

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

4.00pm 15 JANUARY 2014

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Randall (Chair), Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson), Barnett, Bowden, Duncan, Farrow, Fitch, Mears, Pissaridou and Rufus

PART ONE

39 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

39(a) Declarations of Substitute Members

39.1 Councillor Bowden declared he was substituting for Councillor Kennedy
Councillor Pissaridou declared she was substituting for Councillor Wilson

39(b) Declarations of Interests

39.2 There were none

39(c) Exclusion of the Press and Public

39.3 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

39.4 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public not be excluded from the meeting.

2. MINUTES

40.1 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 28.1 and asked whether eviction proceedings had been started against any tenants who were behind with their rent due to the changes to Housing Benefit. The Chair confirmed that no proceedings had started, and

said that further information would be brought to the meeting due to be held in April 2014.

- 40.2 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 28.3 and asked if the protocol had been completed. Officers advised that it hadn't, but they would speak to the Head of Community Safety and advise members of the progress.
- 40.3 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 29.1 and asked if plans to provide a hostel just for women had progressed. Officers advised that discussions had been held with the Women's Centre and the matter was still being considered.
- 40.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 36.3 and asked for an update on the possibility of setting up a financial workshop. Officers advised that a cross party working group was being set up, and the first meeting would be held at the end of January beginning of February.
- 40.5 **RESOLVED** – That the Minutes be agreed as a correct record.

3. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 41.1 The Chair welcomed the new Interim Head of Housing, Angela Smithers, to the meeting.
- 41.2 The Chair was pleased to advise the Committee that Councillor Kennedy had very recently given birth to a boy. Everyone wanted to send her their best wishes.
- 41.3 The Chair provided an update on the Brooke Mead development.

Following Housing Committee agreement to delegation of authority to sign HCA Funding Agreement & authorising commencement of procurement, Policy & Resources (5 December) approved the overall £8.3m capital scheme for Brooke Mead extra care. Planning permission was granted on the 11th December 2013 to develop an 45 home extra care housing scheme on the existing Brooke Mead site, subject to the condition that a single additional parking space is found in the vicinity of the development. The permission is also subject to a section 106 agreement which requires provision of:

- a construction training and employment strategy
- a financial contribution towards sustainable transport
- a financial contribution toward open space improvements in the vicinity of the proposed development

Working in partnership with colleagues in ASC we are commencing procurement. Residents and local ward members will be informed of the outcome of the Planning decision and will be kept informed of procurement, demolition and construction issues as the scheme is progressed. The build period remains at a year to a year and a half depending on the construction arrangements and supply channels. This time period could be reduced if existing procurement frameworks can be utilised.

- 41.4 The Chair advised that the EU was making £500m available for housing in the UK, and said that the Council would be bidding for a share of that amount.

4. CALL OVER

42.1 It was agreed that all items be reserved for discussion.

5. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

43(a).1 There were no Petitions

43(b).2 There were no Written Questions

43(c).3 There were no Deputations

6. ISSUES RAISED BY COUNCILLORS

44(a).1 There were no Petitions

44(b).2 There were no Written Questions

44(c).3 There were no Letters

44(d).4 There were no Notices of Motion

7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2014/15

45.1 The Committee considered the joint report of the Executive Director Environment Development and Housing and the Executive Director of Finance & Resources. The report presented the proposed budget for 2014/15 as required by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The report was presented by the Head of Financial Services.

45.2 Councillor Mears asked whether the asked whether the budget proposals had been signed off by the Chief Finance Officer, and was advised they had.

45.3 Councillor Mears noted that both this report and item 48 on the agenda gave different figures for the number of Council properties. The Chair apologised and said the correct figure would be clarified.

45.4 Councillor Mears had a number of comments on the report. Paragraph 3.2 referred to a reduction in management costs, but Councillor Mears believed the management costs were actually going up. Paragraph 3.4 referred to the installation of Solar PV being installed and Councillor Mears said the current administration had previously failed to agree such installation which had cost tenants money. The proposed budget allowed for £0.145m being invested for legal, health and safety and human resources to support the delivery of service redesigns and to meet health and safety legislation and said that the proposals should have been considered by Area Panels. Paragraph 3.11 also stated that there would be a contribution of £0.145m to community groups working in and around council estates, and she was concerned that tenant's money was going to the General Fund. Councillor Mears referred to the EIA table and said that the information provided was very poor and, in her view, not acceptable. In particular she referred to page 40, and asked how it was known that there would be 'no disproportionate impact' from the Budget Proposals 4 and 6.

