Housing responded that the repair had been for fire safety and environmental issues, as agreed with the stakeholders involved there, and had been long overdue.
- 7.14 Councillor Grandon asked if any of the Council's properties had any of the combustible cladding which was discussed in the current news and the Assistant Director – Housing confirmed that there were no high rises in the area and none of the council's housing had any of the combustible cladding applied.
- 7.15 Members briefly debated the issues and congratulated the Assistant Director – Housing, the Corporate Manager – Housing Solutions and the Housing team on the work undertaken, problems resolved and the work they have achieved.
- 7.16 Councillor Grandon proposed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported the Recommendations in the Report, which was seconded by Councillor Dawson.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports Recommendations 3.1 to 3.7 in the Report to Cabinet.