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Housing Scrutiny Committee

HSC/1

Thursday, 24 September 2015

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 September 2015

5.30 - 9.15 pm

Present:

Scrutiny Committee Members: Councillors Todd-Jones (Chair), Baigent (Vice-Chair), Avery, Ashton, Bird, Holland, Moore and Gawthrope

Executive Councillor for Housing: Councillor Price

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

Officers:

Director of Customer & Community Services: Liz Bisset

Head of City Homes: Robert Hollingsworth

Head of Strategic Housing: Alan Carter

Area Housing Manager: Andrew Latchem

Area Housing Manager: Sandra Farmer

Asset Manager: Will Barfield

Resident Involvement Facilitator: James Bull

Housing Advice Service Manager: David Greening

Business Manager & Principal Accountant: Julia Hovells

Manager Temp Housing & Housing Support: Frances Swann

Head of Estates & Facilities: Trevor Burdon

Committee Manager: Toni Birkin

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

15/77/HSC Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Sarris. Councillor Gawthrope was present as the alternate.

15/78/HSC Declarations of Interest

Name	Item	Interest
Diane Best (Leaseholder)	15/84/HSC	Personal: Cambridge City

Representative)		Council Leaseholder
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15/79/HSC Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the 30th June 2015 were approved and signed as a correct record.

15/80/HSC Public Questions

This Item Was Chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Councillor Holland addressed the Committee regarding improvements to the communal areas in the council-owned properties on Honey Hill.

What is the status on the proposed improvements to the public area of Honey Hill council-owned property?

At a site visit last summer which I attended along with local residents and organised by Andrew Latchem, the contractor (SDC) outlined their plans for the occupation of the council-owned green area on Northampton Street whilst the redevelopment of Kettle's Yard is underway. The need for these improvements was identified by local residents and there was a suggestion that the Kettle's Yard redevelopment would make a contribution towards these local improvements.

Area Housing Manager, Andrew Latchem provided the following answer:

The details are still being worked on as part of the Licence agreement but are due to be finalised within a couple of weeks.

The improvements will include marking out the car park, low level fences, flower beds and a tidy up of the car park area.

A "residents parking only" sign has already been erected. Further improvements to include improved cycling provision for Kettles Yard and shrubs will be carried out on completion of the project in 2017.

15/81/HSC Housing Fencing Policy

This item was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair / Tenant Representative).

Matter for Decision

The proposals described realistic and reasonable standards which can be readily explained to tenants and can be applied consistently regardless of demand and budgetary constraints. The standards which would be enforced as the “City Council’s Fencing Policy” include criteria for the allocation of annual resources, minimum requirements for individual situations, response times and specifications for the materials to be used to ensure a consistent appearance.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

The Executive Councillor approved the proposed Fencing Policy as described in sections 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8 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 Asset Manager.

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

- i. Welcomed the policy.
- ii. Questioned how tenants would be able to access the new policy information.
- iii. Asked if there were community groups that could offer speedy, minor repairs.

In response to Members’ questions the Asset Manager stated that:

- i. While chain link fencing would be the norm, there would be exceptions.
- ii. The policy was looking towards long term savings.
- iii. The overall appearance of estates would be taken into consideration.
- iv. The policy would be available on the City Homes section of the City Council’s website.

The Executive Councillor for Housing welcomed the policy and stated that it would provide greater clarity for tenants

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

15/82/HSC Repairs Improvement Plan - Performance Update

This item was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair / Tenant Representative).

Matter for Decision

A report detailing the success of the improvement plan was discussed at the meeting of Housing Management Board in October 2013, at which the decision was made to retain the delivery of the service by the in-house team, providing the high service standards achieved during the period of the improvement plan were maintained.

The current report detailed the performance achieved over the past twelve months and provides an update to the report considered at the Housing Scrutiny Committee meeting in September 2014.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Welcomed the successful delivery of the 2013 Repairs Improvement Plan, and the continuing and consistent improvement of the in-house Responsive Repairs and Voids team.
- ii. Welcomed that performance of the in-house Responsive Repairs and Voids team is continuously and transparently monitored and that any significant failings or deterioration in service will be the subject of formal exception reporting.

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 Head of Estates & Facilities.

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

- i. Suggested that the survey results would be easier to assess if more details of the sample size had been included.
- ii. Suggested that this report should be shared with the Residents and Officers Asset Management group.

- iii. Asked of feedback cards, with open questions, had been considered as a customer feedback option.

