

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

4.00pm 16 JANUARY 2013

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Wakefield (Chair), Councillor Powell (Deputy Chair), Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson), Farrow (Opposition Spokesperson), Davey, Fitch, Jarrett, Mears, Deane and Wells

PART ONE

37. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

37A Declarations of Substitute Members

37.1 Councillor Deane declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Duncan. Councillor Wells declared that he was attending as a substitute for Councillor Barnett.

37B Declarations of Interests

37.2 Councillors Fitch, Peltzer Dunn and Wells each declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in Item 43c, as landlords of residential property within the City.

37C Exclusion of the Press and Public

37.3 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.

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

38. MINUTES

38.1 The Committee considered the Minutes of the Housing Committee meeting held on 14 November 2012.

- 38.2 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 32.4 and asked if there was any information on whether other authorities would be supporting the Home Energy Efficiency Investment – Green Deal. The Chair said that West Sussex County Council were interested and keen to work with Brighton & Hove City Council. Information on other authorities would be provided as and when it was known.
- 38.3 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 33.4 and asked whether Councillor Jarrett had spoken to the Director of Adult Social Services about possible funding to enable adaptations to be made to properties. Councillor Jarrett confirmed he had, and that Adult Social Care had agreed to assess each application on a case by case basis and provide funding where possible.
- 38.4 Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 30.4, and said that the Chair had informed her that the homelessness budget had not been cut, but that that was incorrect and the budget had been reduced. The Chair agreed to look into the matter.
- 38.5 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 32.3 and felt that the wording was contradictory. It was agreed to change the wording to read ‘Officers confirmed that any charge would be shown on the electricity bill, but householders could see savings through reduced use of gas or electricity’
- 38.6 **RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the Housing Committee held on 14 November 2012 be agreed (subject to the amendment to the wording in paragraph 32.3).

39. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE SUB COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 DECEMBER 2012

- 39.1 Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 36.3 and requested that the cost of running Area Panels be provided, and asked for reassurance that there was sufficient funding to enable the Area Panels to continue. Councillor Wakefield said that there was no intention not to continue with Area Panels and asked for officers to provide the cost of running the Panels and all other tenant groups.
- 39.2 Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 38.3 and asked for clarification on who had agreed the new structure, who had agreed that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) would fund £280k, how many other staff were involved and whether there would be any additional costs to the HRA. Officers said that a number of staff involved in the new department did not all deal with housing and so funding would come from other budgets, and agreed to provide a written response for the next Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee meeting.
- 39.3 **RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee held on 18 December 2012 be noted.

40. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 40.1 The Chair provided an update on a number of issues.

Green Deal Energy Efficiency Investment Options

A report on the Green Deal Energy Efficiency Investment Options had been prepared for the Policy & Resources Committee (P&R) meeting due to be held on 24 January 2013. The P&R report would be circulated to Housing Committee members and an officer briefing offered prior to P&R. A formal report will be brought to a future Housing Committee meeting.

DECC Local Authority Competition 2012-13

We have successfully bid for over £500,000 of funding as part of the Department of Energy & Climate Change Local Authority Competition in both the Fuel Poverty and Green Deal Pioneer Places strands. Both projects were to be delivered by 31st March 2013

Fuel Poverty Fund

Brighton & Hove had been awarded funds totalling £287,600 for this project.

A joint bid for the Fuel Poverty Fund was submitted with Eastbourne Borough Council to support vulnerable households living in or at risk of fuel poverty. In Brighton & Hove we were aiming to assist up to 60 householders with major heating and insulation measures. Each householder would be supported by a fuel poverty trained case-worker from the community and voluntary sector.

We would target interventions to support vulnerable groups through existing programmes, events and outreach sessions in areas of higher levels of fuel poverty. Also through links with the private rented sector, Health and CVSF

Green Deal Pioneer Places

The total amount of funding for this project was £221,000.

The aim of this project was to kick start and show the benefits of the Green Deal by creating a network of Green Deal show-homes and opening them as part of the City's Eco Open Houses. The activity would build the local supply chain by developing a strong network of Green Deal approved assessors and installers help market and publicise the Green Deal and issue planning guidance to support take up.

The key objectives of this project were to:

Carry out 100 Green Deal assessments; Create a network of 10 Green Deal show-homes; Develop show home resources, including case studies, available online, displayed at the Eco Open Houses and other events; Develop two draft Planning Advice Notes for external wall insulation & Green Deal in Conservation Areas.

