

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT BOARD**

1 October 2013  
5.30pm - 8.00 pm

**Present:** Councillors Blackhurst (Vice-Chair), Bird, Blencowe, Brierley, Johnson, Pippas, Price and Rosenstiel

**Executive Councillor for Housing:** Councillor Smart

**Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives:** Diana Minns (Chair), Diane Best, Kay Harris, John Marais, Caroline Oriokot and Terry Sweeney

**Officers:**

Director of Customer & Community Services: Liz Bisset  
Head of Strategic Housing: Alan Carter  
Head of City Homes: Robert Hollingsworth  
Head of Community Development: Trevor Woolams  
Head of Estates and Facilities: Bob Hadfield  
Area Housing Manager: Andrew Latchem  
Business Manager & Principal Accountant: Julia Hovells  
Property Services Officer: Hilary Newby  
Committee Manager: Claire Tunnicliffe

<b>FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL</b>
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**13/29/HMB Welcome & Apologies**

No apologies were received.

The Chair welcomed Caroline Oriokot, the new tenant representative to her first meeting and asked that a note of thanks to Alan Champion, former tenant representative, be recorded on the minutes for his hard work and commitment.

**13/30/HMB Declarations of Interest**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Interest</b>
Kay Harris (Tenant Representative)	13/34/HMB: Outcome of the repairs and improvement plan.	Personal: Member of ROAM and resident inspector.

**13/31/HMB Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2013 were approved and signed by the Chair.

**13/32/HMB Public Questions**

There were no public questions.

**13/33/HMB Write-Off of Current Tenant Arrears****Matter for Decision**

Write off of current tenant arrears

**Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Approved that the one case of current tenant arrears totalling £2,719.14 as detailed in the appendix to the Officer's report be written off, due to the expiration of a Debt Relief Order.

**Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

**Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

**Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Principal Finance Officer.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- (i) Viewed the report as usual information that should be brought to the attention of the committee.

**The Committee:**

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

**Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)**

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

**13/34/HMB Outcome of the Repairs Improvement Plan****Matter for Decision**

The decision to implement a 2 year improvement plan for the responsive repairs and voids service was approved at the meeting of Housing Management Board on 28 September 2010. The Executive Councillor subsequently agreed to extend the period by a further 1 year to enable further investigation into the procurement of alternative I.T. solutions and to

implement the most appropriate option. The 3 year period had now concluded, and the report presented the outcomes of the improvement plan, which would enable the Executive Councillor to consider retaining the service provision in-house.

### **Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Noted the progress and improvements made in service delivery over the past 3 years.
- ii. Agreed to retain the service delivery in house subject to the following requirements:
  - That a report be presented to Housing Management Board in June 2014 detailing the performance of the service following the introduction of mobile working.
  - That an annual review takes place which establishes whether performance is being maintained and the decision to retain the service in house is still valid.
- iii. Approved that the contract review date for all products supplied by Orchard Information Systems and their operational partners, is timetabled to be 5 years from the point of implementation of the Direct Works and SVS applications, to ensure that any anticipated cost savings are achieved and that the housing service is able to maintain rational service delivery across all aspects of the service.

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Property Services Officer.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- (ii) Welcomed the progress and improvements highlighted in the report and congratulated the entire workforce and Officers involved.
- (iii) Made reference to the Responsive Repair Service Delivery table that figures should be produced to show what the percentage figures were a total of.
- (iv) Questioned why the "5 point promise" needed to be reviewed again.

- (v) Expressed disappointment that the data regarding the Completed Repair's did not separate information to show communal areas.
- (vi) Noted that that cross departmental working would continue to be embedded within the repairs and maintenance service.
- (vii) Disappointed to note that an annual review would take place to establish whether performance was being maintained and the decision to retain the service in house was still valid.

### The Committee:

Terry Sweeny (Tenant Representative) proposed the following amendment to recommendation 2.1 of the Officer's report (replacement underlined and original ~~struck through~~):

- To ~~note~~ welcome the progress and improvements made in service delivery over the past 3 years.

**Resolved unanimously** to agree this amendment.

Terry Sweeny (Tenant Representative) then requested the inclusion of an additional recommendation to 2.2 of the Officer's report.

- C. If the annual report to the Housing Management Board continues to show that services are improved consideration be given to retention of the service 'in house' on a more permanent and business like basis.

**Resolved unanimously** to agree to this additional recommendation.

The Committee **resolved unanimously** to endorse the amendment and additional recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

### **Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)**

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

### **13/35/HMB Under occupation Incentive grant**

#### **Matter for Decision**

As a result of the changes to Welfare Benefit, and in particular, the reduction of Housing Benefit for spare rooms it was felt appropriate to review the scheme.

**Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Approved the continuation of the existing scheme.
- ii. Agreed to include tenants downsizing via a mutual exchange as part of the scheme.
- iii. Instructed Officers to prepare a bid for additional funding for the scheme as part of the 2013/14 revised budget and 2014/15 original budget processes in January 2014, if demand increases.

**Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

**Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

**Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Area Housing Manager.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- (viii) Pleased to receive the report.
- (ix) Noted the increase in requests to downsize to smaller properties.
- (x) Welcomed the demand to downsize through the mutual exchange programme as part of the scheme.

**The Committee:**

**Resolved unanimously** to endorse the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

**Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)**

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

**13/36/HMB Cambridge Standard Fund****Matter for Decision**

The report presented a proposal for the allocation of £400,000 of the Cambridge Standard Fund for the financial years 2013/2014 and 2014/2015.

**Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Approved the list of projects in Appendix 1 of the Officer's report.

**Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

**Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

**Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Area Housing Manager.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- (xi) Acknowledged that the renewal of fencing for twelve blocks on Ekin Road could be considered under a separate fencing scheme, as this scheme had not been prioritised under the Cambridge Standard Fund.
- (xii) Queried the cost of £5,000 to install two extra padlocks to each garage door on Humphrey's Road.
- (xiii) Requested that the new drying area at Langdale should be hard standing only.

**The Committee:**

**Resolved unanimously** to endorse the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

**Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)**

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

**13/37/HMB Welfare Reform and the Impact on Rent Arrears.****Matter for Decision**

Since April 2013 City Council tenants of working age have experienced a reduction in Housing Benefit if they are deemed to have a spare bedroom. Originally nearly 600 households were identified as falling into this category. This has now reduced to less than 500 due to re assessment and exemptions. Rent arrears for all current tenants at the end of August 2013 amount to just over £750,000 compared with £800,000 twelve months ago.

The rent arrears due to the Housing Benefit Social Size Criteria since April 2013 amount to £29,271 after five months.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) have been applied for by 158 tenants and 27 of those have been refused or had their bedroom requirements revised so that DHP was no longer needed. DHP may be refused if the tenant has too much capital or sufficient income. Reasons to award DHP may be where the property has disabled adaptations or the tenant is actively bidding to move on Homelink or seeking employment

### **Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

- i. Acknowledged the impact of the Welfare Reforms and the support given to tenants affected by the changes.
- ii. Instructed Officers to continue to assist tenants in rent arrears and only seek eviction through the Court as a last resort.
- iii. Instructed Officers to introduce a Local Lettings Policy in April 2014 to give priority to tenants wanting to downsize as a result of the Housing Benefit Social Size Criteria

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Area Housing Manager.

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- (xiv) Thanks should be passed to those staff who had worked hard to cushion these changes.
- (xv) Expressed concern regarding the impact of changes to benefit payments that may affect tenants and the impact that this would have on rent payment.
- (xvi) Asked if figures could be produced to show the result on rent arrears when the changes to the universal credit system came into force.
- (xvii) Questioned how many of those tenants in arrears were disabled as this was not stated in the report.
- (xviii) Queried how those tenants affected by the 'spare room subsidy' or more commonly known as the 'bedroom tax' would be identified and how they would be treated.

### The Committee:

Councillor Blencowe proposed that the recommendation 2.2 of the Officer's report became 2.2 A:

- To instruct Officers to continue to assist tenants in rent arrears and only seek eviction through the Court as a last resort.

**Resolved unanimously** to agree to the numbering change.

Councillor Blencowe then proposed that paragraph 3.5 of the Officer's report became an additional recommendation 2.2 B (replacement underlined and original ~~struck through~~):

- Eviction will not be progressed for a tenant in rent arrears, which solely relate to the under occupation reduction in Housing Benefit, when all any of the following criteria are met:
  - Where the tenant has applied for rehousing and is making active reasonable bids.
  - Where the tenant has applied for DHP.
  - Where other tenancy conditions (such as ASB) have not been seriously breached.

**Resolved unanimously** to agree to this additional recommendation.

The Committee **resolved unanimously** to endorse the amendment and additional recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

### **Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)**

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

### **13/38/HMB Housing Revenue Account Mid-Year Financial Review**

#### **Matter for Decision**

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Mid-Year Financial Review provides an opportunity to review the assumptions incorporated as part of the longer-term financial planning process, recommending any changes in response to new legislative requirements, variations in external economic factors and amendments to service delivery methods, allowing incorporation into budgets and financial forecasts at the earliest opportunity.



## **Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing**

Following scrutiny and debate at Housing Management Board:

- i. Approved the Housing Revenue Account Mid-Year Financial Review attached, to include all proposals for changes in:
  - Revenue budgets as detailed in Sections 4 and 5, and summarised in Appendix E of the document.
  - Financial assumptions as detailed in Appendix B of the document.

Following scrutiny and debate at Community Services Committee:

- ii To consider proposals for changes in housing capital budgets, as detailed in Sections 6 and 7 of the document, and summarised in Appendix F of the document, recommending the proposals for decision at Council on 24 October 2013.

### **Reason for the Decision**

As set out in the Officer's report.

### **Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not applicable.

### **Scrutiny Considerations**

The Committee received a report from the Business Manager / Principal Accountant

The Committee made the following comments in response to the report:

- (xix) Sought clarification on how the inflation predications had been calculated.
- (xx) Queried how the money from 'Right to Buy' sales would be spent.
- (xxi) Questioned how the impact to the changes in policies to the 'Right to Buy' scheme had impacted in the financial planning process and if those changes had been under estimated.
- (xxii) Questioned who would pick up the risk should the Government proposals to stop target rents take effect.
- (xxiii) Acknowledged that there could be fewer estimated stock numbers of one bedroom houses available in the new financial year as the demand to downsize increases.

The Committee:

**Resolved by 9 votes to 0** to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

**Conflicts of Interest Declared by the Executive Councillor (and any Dispensations Granted)**

No conflicts of interest were declared by the Executive Councillor.

The meeting ended at 8.00 pm

**CHAIR**