- 45.5 Councillor Peltzer Dunn said that he fundamentally disagreed with the new service charges. In particular the charge to store mobility scooters was wrong and was discriminating against the disabled. The Authority should provide safe access to buildings and therefore it was wrong to charge for lighting. Charging for lift maintenance was wrong and it should not be an optional extra to use a lift if you lived on the top floor of a high rise building. The Chair said that currently all tenants contributed to the cost of lift maintenance, and it was fairer that only those who used lifts contributed to their upkeep. The Chair said that meetings had been held with some residents from the High Rise Action Group (HRAG) who had accepted the charges were necessary. The Chair advised the Committee that the Authority would introduce a compensation scheme if the lifts weren't working. Councillor Mears said that she understood that the HRAG had not agreed to the new service charge, and that if they did have to pay they would expect a certain level of service. The Head of Income, Inclusion and Improvement (Housing), who had attended a meeting with two members of the HRAG and the Council's Principal Accountant, said that the two residents had agreed with the premise of the charge, and had said they felt that it wasn't equitable that some tenants paid for a service they didn't receive. She agreed they discussed tenants' service level expectations, and that they should hold the Authority to account to ensure they were achieved.
- 45.6 Councillor Barnett said there was sheltered housing in her ward, Churchill House, and they hadn't had a full time warden for a number of weeks. Officers advised that the Authority didn't have the resources to provide a full warden service, and the service redevelopment would be addressing that issue. A report would come to a future meeting of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee.

45.7 RESOLVED:

- (1) That Housing Committee recommend that Policy & Resources Committee:
- (a) Approves and recommends to Council the budget for 2014/15 as shown in Appendix 1 according to the final year of rent convergence to be confirmed by the government in its rent restructuring guidance for 2014/15.
 - (b) Approves individual rent increases and decreases in line with rent restructuring principles as determined by the Government and detailed in paragraphs 3.12 to 3.16 in the report and according to the final year of rent convergence to be confirmed by government in its rent restructuring guidance for 2014/15.
 - (c) Approves the changes to fees and charges as detailed in Appendix 2.
 - (d) Approves the new service charges outlined in Appendix 2 including the phased implementation of the new Intensive Housing Management charge.
- (2) That Housing Committee agree that officers should begin consultation with tenants on the implementation of new service charges in accordance with the tenancy agreement.

8. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2014-2017

- 46.1 The Committee considered the joint report of the Executive Director Environment Development and Housing and the Executive Director of Finance & Resources, which

sought approval for the 2014/15 capital programme and provided a provisional capital programme for 2015/16 and 2016/17 for the Housing Revenue Account. The report was presented by the Head of Property & Investment (Housing).

- 46.2** Councillor Mears noted that the report didn't clearly state the funding received from Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes. Councillor Fitch who was a board member of Brighton & Hove Seaside Community Homes, declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, and left the room during this discussion. Officers said the information was contained in paragraph 4.1 and showed Capital receipts of £3.189m which included £2.563m receipts from Seaside Homes.
- 46.3** Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 4.4 and asked if the capital receipts from Seaside Homes was an agreed figure or an assumption. Officers advised it was a forecast of receipts based on the agreement with Seaside Homes and that receipts received to date were on track with this agreement. Councillor Fitch returned to the room.
- 46.4** Councillor Farrow noted the provision for new build over the next two years and asked if that was the maximum amount which could be used. Officers advised there could be other funding such as borrowing, net additional Right to Buy Receipts or Government grants etc. More detailed information on new builds and the costs involved would come to a future meeting. The Chair said that the Authority had a programme of work and if necessary additional funding would be sought.
- 46.5** **RESOLVED** - That the HRA Capital Programme budget of £28.876 million and financing for 2014/15 as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the report be approved with any comments upon the proposals.

9. SUSTAINABLE TENANCIES STRATEGY (WELFARE REFORM)

- 47.1** The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Environment Development and Housing, which set out the draft Sustainable Tenancies Strategy which outlined the work being undertaken in response to welfare reform. The report was introduced by the Head of Income Inclusion and Improvement (Housing).
- 47.2** Councillor Farrow thanked officers for the report, but was concerned that endorsing the strategy could be interpreted as endorsing the coalition government cuts. Councillor Farrow suggested that the recommendation of the report be changed to say 'That the Housing Committee note the draft strategy'. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Fitch. Councillor Bowden said that he supported the amendment. Officers were working hard to assist tenants affected by the changes to benefits and he supported the proposed strategy and if the Committee agreed to 'note' it rather than 'endorse', it would not detract from the work being undertaken. Councillor Peltzer Dunn said that officers had acted excellently in mitigating the impact on those affected by changes to benefits, and the report reflected the Committee's earlier request to assist tenants. He felt that 'endorsing' the strategy would support the work the officers had done. Members voted on the proposed amendment and agreed to change the recommendation to read 'That the Housing Committee note the draft strategy'.