The Executive Councillor welcomed the improvements to the service and proposed an amendment to recommendations to reflect this as follows:

- i. ~~Noted~~ Welcomed the successful delivery of the 2013 Repairs Improvement Plan, and the continuing and consistent improvement of the in-house Responsive Repairs and Voids team.
- ii. ~~Noted~~ Welcomed that performance of the in-house Responsive Repairs and Voids team is continuously and transparently monitored and that any significant failings or deterioration in service will be the subject of formal exception reporting.

The amendments were agreed *Nem. Com.*

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the amended recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

15/83/HSC Update on the 'Get Online' Digital Inclusion Project

This item was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair / Tenant Representative).

Matter for Decision

The report recommends three practical steps the Council can take to deliver effective Digital Inclusion and Engagement in council housing communities.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approve the roll-out of a city-wide Get Online training course aimed at Council Tenants/Leaseholders and delivered from Council Community Centres
- ii. Approved a Digital Champion training scheme to enable peer-to-peer skill sharing within the tenant/leaseholder community
- iii. Approved a scoping project to assess whether a communal tenant/leaseholder WiFi provision was feasible (with a report to be brought to a future committee for funding approval if required).

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 Resident Involvement Facilitator .

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

- i. Sought clarification regarding the involvement of leaseholders.
- ii. Questioned the costings.
- iii. Welcomed the initiative as an example of what resident involvement could achieve.

In response to Members' questions the Resident Involvement Facilitator said the following:

- i. Take up of the scheme would be optional and it was expected that the cost would be less than £10 per month, per household.
- ii. The pilot training scheme had been limited to those in the greatest need.
- iii. Confirmed that the term WiFi could mean other forms of forms of internet connection.
- iv. Clarified that residents engaging with the training scheme would also be expected to sign up for minimum future resident involvement, such as receiving regular emails.
- v. Stated that the timeframes for delivery would be dependent on British Telecom.

In response to questions from members, the Head of City Homes stated whilst it would nice to be able to offer this as a free services, here was no money available to deliver this. In addition, providing WiFi in sheltered housing schemes had produced disappointing results.

Councillor Avery was concerned that the technology in this area was moving was moving fast and that caution was needed to avoid spending a lot of money on something that could soon be out of date.

The Director of Customer and Community Services suggested that a Members briefing might be helpful once more information was available.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

15/84/HSC Home Ownership Services Update

This item was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair / Tenant Representative).

Matter for Decision

- i. The last review of the Leasehold Services was in July 2014 when the Executive Councillor instructed officers to review the level of staff resources, set up a working group to progress the action plan, review the Building Insurance cover and report back in 2015.
- ii. The report updates the Housing Scrutiny Committee on the progress made to date.
- iii. The team had been renamed “The Home Ownership Services Team“. A new post of Senior Home Ownership Officer had been appointed to. A part time post of Right to Buy Officer had also been created and filled. The number of leaseholders was now 1,133.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the current level of staff resources in the Home Ownership Services Team covered in 2.0 of appendix 1 of the Officer’s report.
- ii. Noted the changes to the Building Insurance covered in 3.0 of appendix 1 of the Officer’s report.
- iii. Noted the progress of the working group covered in 4.0 of appendix 1 of the Officer’s report.
- iv. Agreed the Discretionary Reduction in Service Charges covered in section 5.0 of appendix 1 and detailed in Appendix 3 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 welcomed the report and praised the hard work of officer's in improving the service.

The Area Housing Manager explained the Leaseholder funding streams.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

15/85/HSC Fundamental Review of the Housing Service

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

- i. A fundamental review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Fund (GF) housing services was initiated in autumn 2014. At that time it was recognised that we were nearly 3 years into self-financing, and had an ambitious future programme to manage our existing stock and our broader housing management services well, and also to build new affordable housing. The review was designed to enable us to review spending profiles and priorities, and to rebalance the budget and activities to take account of both new opportunities and pressures.
- ii. The analysis that we have undertaken in the review was designed to help us respond in our forward business planning to the changing priorities and major new pressures. We were expecting to rebalance budgets and redirect resources through identified savings. The most significant finding of the review was the impact of construction inflation on our repairs and planned works programme and on new build.
- iii. More recently we have needed to plan for the new Government proposals for council housing, which will have a significant impact on future rental income, stock retention, and as a result, our capital investment programme. In bringing forward the conclusions of the review we have had to look more radically at the future of housing services than we initially anticipated. Strategic proposals are made for the service as a whole to respond to the extent of change and the level of savings facing the service, whilst specific proposals are made for individual service areas.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Agreed in principle to take savings for year one, and to agree the specific savings in the Mid-Year Financial Review which follows on this agenda.
- ii. Agreed to bring back a strategy for achieving a balanced budget in future years, including further savings options, shared services and other potential options.

