

## **Executive Councillor Records of Decision and Housing Management Board Minutes**

**17:30- 19:20**

### **PRESENT**

#### **Executive Councillors:**

Executive Councillor for Housing: Catherine Smart

#### **Scrutiny Committee:**

Scrutiny Committee Members: Councillors Armstrong, Blackhurst (Vice Chair), Blencowe, Howell, McGovern, Todd-Jones (Labour Spokesperson for Housing), Ward.

Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives: Tony Barnes, Diane Best (Chair), Beverley Dennis, Brian Haywood, John Marais and Terry Sweeney.

### **09/HMB/23          Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2009 were signed by the Chair as a correct record.

The Chair put on record her thanks to Councillor Pitt for Chairing the Committee during 2008/09, and also thanked her fellow tenant/leaseholder representatives for nominating her for 2009/10.

The Chair welcomed the newly elected Councillor for East Chesterton, Susannah Kerr, and explained that she had been invited to attend the meeting but would not be able to vote on this occasion. Her full appointment to the HMB Committee would be complete by Friday 19 June.

The reporting back of an urgent decision by the Executive Councillor regarding the reduction to the previously approved rent increase for 2009/10 would be added to the agenda.

### **09/HMB/24          Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Levy and Shah.

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09/HMB/25      **Declarations of Interest**

Beverley Dennis declared a personal interest in agenda item 9.

09/HMB/26      **Public Questions**

None

09/HMB/27      **To nominate Three Tenants/Leaseholders' Representatives to Community Services Scrutiny Committee for Municipal Year 2009/10**

Terry Sweeney announced that Diane Best, Anna Vine-Lott and Brian Haywood would be the representatives for 2009/10.

09/HMB/28      **Service Level Agreement for Cambridge Federation**  
*(Non-Key Decision - Agenda Item 6)*

**Matter for Decision:** To note the achievements made in resident involvement under the 2008/09 Service Level Agreement (SLA) and to present the SLA for the current financial year i.e. April 2009 – March 2010.

**Decision of Executive Councillor:**

- Noted the outcomes and achievements from the 2008/09 Service Level Agreement as detailed in appendices 1 and 2 of the officers report.
- Agreed the 2009/10 City Homes SLA with the Cambridge Federation as detailed in appendix 3 of the officer's report.

**Reason for the Decision:** As set out in the Officers report

**Any alternative options considered and rejected:** N/A

**Scrutiny Considerations:**

The Area Housing Manager introduced the report and brought members attention to the 2008/09 Service Level Agreement (SLA).

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She apologised that the 6 monthly Resident Involvement Reports had not been brought to HMB during 2008/09, and asked that the 2009/10 information be included in the yearly SLA Achievement Report.

Members approved the following amended wording for pages 3 and 5 of the 2009/10 SLA:

- *Reports detailing the Street Forum results to be included in the SLA Achievement Report 2009/10 (page 3)*
- *Report number of recognised Resident groups in the SLA Achievement Report 2009/10 (page 3)*
- *Administer Tenants Initiative Scheme and provide details in the SLA Achievement Report 2009/10 (page 5)*

In response to Members questions the Cambridge Federation Manager confirmed that the 12% budget overspend was due a programme of work being in place prior to the budgets being set. The service had made a staff member redundant and this also contributed to a one-off cost. The website had been in place for a while and the costings indicated in the budget were for staff time in order to keep the site up to date and accurate. It was also confirmed that any under spend could be carried forward into next year.

Tenant/leaseholder representatives felt that the meeting support given by the Federation to the Sheltered Scheme Residents Association (SSRA) needed to continue and be reflected in the 2009/10 SLA. It had been suggested that the Federation could now only support 6 meetings (instead of the normal 12) but with help from SSRA the monthly meetings were likely to continue in the short term. The meetings were well attended and the continued support of the Federation was essential.

The Cambridge Federation Manager confirmed that, as it was very time intensive, the 'Sounding Board' work had now been transferred to the Tenant Participation Team in Community Services.

