

Executive Councillor Records of Decision and Housing Management Board Minutes

5:30pm - 8:45pm

PRESENT

Executive Councillors:

Executive Councillor for Housing: Catherine Smart

Scrutiny Committee:

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

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

Officers: Liz Bisset (Director of Community Services), Bob Hadfield (Head of Technical Services), Sandra Farmer (Area Housing Manager – South), Marella Hoffman (Principal Tenant Participation Officer), Robert Hollingsworth (Head of City Homes), Julia Hovells (Business Manager), Andrew Latchem (Area Housing Manager – North), Nova Roberts (Head of Customer Services), Luisa Sartini-Baldwin (Manager of Cambridge Federation) and Liz Terry (Director of Customer & Democratic Services)

10/HMB/01 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2009 were signed by the Chair as a correct record subject to Councillor Armstrong being added to the list of apologies.

10/HMB/02 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Tenant Representative Tony Barnes.

10/HMB/03 Declarations of Interest

Diane Best declared a personal interest in agenda item 6, as she had Chaired the Tranche 6 Resident Working Group.

Diane Best also declared a personal interest in agenda item 9 as a leaseholder.

Councillor McGovern declared a personal interest in agenda item 8, as a Governor of Orchard Park Primary School.

10/HMB/04 Public Questions

With the agreement of the questioner, the Chair opted to take the single registered public question under agenda item 6.

The Chair asked the Committee's approval to rule that under section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the following Officers' report be considered despite not being made publicly available for five clear working days prior to this meeting.

The reason that these documents could not be deferred was that they formed an integral part of the budget-setting framework of the council.

10/HMB/05 Service Plans for 2010/11, Revenue and Capital Budgets 2009/10 (Revised), 2010/11 and 2011/12 (Forecast) (Key Decision – Agenda Item 5)

Matter for Decision:

Service Performance Reviews set out the performance against objectives and targets for the first six months of 2009/10. The Service Plans for 2010/11 look ahead at service proposals, objectives, targets and the budget position for 2010/11 and forecast for 2011/12. This information would enable the Executive Councillor to consider whether service priorities and resources should be refocused, to enable objectives and targets for the coming year to be met.

Service Plans of the following services were considered:

- Housing Revenue Account.
- Housing General Fund.

Report Appendix D set out the overall base revenue budget position for the Housing Revenue Account. The appendix compared the proposed revised budget to the current budget at September 2009 and detailed the proposed budget for 2010/11 and forecast for 2011/12.

Decision of Executive Councillor:

Performance Targets:

- a) Agreed the service objectives and proposals for 2010/11 and future years for services contained within the Housing Revenue Account, as set out in the service plan, and the performance indicators and targets as set out in Appendix 1 to the plan.
-

Review of Charges:

- b) Approved the proposed charges for Housing Revenue Account services and facilities, as shown in Appendix B to this report.
- c) Approved that council dwellings rents be increased in line with rent restructuring guidelines to seek to achieve convergence with formula rent by 2012/13, with a maximum in individual increases of inflation (RPI at September 2009 of minus 1.4%) plus half percent (0.5%) plus £2.00 per week with effect from 5 April 2010, in accordance with the latest government guidelines.
- d) Approved inflationary increases of 2.6% in garage rents for 2010/11, in line with an average of employee and building cost inflation.
- e) Approved that service charges for door entry systems, lifts, stair lifts and electrical and mechanical maintenance are held at 2009/10 prices.
- f) Approved a reduction in gas maintenance service charge in line with the reduced costs anticipated as part of jointly re-tendering the service with South Cambridgeshire District Council.
- g) Approved that caretaking, communal cleaning, grounds maintenance, window cleaning, temporary housing premises and utilities, sheltered scheme premises, utilities and catering charges continue to be recovered at full cost.
- h) Approved the introduction of service charges for the maintenance of property adaptations, as per the revised policy for the 'Provision of Disabled Adaptations in Council owned properties' as approved by HMB in November 2008, to ensure full cost recovery.

Revenue Budgets:

- i) Approved with any amendments, the current year funding requests and savings, (detailed in Appendix A of the Officer's report).
- j) Approved the revised revenue budget for 2009/10, as shown in Appendix D of the Officer's report, which results in an increased use of reserves of £180,410 for 2009/10.
- k) Agreed proposals for revenue savings and bids, as set out in Appendix C of the Officer's report, which have been incorporated into the budgets presented for this portfolio.
- l) Approved the budget for 2010/11 as shown in Appendix D of the Officer's report.

