

DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Notification of one Deputation has been received. The spokesperson is entitled to speak for 5 minutes.

Deputation concerning Budget Consultation

(Spokesperson) – Mr. J. Melson

Consultation and Policy-making

“B&HCC’s Constitution provides for the Policy-making process on Council Housing to be conducted by consultation with the four Area Housing Management Panels, and Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee. The four “special-interest” Groups (Sheltered Housing, High Rise Action Group, Leaseholder Action Group, and Tenant Disability Network) have seats on HMCSC.

We understand the difficulty Central Government’s tardiness can cause officers however, the Rent Convergence directive does not mean that a provisional budget Report could not have been produced and Consulted in good time. Reading out an isolated list of changes to the Service Charges at a Sheltered Housing meeting, and at Area Panels (after Housing Committee had sat on the Budget Report) cannot be construed as Consultation.

A meeting with two people, out of more than 2,300 High Rise properties, cannot be a valid consultation with the High Rise Action Group that has not seen the list of changes to the Service Charges or any of the Budget Report. The proper purpose of Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives is to bring the consensus of their electing body to inform the views of Members and help them in the final “tweaking” of Reports. Without proper Consultation with the Area Panels and Groups the meeting of Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee on the 11th February 2014 is flawed by reliance on the personal views of the Tenant and Leaseholder representatives present rather than the consensus of all council-housed residents.

This Deputation considers the Consultation process on this HRA budget is not adequate or satisfactory and has unresolved issues with some of the proposals in this Budget.

Discretionary Grants

The £145,000 for Discretionary Grants: Housing Management has specialised teams in place from Financial Inclusion and Sustainable Tenancy to Travellers and everything in between.

The HRA is ring-fenced and can only be spent on Housing and for the general benefit of all council-housed residents. Grants to Voluntary Sector groups raise an issue if the group to whom a grant is made provides services which are not housing-specific, or restrictive (for Older People, Young People, Disability, LGBT, Ethnic), or provided across the Private Sector.

If the introduction of additional Service Charges is based on the principle that a resident who does not receive a Service should not subsidise those that do then

clearly they should not subsidise Voluntary Sector groups which do not pay into the HRA. However council-housed residents do pay Council Tax in common with the Private Sector and any Discretionary Grants should be paid from the General Account.

Public Ways lighting and Lift Charges.

Discussions with two local Letting Agencies and a Private Sector landlord have made it clear that they factor these charges and the proximity of other amenities of their properties, transport, shops, schools, doctors, views from the property, into the Rent asked.

Long-time residents tell us that lighting and lifts were included as part of the rent setting process when letting the newly-commissioned high-rise buildings (late 60's and early 70's) and what would be a duplicate cost has been introduced at the time we became a Unified Authority. We have not had time to ask the question or find documentary support for that.

PV Panels and Communal Digital TV Aerials

The principle that a resident who does not receive a Service should not subsidise those that do leads us into **PV panels**: a question of recharge was shelved as it was not a factor when the previous Administration had negotiated for an Energy company to provide, install and maintain these cost-neutrally to the HRA. However, this Administration did not finalise that proposal and installations are funded from the HRA and no longer cost-neutral and raise a question as to whether the installation of pv panels are a hidden subsidy of the Electricity bills for the properties on which they are installed. If they do constitute a subsidy of private financial liabilities are they a legitimate expenditure from the HRA unless each installation is recharged, not at an average cost across the whole expenditure but specifically to the beneficiaries of each installation at the cost of each installation?

The same proportionate recharge would need to be applied to the Communal Digital TV installation. The cost of the satellite dish is the same whether it is installed on a low-rise comprising 6 dwellings or a high-rise of 100 dwellings, if the dish cost £600 then low-rise would need to pay £100 each as opposed to the high-rise £6. Similarly with maintenance visits, the cost is the same per installation. Is the same principle to be applied to Repairs and Maintenance? Is a resident paying £60pw only entitled to half the repairs of someone paying £120?

Clearly a reductio ad absurdum!

That the HMCSC papers tell us that consultation will start immediately after Housing Committee and focus on the implementation of the new service charges and further consideration of how any adverse impact on tenants and leaseholders can be mitigated is not good practise, once the horse has bolted...

We ask this Committee to modify the Budget items above before approving the Recommendations of this Report.”

Councillor J. Kitcat, Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee will reply.