41. CALL OVER

41.1 It was agreed that all items would be reserved for discussion.

42. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

42.1 There were no petitions, written questions or deputations.

43. MEMBERS INVOLVEMENT**43 c Letters**

- 43c.1 There were two letters submitted by Councillor Farrow. One letter related to a register of landlords. Councillors Fitch, Peltzer Dunn and Wells declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in the matter and left the room when this letter was discussed.
- 43c.2 Councillor Farrow spoke on his first letter which, following the success of the Hedgehog Housing Co-operative, asked for officers to investigate the feasibility of using similar schemes to develop more homes on marginal land in the city.
- 43c.3 RESOLVED** - The Committee asked officers to provide a report on this matter for a future meeting.
- 43c.4 Councillor Farrow presented his second letter which referred to the London Borough of Newham's scheme to have a register of landlords, and asked officers to investigate on the feasibility of implementing a similar scheme in the city.
- 43c.5 RESOLVED** - The Committee asked officers to provide a verbal response at the next meeting.

43 d Notice of Motion

- 43d.6 Councillor Mitchell presented the Notice of Motion which called on the Housing Committee to request officers to bring forward a report that:
- Evaluates whether the council would benefit from entering into the Right to Buy receipts scheme that would enable the receipts from any additional sales generated to be retained by the council in order to fund the provision of replacement housing stock.
 - Explores whether the retention of Right to Buy receipts under the scheme could enable the council to buy back ex-council homes that come onto the housing market either from estate agents' repossession or at auction.
 - Considers the possibility of the scheme being used in relation to leaseholders where the high cost of major works are causing particular difficulties.
 - Demonstrates whether and if so, how entering into such a scheme could compliment the other initiatives being pursued in relation to the provision of affordable housing."
- 43d.7 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked if the second bullet point could be expanded to cover all ex-council properties which came onto the market. The Chair agreed.
- 43d.8 RESOLVED** That the Housing Committee requested officers to bring forward a report to cover the issues suggested in the Notice of Motion.

44. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2013-2016

- 44.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Finance and Strategic Director, Place which set out the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2013-16.

- 44.2 Councillor Farrow said that he felt that the Programme did not meet the needs of tenants in the city and that he would abstain from recommending it to Policy & Resources Committee. Paragraph 5.17 of the report stated that the budget had been increased with the aim of providing 15-20 home extensions per annum. Councillor Farrow felt that this was too low and was inadequate for the needs of the city. He asked that officers look at simpler ways to undertake conversions/extensions to ensure that more could be built. Councillor Fitch said that he too felt that loft conversions/extensions were important and hoped that the budget for this area of work could be increased further. Officers agreed that loft conversions could be useful, and the number proposed was higher than the number undertaken last year. However, extensions to homes weren't always the most appropriate course of action. Property and Investment worked with families and adaptations team to devise individual design solutions, to ensure extra rooms(s) required did not impact on families receiving benefits. Officers referred to a specific sensitive case with complex adaptations involved, where an older child (adult) with disabilities required an additional room or sensory space to meet their special needs.
- 44.3 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 5.18 which related to Fencing and asked that this be a priority. Erecting fencing was important for health and safety, particularly for those with young children, pets etc. Officers said that a draft policy on fencing was going to Area Panels and would then go to the HMCSC. If there was a fence which needed repairing because of health and safety issues, the work would be undertaken from the Repairs Budget. This report recommended doubling the existing planned budget for improving boundary fencing across the city to relieve pressures on the Estate Development Budget.
- 44.4 Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 3.2 (2) Creating a More Sustainable City, and asked if a report on One Planet Living could come to a future meeting of the Housing Committee. Councillor Mears also asked if more information could be provided on the capital receipt from Seaside Homes as that funding needed to be taken into account. The Chair agreed for that information to be made available.
- 44.5 Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 5.21 on building new council homes and was concerned that the scheme, which had been started under the previous administration, had not moved forward.
- 44.6 Councillor Jarrett welcomed the reduction in time for lift repairs, and suggested that where possible a more proactive approach be taken to identify any problems with lifts before they broke down. Officers confirmed that engineers already carried out regular servicing for lifts.
- 44.7 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 6.8 which said that a draft of this report had been presented to the Housing Committee on 18 December 2012, but said that that was incorrect as the report previously considered had had amendments and therefore it was a different report. Officers confirmed that there had been some small changes to the report.
- 44.8 **RESOLVED –**

(1) That the Housing Committee recommend that Policy & Resources approves the capital programme budget of £26.957 million and financing for 2013/14 as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the report.

45. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2013/14

45.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Finance and Strategic Director, Place which set out the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2013/14.

45.2 Councillor Farrow thanked officers for the report, which he agreed with in parts. However, he suggested that there be a radical review on how the Council managed properties, and asked that the housing management structure be looked at to see if any money could be saved which could then be reinvested in homes. He said the Labour and Co-operative party would abstain from recommending the report to Policy and Resources Committee. The Chair invited anyone who had any ideas on how properties were managed to put them forward for discussion.

