

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 21 FEBRUARY 2022

HIF HOUSING OUTPUTS TASK GROUP UPDATE

Executive Summary

The HIF Housing Outputs Task Group met on 2 February 2022 and considered the aims for the remainder of the current municipal year and potential experts to be invited to provide initial expert briefings. Set out below is the detailed report from the Chairman of the task group.

Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman and Terms of Reference

In this initial meeting the group elected Councillor Adam Kirby as Chairman and Councillor Melanie Whitehand as Vice-Chairman.

Terms of Reference (TOR) were noted by all members and a constructive discussion ensued on the scope and limitations of the group.

HIF Agreement Legal Framework Initial Briefing

Members received an initial briefing on the legal framework of the HIF agreement, setting out areas for further investigation into the legal aspects of housing delivery under HIF. It was agreed that other contracts (aside from that with Homes England) which remain core parts of the broader HIF project, and which are relevant for the housing delivery risk under investigation, will also be important parts of the scope of the group.

HIF Headline Approximate Figures Initial Briefing

Members received an initial briefing of the headline approximate financial numbers of the HIF agreement, including the £95m grant total from Homes England, £10m agreed contribution by Network Rail, and around £10m in initially planned borrowing by WBC to support housing elements of the scheme. Officers advised that the 'committed' capital by WBC to date amounts to approximately £30 million. The group discussed the different ways in which it should measure housing risks, including financial as well as contractual.

Next Steps

In order to facilitate informed discussion, and identification of both risks and rewards for WBC, the group will task itself with understanding the housing elements of Woking's HIF bid under the following broad areas of briefing, as far as relevant to the TOR:

- Planning implications and linkages/independence from HIF
- Housing strategy and affordable housing elements
- Development viability and site design
- Legal briefing in further detail
- Financial implications of different housing delivery and legal outcomes

In the interim the group agreed to task officers with beginning an initial SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of the various areas of focus – to be discussed and refined at the next meeting and to enable a considered listing, and focusing, of these many potential avenues of discussion.

Officers will also be considering options for a comparative study with other local authorities which have made use of HIF grants, either externally commissioned or conducted by officers of WBC. This will enable the group to see where Woking's strengths and weaknesses lie compared to others making use of the same funding stream and legal framework – and help to list areas of relative risk compared to practice elsewhere.

Members agreed to read and consider the existing reports into WBC Housing Strategy as set out by Council officers, as essential background and the group is anticipating that a Member will be able to feedback any relevant information from the Local Development Framework Working Group, where The LDF group are due to consider a presentation on a study looking at the capacity of the Town Centre to accommodate the nature and type of housing being proposed, taking into account the changing assumptions brought about by the pandemic.

The HIF Housing Task Group will aim to have some initial findings and listing of areas for further work ahead of the next (March) meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE that the report be noted.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Background Papers:	None.
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