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Housing Scrutiny Committee

HSC/1

Thursday, 22 September 2016

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 September 2016

5.30 - 8.15 pm

Present:

Scrutiny Committee Members: Councillors Todd-Jones (Chair), Avery, Gawthrop, Holland, R. Moore, Page-Croft, Smart and Perry

Executive Councillor for Housing: Councillor Price

Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives: Diane Best, Kay Harris, John Marais, Diana Minns, Lulu Agate and Mandy Powell-Hardy

Officers:

Strategic Director: Suzanne McBride

Strategic Advisor - Housing and Welfare Reform: Liz Bisset

Head of Housing Services: Tom Bremner

Head of Estates & Facilities: Trevor Burdon:

Housing Advice Service Manager: David Greening

Business Manager & Principal Accountant: Julia Hovells

Manager Temp Housing & Housing Support: Frances Swann

Committee Manager: Toni Birkin

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

16/34/HSC Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Bird

Councillor Perry was present as the alternate.

16/35/HSC Tenant and Leaseholder Comments

The tenant and leaseholder representatives expressed dissatisfaction with the limited number of items on the agenda which allowed them voting rights. The Chair noted their comments and agreed that greater clarity was needed.

16/36/HSC Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

16/37/HSC Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the 21st June 2016 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

16/38/HSC Public Questions

There were no public questions.

16/39/HSC Supported Housing Update

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

Matter for Decision

The report was predominantly for information and at a time of significant change within Housing, Health and Social Care. The Care Act 2014 requires public sector services to work in partnership to deliver preventative services which promote well-being in the community. In recognition that many of the City Council's tenants are vulnerable at some point in their life and during their tenancy, the City Council provides a number of services to its tenants and those in the wider community to ensure that tenancies are sustained and that households remain at home and independent for as long as possible.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Noted the 2015/16 outcomes of the Supported Housing Service.
- ii. Approved a review of the community alarms service.

Reason for the Decision

The City Council continues to contribute to the role of the Local Health Partnership by ensuring supported housing services are targeted at those in greatest need.

Any Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not applicable.

Scrutiny Considerations

The Committee expressed support for the service and praised its achievements.

The Supported Housing Manager said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Move on times for those in CCC Mental Health Supported Housing varied. Since 2014, tenancies are fixed term and last for up to 3 years. Many move on within 2 years.
- ii. Clarified that the City Council is the only district in the County to offer an emergency attendance response service in addition to the telephone response.
- iii. Stated that some flats in Anstey Way had been used as temporary housing and that the properties were no longer used for this purpose.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

16/40/HSC Medium Term Financial Strategy

Recommendation (a) was chaired by Diana Minns (Vice Chair / Tenant Representative) and recommendation (b) was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The Housing Revenue Account 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.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Medium Term Financial Strategy 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

- i. (Recommendation 2a) Approve the Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Strategy attached, to include all proposals for change in:
 - Financial assumptions as detailed in Appendix B of the Officer's report.
 - 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 D of the Officer's report and summarised in Appendix G.

- ii. (Recommendation 2b) Approved proposals for changes in existing housing capital budgets, as introduced in Sections 6 and 7 of the Officer's report and detailed in Appendix E of the document, with the resulting position summarised in Appendix H, for decision at Council on 20th October 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 Business Manager/Principal Accountant.

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

- i. Sought clarification regarding the expected policy revisions regarding the sale of high value stock. Officers confirmed that this was not yet available.
- ii. Expressed concerns that completed, new build properties had been left empty due to technical difficulties with the developer.

The Business Manager/Principal Accountant stated the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. It was hoped that the, now vacant, South Area Office would realise the anticipated savings. The property was being actively marketed but to date a sub-let of the lease had not been agreed.
- ii. Agreed with the Committee that tenants needed to be keep informed of developments regarding Universal Credit.
- iii. Confirmed the approach being taken regarding annual valuation of the housing stock.
- iv. It was anticipated that the valuation formulas would change to reflect the impact of new policies such as: Pay to Stay, fixed term or short term tenancies.

The Strategic Advisor - Housing and Welfare Reform stated that the development of Anstey Way was currently delayed. Rent reduction had

impacted on the development programme. It was hoped that devolution funding, which came with less constraints, would allow this project to be completed. 'Right to Buy' receipts could not be used for this project.

In response to questions from the Committee the Executive Councillor Housing stated the following:

- i. A joint approach with other authorities was being pursued to push for a deferral of 'Pay to Stay' and for an assurance regarding future administration costs of applying the charges.
- ii. Whilst no firm commitment had been received, the Executive Councillor was quietly confident that the devolution deal would give a five year boost to the construction of new council housing.

The Committee resolved by 12 votes to 0 with 2 abstentions to endorse the recommendation 2a (i)

The Committee resolved by 6 votes to 0 with 2 abstentions to endorse the recommendation 2b (ii)

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

16/41/HSC Housing Transformation Programme Update

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The report provided an update on progress for the Housing Transformation programme. The Housing Transformation programme was reviewing the way we deliver housing services for three major reasons. It is good practice to periodically review the way we do things to ensure that our services were delivering the right outcomes and that resources were targeted towards meeting service and policy objectives; national housing policy and local initiatives had resulted in incremental changes to the service that we now needed to take an overview of; and finally as a result of recent legislation we had to make very significant savings in the Housing Revenue Account.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Endorsed the approach set out in this 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 Strategic Advisor - Housing and Welfare Reform.