Reason for the Decision:

Service Plans and draft Budgets were key elements of the Councils budgetary and policy framework.

Any alternative options considered and rejected:

N/A.

Scrutiny Considerations:

The Business Manager introduced the Revenue and Capital Budgets 2009/10 (Revised), 2010/11 and 2011/12 (Forecast) Report to Members. The Head of City Homes introduced the Service Plans. Members were asked for comments or questions.

Housing Revenue Account Service Plan

In response to a question concerning rent convergence, the Business Manager answered the Department for Communities and Local Government had moved the intended rent convergence date to 2012/13 from the original figure of 2023/24. This formed part of the Government's calculation to arrive at guideline rent.

HRA rent income and property voids were discussed.

The City Council undertakes major works as required on properties to bring them up to decent homes standard in between occupation by tenants. This could have an impact on the length of time a property was unoccupied in comparison to other local authorities. Visits by Tenant Inspectors and maintenance work (as required) were undertaken within twenty nine days of a property becoming vacant. Other councils generally undertake maintenance work when tenants are in situ to reduce relet times.

Councillor Howell raised a concern about the cost of Legionella Testing. He was informed the Council had a legal health and safety duty to undertake this work, which was viewed as a very important area of risk to manage. The Head of Technical Services informed the Committee that services were procured through the County Council and funding spent objectively.

In response to a question regarding the 2.6% increase in garage rent, the Business Manager said that contributions went towards a maintenance service and a capital programme for garage repairs. The Director of Community Services offered to discuss the matter further with Councillor Blencowe post meeting.

The Head of Technical Services advised delegates of a typographical error on page 2 of the Housing Revenue Account report (P39/165). Members were advised that 'hard' rather than 'soft' market testing had been undertaken.

Members discussed in detail the proposal to transfer services provided at housing Area Offices into the Customer Service Centre. It was felt important to maintain services in the community and concerns were raised about the accessibility of the new Centre for the elderly and infirm.

The provision of care in Ditchburn Place by the Independent Living Service will face competition in either having to bid for contracts in the next 12 months or face uncertain funding as the County Council and Primary Care Trust move towards Personal Budgets and Self Directed Support. The City Council will bid for the contract, which ends in August 2010, but will be in competition with the private sector. The Council prided itself on attracting high quality staff due to the benefits it offered as an employer, so its bid may appear higher in comparison to the private sector. The Committee recognised this was a complex and delicate situation.

The Director of Community Services offered to respond to Councillor Levy's query concerning MTO PI 2z post committee.

The Committee raised concerns about why BME tenants expressed lower levels of satisfaction with service performance than other groups. This reflected the national trend, although Cambridge satisfaction levels (66%) were higher than the national average. Work was being undertaken to engage BME groups to address their issues.

It was agreed to bring a report back to HMB by the Director of Community Services/Head of City Homes on why BME tenants reported lower levels of satisfaction with housing services.

The Chair decided that the recommendations highlighted in the Report should be voted on and recorded separately:

The Committee approved recommendation a by 11 votes to 0.

The Committee approved recommendations b – h by 11 votes to 0.

The Committee approved recommendations i – l by 11 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

Housing General Fund Service Plan

The Head of City Homes introduced the Service Plan highlighting the Key Objectives and Performance Indicators.

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

N/A.

10/HMB/06 Customer Access Strategy (CAS)
(Key Decision – Agenda Item 6)

Matter for Decision:

Report provided an update on the development of the Tranche 6 Housing Management services phase of the Customer Access Strategy:

- Described key process changes.
- Sets out implications for the Area Offices and staffing issues.
- Sets out cost implications.

Decision of Executive Councillor:

- Instructed Officers to take into account the outcomes of the Residents Working Group and to progress the work required to implement a 'go-live' of Tranche 6 Housing Management services to be delivered in the Customer Service Centre, alongside the Area Offices.
- Considered the staffing issues and cost implications for the Area Offices.
- The Executive Councillor is recommended to ensure monitoring of uses of Area Offices takes into account the complexity of reasons for visits.
- The Executive Councillor is recommended to ask the Executive to investigate the wider use of housing Area Offices by other departments to bring staff and services closer to the local neighbourhoods they serve.

Reason for the Decision:

As set out in the Officers report.