- 47.3 Councillor Mears referred to the map in table 1 of the report and asked whether it was the same map as that used in 2004 or whether it had been updated. Officers confirmed it had been updated and thought it was from 2007, but would clarify after the meeting.
- 47.4 Councillor Pissaridou asked for more information on Discretionary Housing Payments. Officers advised that everyone they knew who had been affected by the changes had been contacted, and where appropriate people had been supported to make an application.
- 47.5 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked what the timetable for implementation of the strategy would be. Officers said they hoped to use it once the Committee had endorsed or noted it. Councillor Peltzer Dunn suggested that 'noting the draft strategy' was incorrect and it should really be approved. Councillor Farrow accepted Councillor Pelzer Dunn's comments and suggested that the recommendation be amended from 'That the Housing Committee note the draft strategy' to 'That the Housing Committee note the strategy'. Councillor Bowden seconded that proposal. A vote was taken and the amendment was agreed. The Chair wanted officers to know that the change to the recommendation did no diminish the work undertaken on the Strategy.
- 47.6 **RESOLVED - That the Housing Committee note the Strategy**

10. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 48.1 The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Environment Development and Housing which provided information on the Homelessness Strategy and the Homelessness Review. The report was presented by the Service Improvement Manager Housing Options. A PowerPoint presentation supplemented the report.
- 48.2 Councillor Farrow thanked the officer for the report and for the work being undertaken. Homelessness was an important issue, and it was essential that the work to help those in need continued. The Chair agreed and said that this was an important issue for the Authority and one which all political parties took seriously.
- 48.3 Councillor Mears noted that student accommodation was putting a strain on the private sector, and suggested there be debate to discuss this issue. The Chair agreed and thought a debate would be useful. Councillor Bowden said that Sussex University planned to expand, taking an extra 5000 students. Additional Student accommodation was being built which would help. The Chair added that the University thought that around 20% of their students would either commute or continue living at home which would relieve some pressure, but that would still leave many students needing accommodation.
- 48.4 Councillor Pissaridou was surprised at the level of deprivation in the city, and the fact that the minimum household income required to afford market housing without subsidy was £42k pa.
- 48.5 The Chair thanked the officer for the report.
- 48.6 **RESOLVED –**

- (1) That the Committee noted the contents of the Homelessness Review 2008 – 2013
- (2) To endorse the approach to producing a Homelessness Strategy 2014-2019, incorporating all related sub strategies contained in paragraph 1.3 in the report.
- (3) That the Committee noted the proposed Community Engagement Strategy being used to develop the new Homelessness Strategy 2014 - 2019

11. ROUGH SLEEPING UPDATE

- 49.1 The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director Environment Development and Housing, which provided an update on the current number of rough sleepers in the city, gave details about changes to local provision in response to the increasing pressure on services, and information about the progress of the new pilot services which targeted street drinkers and entrenched rough sleepers. The Commissioning Officer for Rough Sleepers, Single Homeless and Substance Misuse gave a presentation to explain the report.
- 49.2 Councillor Farrow thanked the officer for the report. He noted that the recent street count found 50 individuals sleeping rough and asked if that was a true figure as another source had suggested that any count should be multiplied by 4 to give a more accurate number. He was advised that that figure could be higher. The Authority did two counts a year, one in November and one in March. The one carried out in March found 93 individuals sleeping rough.
- 49.3 The Chair thanked officers for the report and was pleased to note the work with other agencies, particularly Equinox and Stonewall.
- 49.4 Councillor Farrow was concerned that the recent heavy rain would have made sleeping outdoors very difficult. The Chair advised that he was also concerned over the recent weather and had asked for the Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) to be put in place. The SWEP was currently being reviewed to taken into account heavy rain and high winds.
- 49.5 Councillor Barnett asked if the count of rough sleepers included areas on the outskirts of the city. Officers confirmed that the whole city was covered.
- 49.6 Councillor Bowden thanked officers for the report. He expected that some of the individuals sleeping rough were ex-prisoners and asked if any work was being done to address that. Officers advised that there were workers at Lewes prison who advised individuals.
- 49.7 Councillor Pissaridou said she'd previously taken part in the count, but hadn't known the date this year and asked if it could be better publicised next year.
- 49.8 **RESOLVED – The Committee agreed to note the report.**

12. ITEMS REFERRED FOR COUNCIL

- 50.1 There were no items to be referred to the next Council meeting.

The meeting concluded at 6.20pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of