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

- i. Sought clarification regarding the terminology used as savings already achieved were not adequately reflected in the report. Officers stated that this would be addressed in the January 2017 report.
- ii. Expressed concerns that other issues might be being missed as attention was focused on savings.
- iii. Expressed concerns about the impact of budget savings for vulnerable tenants.

Committee Members suggested that cuts to the repairs budget could be false economy as tenant DIY repairs could result in a bigger spent at a later date. Officers confirmed that a clearer policy on what was a landlord responsibility and what was the responsibility of the tenant was under consideration.

The Head of Estates and Facilities undertook to investigate what services were available to tenants unable to undertake repairs that were their responsibility. This might include options for the repairs team to undertake the work and then re-charge it to the tenant. The Officer stated that his team were unable to recommend tradespeople.

The Strategic Advisor - Housing and Welfare Reform said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. It was recognised that vulnerable tenants used more than one service. Currently there were a number of posts which offered support and in the future those services would need to be used in a smarter way. The tenant profile would offer insights into areas of greatest need.
- ii. Lessons could be learnt from peer organisations.
- iii. The 'Pay to Stay', project group had not yet been established. This could be a joint group with South Cambridgeshire.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

16/42/HSC Social Lettings Agency Business Plan

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

The report followed on from the social lettings agency update report brought to this committee in January 2016, which set out the outcomes, direction of travel and business plan for *Town Hall Lettings (THL)*, the Council's social lettings agency. The January report highlighted the need to identify funding from April 2017 to retain THL, and this report aimed to update members on the outcomes and business plan so that officers can obtain 'in principle' approval to submit a budget bid to support the service from the General Fund from 2017-18.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Approve, in principle, the proposed business plan for Town Hall Lettings (THL), and support the inclusion of a budget bid as part of the 2017/18 budget setting process to meet the subsidy requirement, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the officer's report – this would allow continuation of the service from April 2017. Continuation of the service would therefore be subject to approval of this budget bid at Council in February 2017.

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 report sought clarification regarding financial forecast in the report.

The Housing Advice Service Manager said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. Suggested that the report was based on cautious financial assumptions.
- ii. Modest gains were expected from the Empty Properties initiative.
- iii. The Social Lettings Agency staff had been on a learning curve and rent collection was improving.

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

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

16/43/HSC Homelessness Prevention Grants 2017-18

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

This report outlined a programme of grant funding to organisations providing homelessness prevention services. All grant awards are for 2017-18 only and applications for funding are submitted on an annual basis with two exceptions – please refer to paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4 of the Officer’s report. Given the dual financial and homelessness pressures the Council is facing, it is important that the grants programme was both transparent and exposed to scrutiny.

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 2017/18 budget by Council, the proposed grant funding allocations as outlined in appendix 1 of the Officer’s report.
- ii. Agreed delegated authority for the Head or Interim Head of Housing, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing, to agree ad hoc, in year, funding awards as outlined in paragraph 4.6 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 Housing Advice Service Manager.

The Committee discussed points to be raised in the response to the withdrawal of funding to the Police for a Street Life Officer. The Housing Advice Service Manager stated that the previous funding had supported engagement and enforcement work. It had not provided a full time post. Police financial

pressures had resulted in a change of focus and the funding was no longer seen as the best use of resources.

The Housing Advice Service Manager said the following in response to Members' questions:

- i. There had been an increase in non-engagement from entrenched rough sleepers.
- ii. The team was investigating the causes of increased begging.
- iii. Grants had been allocated in a targeted way with the grants programme being used to address any identified gaps in services.
- iv. A strategic approach had been adopted regarding partnership working.
- v. The majority of homelessness services were delivered via County Council budgets.

The Committee unanimously resolved to endorse the recommendations.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

The Housing Scrutiny Committee resolved to exclude members of the public from the meeting on the grounds that, if they were present, there would be disclosure to them of information defined as exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

The minutes below relate to the discussions of the open report only and not the confidential appendix.

16/44/HSC Disposal of an HRA Asset - 1 Ferry House

This item was chaired by Councillor Todd-Jones

Matter for Decision

1 Ferry House, Midsummer Common is a high-value HRA asset that became void on 22/08/2016. An appraisal of the options for the property has been completed, and the report provided the background and reasons for the final recommendation.

Decision of Executive Councillor for Housing

- i. Agreed that the HRA sells 1 (The) Ferry House, a 2-bedroom detached house on Midsummer Common in Market ward on the open market. The resulting receipt will be set-aside for re-investment in future new build

housing or alternatively as a contribution towards the impending government levy.

- ii. Noted that the only HRA capital costs associated with option (a) will be the administrative costs of the open market disposal, as detailed in the attached appendix. These will be funded from the resulting capital receipt.

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 Business Manager / Principal Accountant.

The Committee resolved by 6 votes to 2 to endorse recommendations (a) and (b) as detailed in the confidential appendix to the report.

The Chair invited the press and public to return to the Committee Room

The Committee resolved by 6 votes to 2 to endorse the redacted recommendations as detailed in the report available to the public.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

CHAIR