

ENVIRONMENT AND LIVING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 JUNE 2017

PRESENT: Councillor M Winn (Chairman); Councillors M Bateman, A Christensen (in place of T Hunter-Watts), A Cole, S Cole, P Cooper, B Everitt and R King. Councillor Sir Beville Stanier attended also.

APOLOGIES: Councillors S Jenkins, S Chapple and B Foster.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meetings held on 22 March 2017 and 17 May 2017 be approved as correct records.

2. VALE OF AYLESBURY HOUSING TRUST - ANNUAL UPDATE

The Committee received a presentation from Mr Matthew Applegate, Chief Executive of the Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust (VAHT), updating Members on VAHT's operations over the past 12 months. The presentation also outlined the strategic direction for the next year.

VAHT managed and supported 7,481 properties (with an additional 405 lettings occurring each year) with 21,249 residents, which equated to 1:9 resident in Aylesbury Vale. The Trust had an annual turnover of £45m (which had doubled over the last 10 years) and employed 245 staff.

VAHT's Customer Contact Centre received 81,911 calls in the last year and had then carried out 22,195 repairs.

Tenant feedback of VAHT's performance was as follows:

- 91.8% were satisfied with the service (the highest ever recorded by VAHT).
- 91.4% were satisfied that the service was value for money (i.e. satisfied with their level of rent).
- 89.3% were satisfied with their neighbourhood.
- 87.2% were satisfied with the quality of their home

38 formal complaints (lowest ever) had been received in the last year, compared to 67 in the previous year.

As explained in previous annual updates, VAHT has received a 'Net Promoter Score' of 38% (27% last year) which was a rating of 'How likely would residents be to recommend VAHT to family and friends?'. This put VAHT in the top of the top quartile of comparable Housing Associations.

The presentation also covered:

- Governance and financial viability, including on the independent Tenant Scrutiny Panel which reported to the Board, made recommendations for improvement and carried out their own enquiries.
- Operational performance
 - Rent Arrears – remained low at 1.18% of total income (excluding housing benefits).

- Repairs – 95% were completed at first visit. 99.6% of emergency repairs were done within 4 hours, with the turnaround time for all repairs being 13 days.
- Voids – average turnaround time was 13 days. There were currently 49 void properties (39 normal and 10 strategic, i.e. held back for families/people with particular circumstances).
- new and affordable homes completed.
- a breakdown of expenditure and the indicative development programme for 2017-2020.
- how VAHT was managing the impact of Welfare Reform.

Members were informed that one challenge faced over the last year had been handling the 400 reported cases of anti-social behaviour. The majority of these had been low level but some instances had involved drug related activity, domestic violence and serious noise nuisance. 97% of cases had been resolved and 14 properties had been recovered due to serious behaviour, criminal activity or other forms of abuse. 12 Civil Injunctions had been obtained during 2016/17 to tackle anti-social behaviour, and this had been found to be effective as the courts took breaches of Civil Injunctions seriously.

VAHT had also undertaken preventative activity to tackle anti-social behaviour before it became a recurring problem. These had included a fly tip awareness event at Wycliffe End and Walton Court Centre, and 'Coffee with Cops' which had involved police informing local residents about what they did within the community. Diversionary fitness activities had also been organised and funding provided for a Friday Night Project for 11-18 year olds to divert them away from anti-social behaviour. The project participants had been referred due to school exclusion or truancy, and had also been referred via Youth Offending Services. This project had led to mentor programmes that taught interview skills and encouraged participants to go back to school. The Thames Valley Housing Association had also shown an interest in assisting in the project due to the positive effects it had brought.