Any alternative options considered and rejected:

N/A.

Scrutiny Considerations:

Kay Harris raised a public question on behalf of the Hawks Residents Association. She expressed people's concerns that they may lose contact with Area Offices as services are transferred to the Customer Service Centre. Councillor Smart responded that Area Offices would remain open for another twelve months, then the situation would be reviewed. No decision has been made to close the Offices.

The Head of City Homes and Head of Customer Services introduced the Customer Access Strategy report.

The Tranche 6 Resident Working Group was looking at the concerns of residents to ensure their needs were addressed during the transfer of services. The City Council had arms length influence through buy-in of other services such as maintenance, and the same principle should be applied for housing through the Customer Service Centre contract.

Councillor Howell raised concerns about staffing and operation matters, cost implications for Area Offices remaining open in parallel with the Customer Service Centre, plus political steer affecting the decision. The Director of Community Services responded that the City Council made a corporate decision to provide a multitude of services through the Customer Service Centre, including housing. A number of Housing Officer posts may cease to exist in future, but these included temporary positions that were coming to an end, therefore the number of substantive staff posts that would be made redundant was expected to be lower than the figure quoted in the report. Cost implications for the Customer Access Strategy were originally modeled in 2006. However, the business model appeared accurate and had been updated to include figures from 2008.

Final costs could not be quantified yet as variables such as redundancy figures were still to be confirmed. Councillor Smart added that capacity across the City Council, not just cost (although an important consideration) drove the need for the Customer Service Centre. The intention was to split administration and specialist roles. Therefore Customer Service Centre staff would aim to address initial enquiries, so Housing Officers etc could respond to more technical ones directed to them from the Customer Service Centre. The split of roles could be reviewed in future depending on results on the ground. The Customer Service Centre would act as a one-stop shop for enquiries, when a multitude of contact points, including fifty seven phone numbers, were available before. The Councillor acknowledged people's concerns, this was why the Area Offices would remain open for twelve months prior to a review on how to proceed.

It was agreed to bring a report back to HMB plus S&R Committees by the Head of City Homes/Head of Customer Services concerning updated figures cost implications of Area Offices working in parallel with the Customer Service Centre.

Tenant Representatives and Opposition Councillors raised concerns about the impact of staff reductions on Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs). They recognized that the Customer Service Centre Team were

professional, but asked if the team provide a service that tenants want? It was felt that some tenants could better adapt to the new mode of service provision than others. The views of vulnerable tenants should be considered in EQIAs. Concern over service provision post staffing reductions was raised again. Concerns were also raised about the closure of Area Offices post the twelve month review. It was suggested that multiple one-stop shops for service provision could be set up across the city. The Director of Community Services acknowledged concerns over Area Offices and re-emphasised that no action would be taken until after the review. The Customer Service Centre would be accessible to all, including elderly and vulnerable tenants. Visitors could make appointments if desired. Councillor Smart added that Housing Officers would still undertake home visits as required.

Councillor Shah asked for the minutes to show that the Area Office review would come back to HMB for discussion prior to any further action being taken. The review would consider the needs of BME and elderly service users. The Head of Customer Services responded that the Council had a protocol to monitor Area Office plus Customer Service Centre usage and customer satisfaction levels. The intention would be to build on and improve current satisfaction levels in future, including all modes of contact (foot fall, phone, email etc). Feedback on monitoring could occur through the Working Group.

It was agreed to bring a report back to HMB by the Director of Community Services/Head of City Homes on Equality Impact Assessment results and how they address the needs of vulnerable residents as routine housing services were transferred from Area Offices to the Customer Service Centre.

Terry Sweeney formally proposed the following additional recommendation:

- (New 2.3) The Executive Councillor is recommended to ensure monitoring of uses of Area Offices takes into account the complexity of reasons for visits.

The Committee approved this additional recommendation unanimously.

Councillor Blencowe formally proposed the following additional recommendation:

- (New 2.4) The Executive Councillor is recommended to ask the Executive to investigate the wider use of housing Area Offices by other departments to bring staff and services closer to the local neighbourhoods they serve.
-

The Committee approved this additional recommendation by 8 votes to 5.

The Chair decided that the recommendations highlighted in the Report should be voted on and recorded separately:

The Committee approved recommendation 2.1 by 11 votes to 1.

The Committee approved recommendation 2.2 unanimously.

The Committee approved recommendation 2.3 unanimously.