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 Director of Customer and Community Services. She outlined the context of the report and reminded Members that the decision was to agree, in principle, the suggested savings. Further challenges were likely in the future.

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

- i. Sought clarification regarding the recommendations which some Member's suggested were vague.
- ii. Expressed concerns about interest being paid on funds that were being held but were not unavailable for use.
- iii. Expressed concerns about the ability to use Right to Buy receipts.
- iv. Suggested the debt portfolio should be reviewed.
- v. Requested a briefing as the situation was complex.
- vi. Suggested that difficult decisions had to be made based on the reality of the situation.
- vii. Raised concern about the impact on existing tenants and those on the waiting list.
- viii. Asked if tenants could choose not to take the rent reductions.

In response to Members' questions the Director of Customer and Community Services said that there was a need to make decisions quickly. The previous budget had been set on assumptions that were common across the sector. The long-term debt and risk profile would be looked at.

Members suggested that public awareness of policies such as 'Pay to Stay' and 'Right to Buy' was low and suggested that more publicity was needed.

The Executive Councillor for Housing outlined the likely impact of the new Right to Buy strategy. The Council could be forced to sell up to 25% of existing stock and would not benefit from the receipts for house sales. Difficult decisions were being forced on Local Authorities.

The Committee resolved by 6 votes to 0 and with 2 abstentions to endorse the recommendation.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

15/86/HSC Housing Revenue Account Mid-Year Financial Review

Recommendation 2A was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair / Tenant Representative) and recommendation 2B and 2C were chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Setting Report, considered and approved in January / February of each year was the long-term strategic planning document for housing landlord services provided by Cambridge City Council.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved the Housing Revenue Account Mid-Year Financial Review, to include all proposals for change in:
 - Financial assumptions as detailed in Appendix C of the document.
 - 2015/16 and 2016/17 revenue budgets as introduced in Section 5, resulting from changes in financial assumptions and the financial consequences of change, as introduced in Section 5, detailed in Appendix E (1) of the document and summarised in Appendix H.
 - 2016/17 base revenue budgets, to incorporate the savings recommendations arising for the Fundamental Review of the Housing Service, as introduced in Section 5, detailed in Appendix E (2), of the document, and summarised in Appendix H.

- Rent Setting Policy, to allow for the movement of all void properties directly to target rent, as outlined in Section 4 of the document.

Agreed to recommend that Council:

- ii. Approves proposals for changes in existing housing capital budgets, as introduced in Sections 6 and 7 and detailed in Appendix F(1) of the document, with the resulting position summarised in Appendix I, for decision at Council on 22nd October 2015.
- iii. Approves proposals for changes in housing capital investment resulting from the Fundamental Review of the Housing Service, as introduced in Sections 6 and 7 and detailed in Appendix F(2) of the document, with the resulting position summarised in Appendix I, for decision at Council on 22nd October 2015.

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. She confirmed that long-term debts were staggered and were on differing rates. Refinancing them now would not achieve any savings. The HRA carried reserves of £3,000,000 as Council properties were not insured and engaging in a building programme could throw up unexpected costs.

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

- i. Moving from planned maintenance to responsive repairs might produce initial savings but would be more expensive in the longer term.
- ii. The service achieved a high level of resident involvement at the decision level but is less effective at an estate level. Could funding for this service be protected? When cuts are happening, resident involvement becomes even more important.
- iii. Suggested that the under occupancy scheme should focus on people who were impacted by the spare room subsidy rent increase.
- iv. Concerns were expressed about the possible loss of the City Homes South office.

In response to Members' questions the Director of Customer and Community Services stated:

- i. There was not a shift from planned maintenance to responsive repairs and efficiency saving had been under review for some time.
- ii. The proposals recognised the need for resident involvement.
- iii. The under occupancy scheme was being brought back to the base line of twelve months ago.

The Committee further discussed the position of resident involvement. Officers confirmed that this service had carried an underspend for a number of years. This dated back to the closure of the Tenant Federation.

The Director of Customer and Community Services stated that it was important to make decision now in order to achieve the significant saving that were needed.

The Committee resolved by 6 votes to 0 with 8 abstentions to endorse the recommendation 2A (i).

The Committee resolved by 6 votes to 0 with 2 abstentions to endorse the recommendation 2B and 2C (ii and iii).

