

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE

4.00pm 14 NOVEMBER 2012

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Wakefield (Chair), Powell (Deputy Chair), Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson), Farrow (Opposition Spokesperson), Barnett, Fitch, Jarrett, Mears, Shanks and Sykes

PART ONE

24. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

24A Declarations of Substitute Members

24.1 Councillor Sykes declared that he was attending as a substitute for Councillor Duncan. Councillor Shanks declared that she was attending as a substitute for Councillor Davey.

24B Declarations of Interests

24.2 There were none

24C Exclusion of the Press and Public

24.3 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.

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

25. MINUTES OF HOUSING COMMITTEE HELD ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2012

25.1 The Committee considered the Minutes of the Housing Committee meeting held on 26 September 2012.

- 25.2 Councillor Farrow referred to paragraph 17.6 which said that written confirmation would be provided to members to confirm what budget was currently available for adaptations, but that had not been received. The Head of Housing said that the political groups had been sent that information, and that the information was also provided in the report on Housing Adaptations, item 33 on the agenda.
- 25.3 Councillor Mears referred to paragraph 19.7, which stated that Councillor Powell had said that two members of staff had been employed by the authority to assist those who had alcohol problems and who were new to rough sleeping. Councillor Mears asked for clarification on whether it was the authority that had employed those staff. Officers confirmed that the staff were actually employed by the voluntary sector. It was agreed to amend the Minutes.
- 25.4 Councillor Fitch referred to paragraph 22.6 and asked when the council would look at brown field sites, and was advised that a Housing Investment update report would come to a future meeting.
- 25.5 **RESOLVED** – That, subject to the amendment to paragraph 19.7, the Minutes of the Housing Committee held on 26 September 2012 be agreed.

26. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE SUB COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 OCTOBER 2012

- 26.1 **RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Sub Committee be noted.

27. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 27.1 The Chair reminded everyone that City Assembly would be held this weekend at Hove Town Hall.
- 27.2 The Chair gave an update on the Warm Homes Healthy People programme and said that the authority had received preliminary notification that the application to the Department of Health's Warm Homes Healthy People Fund had been successful. The initial bid was for £150k, and was developed and submitted in partnership with colleagues from public health and third sector organisations, the programme contained a number of elements to address the issue of cold homes and fuel poverty and their impacts on health, including; fuel poverty awareness training to front line workers across all sectors, free financial inclusion checks, Winter Home Checks Service & Energy assessment and advice visits, Red Cross emergency response service and distribution of 'Warm Packs' and emergency grants to individuals who were at risk during serious cold weather. The final amount of funding was yet to be confirmed, as the Department of Health had reduced all successful bids by around 18% to maximise the spread of funding available to as many successful proposals as possible. Further information on what that actually meant for the programme would be provided when final confirmation of the funding amount was received.
- 27.3 The Chair spoke about Warm Homes and Energy Cafés, and said that through the 'Brighton & Hove Warm Homes' scheme residents in privately-owned, rented or leased homes anywhere in the city were entitled to free cavity wall and loft insulation. Free

insulation and energy-saving advice could help residents save money during the coldest time of year, while energy efficiency in homes was key to helping people stay warm through winter. To promote the scheme the council had joined forces with environmental groups Communities Matter and Albion in the Community. On three Saturdays in November, Energy Cafés would be running in Coldean, Hangleton and Portslade. Here, residents would be able to meet local energy experts for advice on staying warmer whilst saving cash. The first event took place in Coldean last Saturday, this Saturday would see a café at Emmaus, Portslade and the following Saturday, November 24th, at Hangleton Community Centre. Alongside these events, Albion in the Community would be running football camps in the same locations. So while parents were finding out how to reduce energy bills, their children could learn football skills from coaches.

27.4 The Strategic Director, Place advised members that following a reorganisation of the department, Mr J Sharma had been appointed as Head of Housing and Mr N Hibberd had been appointed to Head of City Regeneration. Councillors congratulated both of them on their new roles.

28. CALL OVER

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

29. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

29.1 A Public Question was received from Mr J Melson. The Chair welcomed Mr Melson to the meeting and asked him to put his question.

Mr Melson asked:

‘When were the Communal Digital TV Aerial Installations, for B&HCC’s Council Housing, insured and in which Insurance Policy are they included?’

In response officers stated that:

We are assuming that you are referring to the theft of some of the TV aerial equipment and whether the council is insured against this theft. The current Council insurance policy does not provide cover for replacement parts of buildings which have been stolen. Generally the council does not have theft cover, as it not economically viable to have blanket cover against theft, accidental damage, or malicious damage. This is because the claim excess is very high for each and every claim. Last year it was discovered that some of the first equipment installed as part of the early installations was stolen. In response to this theft, enquiries were made by the housing service about insuring the aerials against theft. We were advised by the corporate insurance team that it was not economically viable for us to apply a blanket cover against Theft, Accidental Damage or Malicious Damage, as the claim excess for accidental damage would amount to more than £10,000 for each & every claim. As a result, the council did not currently purchase theft cover, apart from for computer equipment and items of a high value such as the museum exhibits. The reason that the council was not covered for theft is that it was not good value for money to purchase this cover. Theft of metal was currently at a high and increasing level across the UK and insurance premiums and high excesses currently reflected that risk. It was thought to be financially more cost effective to take preventative measures rather than to insure the items in question as it would likely be the case that each potential loss would fall beneath the quoted excess. In actual fact the replacement