The Head of City Homes praised the hard work of the Federation and the Executive Councillor also thanked officers for the report. It was confirmed that the 2009/10 SLA would be completed prior to the start of the financial year.

The Committee approved recommendations by 13 votes to 0 (unanimous).

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The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

**Conflicts of interest declared by the Executive Councillor (and any dispensations granted)**

N/A

09/HMB/29      **Tenants Contents Insurance – Procurement Approval Report**

*(Non-Key Decision - Agenda Item 7)*

**Matter for Decision:** Approval to tender the existing Tenants Contents Insurance Scheme, on a three-year contract, to be effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010, in accordance with the Council's Constitution on Contracts – The Contract Procedure Rules.

**Decision of Executive Councillor:**

- Authorised the Director of Community Services to select the most appropriate procurement route and, if appropriate, invite competitive tenders in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and thereafter to award a three-year contract (with a two-year extension at the Council's option) for the provision of a weekly paid Tenants Contents Insurance Scheme for City Council housing tenants.
- If appropriate, following an evaluation of the procurement options open to the Council, authorised the Director of Community Services to appoint a broker to assist the Council with the tendering process.

**Reason for the Decision:** As set out in the Officers report

**Any alternative options considered and rejected:** N/A

**Scrutiny Considerations:**

The Business Manager introduced the report and, in response to Members questions, confirmed that the current take-up rate of the insurance was around 10% (746 policies). It was stated that figures were not kept by the Housing Department on the level of insurance held by the other 90% and that the cover was not currently offered to leaseholders – although this could be looked into.

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It was not statutory for Councils to offer this kind of policy and it was unusual for any local authority to do so. However the City Council felt that it was important to provide this for the benefit of its tenants.

It was acknowledged that the current provider did not market the service widely but the Council did advertise it in the 'Open Door' publication and through their housing officers.

A Member questioned the value for money of the policy and felt that better schemes were available. The National Housing Federation offered a pooled scheme and officers were advised to investigate this further.

The Committee approved recommendations by 13 votes to 0 (unanimous).

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

**Conflicts of interest declared by the Executive Councillor (and any dispensations granted)**

N/A

09/HMB/30      **Customer Service Centre – Tranche 6**  
*(Non-Key Decision - Agenda Item 8)*

**Matter for Decision:** Acceptance of the Tranche 6 working Group and the suggestions for how work might be taken forward and how tenants could be involved.

**Decision of Executive Councillor:**

Accepted the proposed Tranche 6 Working Group (outlined in point 5 of the officers report) that would then contribute to the decision report to come to September committee. The September report would propose which housing management services would be appropriate to transfer from City Homes to the CSC

**Reason for the Decision:** As set out in the Officers report

**Any alternative options considered and rejected:** N/A

**Scrutiny Considerations:**

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The Head of City Homes introduced the report and confirmed that telephone handling of the Repairs Service had transferred into the Customer Service Centre (CSC) on Monday 15 June.

In response to member's questions it was confirmed that, whilst a minimum for 3 tenant/leaseholder representatives had been suggested for the working group, there was not a suggested maximum. It was felt important to have as much input and informed debate as possible.

Members suggested that tenant/leaseholder representative's act as a conduit for recruiting the remaining members of the working group and officers agreed with this approach.

It was acknowledged that in order to report back to the September meeting of HMB timescales were tight but three 2-hour sessions with the working group had been suggested.

The Head of City Homes confirmed that, as with most departments, the Housing Service was under financial pressure and efficiencies were possible through using the Customer Service Centre.

In response to members questions the Executive Councillor again confirmed that Area Housing Offices would not be considered for closure until all housing services had been in the CSC for at least 1 year. This would give an opportunity to monitor the services and then make an informed decision.

In response to questions regarding finance the Head of City Homes confirmed that the investment of £3.8m would be new funding. The HRA was a ring-fenced account and all of the funding and savings would be subject to the usual full external scrutiny.