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

15/87/HSC Maintenance/Improvement Contractor Procurement 2015 - 2017

This Item Was Chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The report sought approval to procure a number of contracts to ensure the continued delivery of planned maintenance and capital improvement works for the Council's housing stock and other Council-owned property assets for the next five – eight years.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved the extension of the current Kier Services' Planned Preventative Maintenance contract for 10 months from June 2016 until March 2017 to allow time for the procurement of a replacement contract to be completed.

- ii. Authorised the Director of Customer and Community Services to invite and evaluate tenders and, following consultation with Executive Councillor, the Director of Business Transformation, Chair and Spokes of the Committee to award a contract, or contracts, for:
 - a. the appointment of one or more contractors to carry out Planned Maintenance/Capital Improvement works for a period of five years from April 2017 to March 2022, with an option to extend for one or more periods up to a maximum extension of three years.
 - b. the appointment of a contractor to deliver an annual gas servicing and repairs service for all HRA properties for a period of five years from June 2016 to June 2020, with an option to extend for one or more periods up to a maximum extension of two years.
- iii. Approved a procurement budget of £25,000 for legal and other implementation costs associated with the procurement and implementation the new planned works contracts and gas servicing contracts referred to in this 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 Asset Manager.

The Committee suggested that this item was relevant to tenants and leaseholders and that it should be considered in Part One of the agenda.

In response to Members' questions the Asset Manager said the following:

- i. Using external contractors to provide specialist services was the most cost effective way to deliver those services.
- ii. Maintain work such as gas servicing in-house was not viable as a small team could not provide the desired level of service or meeting the require response times.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

15/88/HSC Mental Health Tenancy Sustainment Service Review

This Item Was Chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The report presented an update on how the newly appointed Mental Health Tenancy Sustainment Service in City Homes had helped to enhance the council's role in supporting vulnerable adults to sustain their accommodation.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Agreed to continue to support the role of the Tenancy Sustainment Service in supporting vulnerable people to sustain their accommodation.

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 Manager Temp Housing & Housing Support.

Members expressed their support for the service.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

15/89/HSC Re-Tendering of Street and Mental Health Outreach Service

This Item Was Chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The City Council funds a Street and Mental Health Outreach Service working primarily with rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. The contract is commissioned jointly with the County Council and is now due to be re-tendered, having been extended for the maximum permitted period. The new contract would commence on 1st April 2016. The service is aimed at adults engaged in a street based lifestyle (i.e. those who sleep rough, drink, beg or indulge in a number of other potentially anti-social behaviours) but also

provides a mental health outreach service. The service is a vital first point of contact with people arriving onto the streets of Cambridge with no accommodation and has played a significant part in minimising rough sleeping in Cambridge City since 2003.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Agreed to commit funds of up to £178,500 (plus annual inflationary uplifts, if applicable) per annum from 1st April 2016 and to award a contract for four years with an option to extend for a further two years.
- ii. Agreed to continue to jointly commission the service with the County Council for the contract period outlined above

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 Housing Advice Service Manager.

Members expressed their support for the service.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

15/90/HSC Review of Homelessness Prevention Grants Programme

This Item Was Chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The report followed on from recommendations, approved at this committee in January 2015, to implement changes to the assessment and monitoring of homelessness prevention grant funding to ensure that the Council can unequivocally demonstrate that value for money is being achieved across all grant funded services.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Agreed, subject to any changes that may be made as part of the budget setting process and the formal adoption of the 2016/17 budget by

Council, the proposed grant funding allocations as outlined in appendix 1 of the Officer's report.

- ii. Agreed to support the assessment and decision making processes for future grant allocation and discontinuation of grants as outlined in this 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 Housing Advice Service Manager.

The Committee were pleased to see the level of grants maintained.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

15/91/HSC Lettings Policy Review

This Item Was Chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The purpose of this report is to explain, and seek approval for proposed revisions to the Council's Lettings Policy. The policy was last reviewed by Community Services Scrutiny Committee in January 2013 following guidance issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approved the draft Lettings Policy set out at Appendix 3 of the Officer's report.
- ii. Agreed to grant delegated authority to the Head of Strategic Housing, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing, Chair and Opposition Spokesperson, to approve further changes to the policy, if required, in the light of the High Court judgement outlined in 3.7 of the Officer's report.
- iii. Approved these changes as effective from 1st April 2016.

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 Housing Advice Service Manager.

The Executive Councillor thanked officers for their hard work in producing a report which took account of the developing Ealing judgement.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm

CHAIR

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