Members also heard more about the Corporate Strategy for 2017-20 which intended to maintain the social purpose of VAHT by the commitment to build strong communities, led by a number of themes:-

Theme 1 – Effective and efficient business

Theme 2 – Flexible, accessible services

Theme 3 – Communities and assets

Theme 4 – Housing supply

Alongside this, VAHT's strategy was to grow, deliver a better service and be bolder in delivering a commercial service in future. Members sought further information and were informed:-

- (i) that information on reporting anti-social behaviour was available on VAHT's website for residents
- (ii) VAHT was involved in the consultation phase of the Local Plan regarding housing need.
- (iii) that the Trust differed to other housing associations due to their community cohesion proactivity and their relationships with local groups such as AHAG
- (iv) that VAHT had interests in a small number of dwellings outside Aylesbury Vale but any profits generated were returned back to the Vale.
- (v) that the intention behind being 'Bolder' was about being innovative in residential feedback for future services. VAHT had focussed on improving their existing services and now wanted to shift their work culture.
- (vi) that there was the possibility to work with other housing associations that do not have VAHT's values. VAHT could also consider selling their successful anti-social behaviour plans to other housing associations.

- (vii) that increasing the customer KPI scores would have incurred disproportionate costs. It was deemed better to focus on streamlining existing services and reinvesting.
- (viii) garage site conversion still existed with some projects ongoing
- (ix) the Rural Exception Policy had been difficult for VAHT to become involved in as other organisations were often approached first
- (x) the KPI for repairs was 15 days from report and the current average was 13 days
- (xi) AVDC had allocated £400,000 towards housing adaptation costs. Once housing was converted for disability, efforts were made to keep these for disabled tenants

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the VAHT's Chief Executive be thanked for the Housing Trust's work in the community and attending the meeting to brief Members with the update.
- (2) The contents of the report and update be noted.

3. SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL PLAN

The Committee received a report which updated members on the production of the Council's Sustainable Travel Plan. The plan was produced every two years and outlined a Travel Plan and an Action Plan until 2019. The Travel Plan set out the activities, measures and targets, whilst the Action Plan outlined the methods to achieve these goals.

Members were informed on how the plan outlined the way AVDC demonstrated its environmental leadership and how the changes to Fleet had reduced costs by 47%. This award winning change had led to the local population benefiting from lower emissions, less traffic congestion, and also the availability of an electric charging infrastructure. Additionally, AVDC had saved £100,000 through the Council's Pool Car Scheme with Enterprise Rent A Car which had also reduced the number of business trips made by Officers. The scheme had been credited by the public and private sector, and earned a silver award at the National Energy Savings Trust Fleet Hero Awards 2015, as well as being acknowledged by British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association as one of the ten best practice case studies for public and private sector in July 2016.

The fleet had also contributed towards AVDC's exceeding its goal of reducing carbon emissions by 34% by 2020 (i.e. 36.5% had been met by 2016). Members also noted how the scheme had received some success through being marketed and sold to other bodies such as Bucks County Council and the Adur and Worthing Council, as well as delivering paid for presentations at the Houses of Parliament, and at the Cardiff City Hall to UK and Welsh public sector and government departments.

Members sought further information and were advised that:-

- (i) there were seven electric vehicle charge points on site at AVDC's Gateway offices that were accessible to the public during office hours as long as it did not affect business usage. It had been deemed a security risk to leave the car park open outside normal office hours.
- (ii) constituents were able to contact AVDC requesting charge points be installed in their local area as Officers had relationships with suppliers who would consider these requests.
- (iii) the car sharing scheme had tailed off over the past few months due to a variety of reasons.

- (iv) the car park badge scheme for AVDC staff vehicle was likely to remain in place.
- (v) central government were looking at the possibility of buying out all vehicles that produced illegal levels of nitrogen dioxide, with it also likely that local authorities to manage any related schemes.

The Committee then proposed and unanimously agreed that the following recommendation should be submitted to Cabinet when it considered this report:

“That the subject of electric vehicle charging points be comprehensively covered in the emerging VALP. The Committee considers that demand will grow quickly in the next few years and that planning policy should provide for Vale-wide public access on-street charging points. A policy should also be in place to make full use of government incentives.”

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Committee noted and was supportive of the updated Sustainable Travel Plan.
- (2) That Cabinet be requested to ensure that the subject of the provision of Electric Vehicle charging points was covered in the emerging Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan.

(Note: In particular, (the Scrutiny Committee) considered that the demand for EV charging points would grow quickly in the next few years and that the Council’s planning policy should provide for Vale wide public access to on-street charging points. A policy should also be in place to make full use of Government incentives).

4. EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS / PROGRESS REPORT

The Scrutiny Committee received a report updating Members on the achievements that had been made towards reducing Carbon Dioxide and Greenhouse Gas emissions against agreed Climate Change reduction targets. In 2008, AVDC had committed to tackling Climate Change following the publication of its first Carbon Management Plan. The plan had targeted a 22% reduction in CO₂ by 2013 which was achieved by 2012. Since then, AVDC had set the target to reach a 34% CO₂ reduction by 2020. Members were informed that the National Energy Foundation had exceeded this target four years ahead of schedule as CO₂ had been reduced by 36.6% by April 2016. This meant that the Council was 63.4% away from achieving its zero carbon ambition and was one of the most successful councils with this action.

Members sought further information and were informed that:-

- (i) concerns over old buses being used for school transport and their emissions would be raised with the County Council who might be able to consider this issue when next procuring contracts for school transport.
- (ii) work towards improving air quality along the Tring Road Air Quality Management Area were ongoing.

RESOLVED –

The Members noted the position of AVDC and the work that had been undertaken by AVDC Officers towards reducing the Council's carbon footprint, as well as the financial savings that had been made.

5. HECA REPORT

Members received a report which updated them on production of the updated Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) report. This report was a mandatory requirement as set out in legislation in 1997 and was revised in 2017. The report used Council and Government held data to assess Council's by Ward (Lower Super Output Areas). The report assessed demographics, insulation measures introduced, hard to treat properties and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) statistics, and produced a map that highlighted areas of concern.

The report had been produced by the National Energy Foundation in partnership with AVDC with the intention to address issues such as affordable warmth and fuel poverty through a joined-up and collective approach countywide. It outlined that AVDC had scored well for Index of Multiple Deprivation compared to other authorities, although some pockets of significant deprivation had been identified in the Quarrendon, Southcourt and Gatehouse Wards.

Members sought further information and were informed that:-

- (i) more could be done to provide home insulation to needy households although people were often reticent to take up the incentives offered. Assistance available by central government had reduced since the ending of the Green Deal scheme.
- (ii) there were more solar panels in Aylesbury Vale compared to most places in the UK although there was a lack of wind turbines. This lack of a suitable renewable energy 'mix' created the issue of grid harmonisation which had significant costs.
- (iii) on a good day, solar energy delivered 10% of energy demands within the District.
- (iv) energy from waste generation only produced a small amount electricity and was not efficient as this was not what the technology had been designed to do.

RESOLVED –

That the Committee noted and was supportive of the HECA Report.

6. LOCAL CLIMATE IMPACTS

The Committee received a report updating Members on the Council's second Local Climate Impacts Profile (LCLIP) which addressed climate change adaptation issues. Adaptation involved adjusting systems, processes or methods of working to increase resilience to climate change.

For the creation of the report, extreme weather occurrences in the news were matched to extremes of weather (rain, drought, flood, snow, ice, storms etc.) events in the locality. These were then discussed with stakeholders from public sector departments to provide information about the effects that these occurrences had caused to services and the cost of these disruptions.

Members were informed that it was an accepted fact that extreme weather events would become more frequent over the years. Adapting to what would become normal

business would become necessary and would save organisations, including the Council, significant costs.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the updated Local Climate Impacts Profile (LCLIP) be noted.
- (2) That Mr Asbury and members of his team be thanked for the work that they had undertaken over a number of years to assist the Council relating to sustainability, energy efficiency and reducing the Council's carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas emissions.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered their future work programme and commented that future agenda items could include:-

- ASB leaflets (to allow Member input on their content, as mentioned at a previous meeting).
- Planning Enforcement Update (had previously been reported on 1 November 2016). It was also discussed as to whether it would be possible to invite a housing developer to attend a future meeting.
- Fairford Leys Riverine corridor (update).
- Biodiversity/Ecology Update
- Flooding (in particular relating to housing growth in the District and building on flood plains).

RESOLVED –

That the current work programme, as discussed at the meeting, be noted.