cost of the stolen aerial equipment was around £9,000. It was therefore decided that adding a higher level of insurance cover did not represent good value for money. Rather than insure the Communal Digital TV Aerial Installations, the risk of theft had been mitigated through introducing greater security measures through the provision of cabinet over locks. These were now fitted to all of the current aerial equipment installations. No further theft of equipment had been reported since the cabinet over locks were fitted. The Council did have other insurance cover and the housing stock was insured under the Council's corporate insurance policy. The policy covered fire, lighting, damage caused by an aircraft, explosion, storm or flood and escape of water. The council also had corporate insurance cover for terrorism and for engineering risks relating to lifts, lifting equipment, boilers and other mechanical equipment. This insurance was operated in conjunction with an inspection regime, where the insurance company's engineering inspectors carry out inspections of the equipment on a regular basis. In return for this cover the Council's corporate insurance team had an annual premium for material damage insurance for the housing stock. This had a £25,000 excess in respect of each and every claim. Included in this amount was the liability premium applicable to the housing assets.

29.2 The Chair asked Mr Melson if he had a supplementary question. Mr Melson circulated a written supplementary question. He accepted that some parts of that question had already been answered in response to his first question.

The supplementary question was:

'Communal aerial installation sites have been targeted by metal thieves. Cable was stolen prior to installation. Is it the liability of the contractor to replace, the contractor's insurance, the council's insurance or is that cost to be covered as part of the £405,000 HRA variance to the Capital Programme for communal digital aerials considered at the Policy & Resources Committee 11 October 2012 meeting?'

In response officers said the contractors had fulfilled their contract. Part of the variance amount (£9,000) was the cost of replacing the equipment. Aerials needed to be changed as part of the digital switchover.

30. MEMBERS INVOLVEMENT

30.1 Councillors Farrow, Peltzer Dunn and Powell submitted a written question about a recent article in The Argus newspaper on Poverty Crisis in the city. Officers provided a detailed briefing note in response to the question which was circulated to members.

30.2 The Chair thanked officers for the response and said that a report would be provided following the forthcoming Street Count. That report would provide information on the number of homeless in the city, comparisons with other authorities etc

- 30.3 Councillor Farrow thanked officers for the information supplied, and suggested that all members be invited to the Street Count due to be held later in the month.
- 30.4 Councillor Mears thanked officers for the report and the Homeless Team for the work they did. Councillor Mears said that the current administration had cut the current budget for dealing with homelessness, and asked for reassurance that there would be no further cuts in future budgets. Councillor Wakefield said that the homeless budget had not been cut, and it was not possible to make any assurances on future budgets.
- 30.5 Councillor Peltzer Dunn thanked officers for the detailed response to the question, and suggested that it would be useful to have scrutiny report into homelessness. Councillor Sykes said that a Homelessness Scrutiny Panel had recently been set up, and that the panel had had their first meeting. Councillor Sykes said that he would pass the briefing note from the meeting to the scrutiny panel.

31. WELFARE REFORM - PRESENTATION

- 31.1 The Head of City Services gave a presentation on Welfare Reform. The presentation gave an overview of the changes to Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit, Universal Credit, Sickness and Disability Benefits, Working Tax Credit and localisation of the Social Fund. The presentation gave details on the number of people affected by these changes in the city.
- 31.2 Councillor Farrow asked if a workshop could be run for councillors on the issues in the presentation. The Head of City Services said they were happy to do that, and asked councillors to let her know what areas they would like covered.
- 31.3 Councillor Barnett asked if those affected would be given sufficient notice of the changes, and was advised that those who lived in council houses would have been contacted by Housing.
- 31.4 Councillor Powell was aware that in the future benefits would be dealt with digitally, and asked what support would be provided for those who were not IT literate. Officers advised the council were already planning for the changes and would help those who were not confident with IT.

32. HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY INVESTMENT OPTIONS - PRESENTATION

- 32.1 The Head of Housing Strategy & Development and Private Sector Housing gave a presentation on Home Energy Efficiency Investment Options – Green Deal.
- 32.2 Councillor Fitch asked who would supply the capital sum in the first place, and was told that it was often the local authority. Councillor Fitch was concerned that the costs involved, particularly in the current economic climate, would be too high.
- 32.3 Councillor Peltzer Dunn asked whether this scheme only related to electricity or covered gas too. Officers confirmed that any charge would be shown on the electricity bill, but savings could be shown against either the gas or electricity bill.

32.4 The Chair asked if further information on this matter could be provided. Officers said the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs had provided guidelines and that could be passed to the Committee. The Chair said that she would shortly be attending a meeting of the Local Government Association, and would find out how other authorities were supporting this scheme.