The Committee approved recommendation 2.4 by 7 votes to 5.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

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

N/A.

10/HMB/07 Cambridge Standard Fund 2010/11
(Non-Key Decision - Agenda Item 7)

Matter for Decision:

The report presented a proposal for allocation of £200,000 for the 2010/11 works towards the Cambridge Standard Capital Funding in respect of Neighbourhood Improvement Projects.

Decision of Executive Councillor:

- Approved the investment of £70,000 of capital resources as part of the 2010/11 works towards the Cambridge Standard funding, to undertake required works at Ditton Fields.
- Approved the investment of £70,000 of capital resources as part of the 2010/11 works towards the Cambridge Standard funding, to undertake required works at Woodhouse Way.
- Approved the allocation of £60,000 towards local small-scale solutions for parking problems, to be agreed by the Head of City Homes.

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 - North introduced the report and Members were asked for comments or questions.

Councillor Howell asked how the provision of extra car parking spaces for residents could be reconciled with the City Council's green credentials. The Area Housing Manager replied that Housing Revenue Account funding was being spent to increase capacity in areas of particular need based on tenant's feedback. The proposal was to establish parking spaces on housing land, not highways. Councillor McGovern asked for local Councillors to be included in any consultation exercises.

The Committee approved recommendations unanimously.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

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

N/A.

10/HMB/08 Service Level Agreement for the Cambridge Federation

(Non-Key Decision - Agenda Item 8)

Matter for Decision:

The Board were informed about the achievements made to date in resident involvement under the 2009/10 Service Level Agreement (SLA) and to present the SLA for April 2010 – March 2011.

The aims of the service level agreement were to continue to improve opportunities for residents to become involved with the management of their homes and the communities in which they live.

Decision of Executive Councillor:

- Noted the outcomes and achievements from the 2009/10 Service Level Agreement as detailed in report appendix 1.
- Agreed the 2010/11 City Homes SLA with the Cambridge Federation as detailed in report appendix 2.

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 – South and Manager of Cambridge Federation introduced the report. Questions and comments were invited from Members.

The level of funding and support given to Residents Associations was discussed in detail.

The role of the Cambridge Federation was discussed in detail. Tenant Representatives asked if the Federation was still fit for purpose and giving value for money. Councillor Smart and the Head of City Homes were aware of resident's views of the service. A review of how tenants are engaged maybe appropriate in future as the Tenant Services Authority comes on-board.

It was agreed to bring a report back to HMB by the Director of Community Services/Head of City Homes concerning the establishment of a formal group to look at the working of the Cambridge Federation prior to the next Service Level Agreement. The review of the Federation will be in the context of new expectations and requirements to support and strengthen good tenant involvement.

The Committee approved the recommendations unanimously.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

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

N/A.

10/HMB/09 Leasehold Services - Administration Charges 2010/11
(Non-Key Decision - Agenda Item 9)

Matter for Decision:

Approval sought for the fees payable by Leaseholders for the financial year 1st April 2010 to 31st March 2011 for services provided with or approvals in connection with the Lease, with a view to these charges being included with the Annual Budget Review to Committee.

Approval also sought to increase the Building Insurance excess in connection with Leaseholder Claims.

Decision of Executive Councillor:

- Approved the table of fees as itemised in report Appendix 1 for 2010/11.
- Future increases will be included annually as part of the Budget Review.
- Approved the introduction of a fee to register sub-letting.
- Approved an increase in the Insurance Excess from £25.00 to £75.00.

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 – North introduced the report and took questions from Members.

Councillor Howell queried if the fee for leaseholders notifying the Council of property sub-letting would act as a disincentive to do so. The Area Housing Manager – North stated the charge would cover administration costs to ensure leaseholders are updated with information as required. If leaseholders did not make this declaration when applicable, their building insurance maybe void. The Leaseholder Representative welcomed the charge as sub-letting administration costs could be split (and therefore reduced) between leaseholders. The Head of City Homes noted that 25% of leaseholders sub-let, which could cause anti-social issues for some. This one-off fee would enable the Council to identify sub-let properties and the leaseholders responsible for managing the anti-social behaviour of their sub-tenants.

The Chair decided that the recommendations highlighted in the Report should be voted on and recorded separately:

The Committee approved recommendations 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4 unanimously.

The Committee approved recommendation 2.3 by 13 votes to 1.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

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

N/A.

Chair