The Committee approved recommendations by 13 votes to 0 (unanimous).

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

**Conflicts of interest declared by the Executive Councillor (and any dispensations granted)**

N/A

**Matter for Decision:** Decision on the future of the 5 estate based laundries across the city managed by City Homes.

**Decision of Executive Councillor:** Approved:

- The continuation of Kingsway laundry, with increased usage charges, with a small wash at £3.50, a large wash at £4.50 and a dryer at 50p per 15 minutes. In order to keep the costs manageable at this site, the laundry would be further subsidised by the aerial income fund.
- The closure of Francis Darwin Court laundry.
- The continuation of Hanover and Princess Court laundry funded through increased usage charges, with a small wash at £4.00, large wash at £5.00 and dryer at £1.50.
- The continuation of Lichfield Rd laundry funded through increased usage charges, with a wash at £2.00 and dryer at £1.00.

**Reason for the Decision:** As set out in the Officers report

**Any alternative options considered and rejected:** N/A

**Scrutiny Considerations:**

The Senior Housing Officer introduced the report and went through in detail the suggestions for the 5 individual laundries. A full Review Report would be brought back to HMB in 12 months.

In response to member's questions it was confirmed that tokens were being stolen from the laundry at Hanover and Princess Court and that discussions around anti-theft devices were ongoing.

The introduction of a fixed fee for all laundries had been discussed but, due to varied usage between the sites, it would mean that some laundries would be heavily subsidising others. It was also acknowledged that any increase could result in less usage but this would be monitored closely.

The Business Manager confirmed that overheads were not included in the figures indicated in the officer's report.

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Members felt that tenants would be happy with a small increase in cost if it resulted in an improved service.

The Committee approved recommendations by 10 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

**Conflicts of interest declared by the Executive Councillor (and any dispensations granted)**

N/A

09/HMB/32      **Urgent Decision: Reduction to the previously approved rent increase for 2009/10**  
(Additional agenda Item)

**Matter for Decision:** A decision required in respect of local rent increases for the reasons set out below.

**Decision of Executive Councillor:** Approved

- A revised average increase of 3.26% in respect of Council dwelling rents for 2009/10, in place of the average increase of 6.59% approved at HMB in January 2009.
- Rent reductions for individual tenants applied to all current tenancies on the same basis as the original increases, ensuring that all properties are moved towards target proportionally over the remaining years of the rent restructuring process.
- That although four weeks formal notice of a change in rent will be provided to all tenants, rent accounts would be adjusted to ensure that tenants benefit from the reduction with effect from 6<sup>th</sup> April 2009, as the Department of Communities and Local Government intended.

**Reason for the Decision:** To implement the announcement made by the Housing Minister on Friday 6 March 2009 announcing new financial support to help Councils cut their 2009/10 rent increases for tenants in the current economic climate, and the subsequent re-issue of both a Draft and Final Amending Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Subsidy Determination.

**Any alternative options considered and rejected:** N/A

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**Scrutiny Considerations:**

The Business Manager apologised for the late addition of this item but the Executive Councillor highlighted that an urgent decision was the quickest way for residents to see the benefits.

Members agreed with the decision.

**Conflicts of interest declared by the Executive Councillor (and any dispensations granted)**

N/A

09/HMB/33      **Housing Management IT System Review**  
*(Key Decision - Agenda Item 11)*

**Matter for Decision:** To identify the options available to the Housing Service in relation to the ongoing provision of an integrated Housing Management IT System.

**Decision of Executive Councillor:** Approved the recommendations as set out in the officer's confidential report.

**Reason for the Decision:** As set out in the Officers report

**Any alternative options considered and rejected:** N/A

**Scrutiny Considerations:**

The Committee approved recommendations by 11 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

**Conflicts of interest declared by the Executive Councillor (and any dispensations granted)**

N/A

**Chair**

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