33. HOUSING ADAPTATIONS

33.1 The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Director, Place which provided background information on the role of the Integrated Housing Adaptations Team and its work to improve access to housing adaptations across all tenures in the City. The report also set out proposals to improve the communication and client involvement by providing more and better information about the process.

33.2 Councillor Farrow noted that it appeared that there would be a shortfall in available funding and that there was no top up available. Officers said that issue would be part of the budget, but other options were being considered and demand would be managed where possible. Assessments would be carried out and priority given to critical cases first.

33.3 Councillor Shanks asked if there was a charge for adaptations. Officers advised that adaptations for children were provided for free, but all others were means tested.

33.4 Councillor Mears was concerned over the budget available as adaptations often enabled people to remain in their homes. Councillor Powell agreed that making adaptations to properties was essential, but there was a shortfall in available funding. Councillor Jarrett, who was Chair of the Adult, Care and Health Committee, said that he would speak to the Director of Adult Social Services to see if money could be transferred from their budget, and would also discuss the matter with colleagues within the NHS.

33.5 RESOLVED

- (i) That Housing Committee note the background information and service improvements to better manage the demand for adaptations, the improved assessment and delivery times, and the current situation concerning capital budgets.
- (ii) That Housing Committee note and approve the proposals to improve communication and client involvement through the team's on-going work with the Fed (the Brighton & Hove Federation of Disabled People) and Tenants Disability Network. In particular, as outlined in paragraph 3.9 of the report, to identify contact details for a named officer contact within the Housing Adaptations Service.

34. LV PROCUREMENT

34.1 The Committee considered the report of the Strategic Director, Place regarding the procurement of contracts for the supply service and repair of door entry systems/CCTV, fire alarms/emergency lighting (low voltage electronic security systems), and one lot encompassing all those services and incorporating warden call for sheltered accommodation, and ventilation and air conditioning.

- 34.2 Councillor Farrow thanked officers for the report, but was concerned over the anticipated timetable. Officers said that every effort would be made to ensure the process ran as quickly as possible. Councillor Farrow asked if safety lights could be included in the contract, and was advised that that issue was already covered by the contract with Mears.
- 34.3 Councillor Mears asked if a report could be brought to a future meeting providing information on Housing, giving details of the budget, the stock, the number of staff employed etc. The Chair agreed that would be useful, and that a report would be brought to a future meeting.
- 34.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn noted that consultation with leaseholders would be undertaken. Officers advised that it was a legal obligation to consult with leaseholders.
- 34.5 Councillor Jarrett asked that there be effective quality control on the door entry systems. Officers agreed.
- 34.6 **RESOLVED**

That the Housing Committee agreed to -

(i) The procurement of a contract or contracts under EU regulations, for the supply, service and repair of door entry systems/CCTV, fire alarms/emergency lighting, (low voltage electronic security systems), and one lot encompassing all those services and incorporating warden call for sheltered accommodation, and ventilation and air conditioning for a 4 year period, with an option for up to two 2 year extensions.

(ii) Give delegated authority to the Strategic Director Place in consultation with Director of Finance, to award the contract or contracts following the recommendations of the evaluation panel and the results of the tendering process and to approve extensions to the contract or contracts if required dependent on performance.

35. ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL TENANTS AND LEASEHOLDERS 2012

- 35.1 The Committee considered a report of the Head of Housing and Social Inclusion. The report provided a copy of the Annual Report to council tenants and leaseholders 2012. The Committee were asked to approve the report.
- 35.2 Councillor Farrow thanked officers for the report. He said it was good but felt that it could be better, and suggested that in future the process of designing and consulting on the content and layout be started earlier. The Chair agreed.
- 35.3 Councillor Mears noted that some of the information had been removed from earlier versions, and that this one was too simplified. The final page of the report had a summary of the Income and Expenditure, which showed how each £10 received had been spent. Councillor Mears felt the diagram, which showed the amount in percentages, was unnecessary and a simple list would suffice. Officers said that focus groups been consulted and they had been happy with way the information had been provided.
- 35.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to the page relating to Income and Expenditure information, and also had some concern over the diagram showing the percentage of each £10 spent, and suggested it be removed. That page also showed the total income

and expenditure, but without any further information it looked as if a profit of around £2m was being made and suggested that a brief note be added explaining where the balance went.

35.5 The Chair said it was difficult to provide information in a manner which everyone found appropriate, and noted that the focus groups had been happy with the 'final' version. The Chair accepted the comments of Councillors Peltzer Dunn and Mears, and asked if the percentage element could be removed from the diagram on Income and Expenditure. Officers agreed to do that, and said that a short explanation on the difference between the level of income and expenditure would be added.

35.6 Councillor Powell asked if the Annual Report had been assessed to ensure the colours used complied with the advice of the RNIB. It was confirmed that officers had checked the colour contrasts in the document.

35.7 RESOLVED

That Housing Committee, subject to the changes noted in paragraph 35.5, approved that the annual report to council tenants and leaseholders 2012 at Appendix 1 of the report, for publication and distribution to all council tenants and leaseholders in December 2012.

36. ITEMS REFERRED FOR COUNCIL

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

The meeting concluded at 7.15pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of