45.3 Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 3.5, and asked who the benchmarking had been against. Officers said it was local authorities with similar profiles to Brighton & Hove; a full list would be provided. Councillor Mears noted that there was no reference in the report to Mr N Hibberd's new post and asked why it was being funded from the Housing Revenue Account and not from the Corporate Account. Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 3.16, which showed the proposed increases to fees and service charges and noted that there was a reference to 12 properties requiring video entry and asked why that item had not been included in the Housing Revenue Account Budget 2013/14 report which went to the HMCSC meeting in December. Officers said that that report had been provided earlier than planned to ensure the HMCSC saw the report, and at that time the information on video entry was not available. Councillor Mears referred to Appendix 1 to the report and noted that the disabled adaptations programme had an investment requirement of £0.4m. Officers stated that that amount was only the overspend.

45.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn noted that the report was slightly different from the one which had gone to the HMCSC meeting in December 2012, and therefore it was procedurally incorrect to say that the report had been considered by that sub committee. The Chair said she wanted to ensure that members of the HMCSC knew what was being proposed, and because of the timing of the meetings it was not possible for a 'final' report to be available for the December meeting.

45.5 RESOLVED:

That Housing Committee recommends that Policy & Resources Committee:

- (i) Approves and recommends to Council the budget for 2013/14 as shown in Appendix to the report.
- (ii) Approves individual rent increases and decreases in line with rent restructuring principles as determined by the Government and detailed in paragraphs 3.13 to 3.15 in the report.
- (iii) Approves the changes to fees and charges as detailed in Table 2, paragraphs 3.16 to 3.18 in the report and to delegate authority to the Strategic Director, Place to increase communal heating electricity charges following the corporate procurement of new contract prices.

46. UPDATE ON HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING

- 46.1 The Committee considered the report which provided an update on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping. In addition to the report, Ms N Homeward, Director Homelessness Brighton Housing Trust and Ms B Davison, Director CRI (Rough Sleeper Team) attended the meeting to provide a verbal overview of their work.
- 46.2 Ms Davison said that there had been an increase in 'short term' rough sleepers over the last two years, but there had been a decrease in the 'long term' rough sleepers. The increase appeared to be due to economic factors and CRI worked quickly with those people to ensure they didn't become entrenched in street life. They had worked hard with the long term rough sleepers, ensuring they had accommodation and received the support they needed. Up to 70% of the short term rough sleepers had no local connection, which was problematic as hostels were being closed and resources squeezed. Where possible these people were encouraged to go to an area where they had a connection and hostels were contacted to see if they could accommodate them. Brighton was a more attractive place to sleep rough; people were more welcoming and there wasn't the same level of crime found in some cities.
- 46.3 Ms Homeward spoke to the Committee about the work with rough sleepers, and said that the Trust had two shelters which were opened during severe weather conditions. The two shelters could accommodate 45 people. The shelters would open if the overnight temperature dropped to 0 degrees, or less, for two nights running. Those staying would be given food and a place to sleep. The shelters closed in the morning and guests were then invited to attend the Day Centres.
- 46.4 All councillors thanked officers and the guests for the report and verbal updates.
- 46.5 Councillor Davey noted that 70% of rough sleepers had no connection with the city, and asked how long they tended to stay. He was advised that they generally moved on within 3 to 4 weeks, and so there was a fairly high turnover.
- 46.6 Councillor Farrow asked whether many of the rough sleepers were ex servicemen. He was advised that a number were and informed that there was a Sussex wide project to help them. It was known that many of those people had distinct needs such as alcoholism or were suffering from PTSD and so particular support was offered. Councillor Farrow said he was involved with a group who supported ex service personnel and invited officers to liaise with that group, and suggested that it might be useful to hold a workshop to look at the issues of homelessness. Councillor Deane said that she had spoken to senior members of the Services and they were very concerned that colleagues were sleeping rough, and said that regiments were very willing to help where they could and suggested that officers liaise with the Services who may be able to offer support and funding.
- 46.7 Councillor Deane asked officers if there were regular patrols to identify those who were sleeping rough, and whether there was a contact number members of the public could use if they were concerned for someone. The Committee were advised that anyone found rough sleeping were advised where they could go to find shelter, and there was a direct line to relevant services which the police, hospitals etc had. In addition the

number for front line services was available to the public and were placed in locations such as bus stops.

46.8 Councillor Mears asked for reassurance that there wouldn't be any cut in the budget for homelessness. The Chair confirmed that the administration took the issue of homelessness very seriously and would do all it could to support those affected.

46.9 Councillor Powell said that it was important to look at all the issues of homelessness, including what could be done to prevent people ending up in that situation, and asked how the council could help further. The Chair said that Councillor Farrow's suggestion of holding a workshop to consider all ideas was a good one and asked officers to arrange it.

46.10 **RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

47. ITEMS REFERRED FOR COUNCIL

47.1 **RESOLVED** That no items be referred to Council

The meeting concluded at 6.45pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of