

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

4.00pm 19 OCTOBER 2011

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Wakefield (Cabinet Member)

Also in attendance: Councillor Peltzer Dunn (Opposition Spokesperson) and Farrow (Opposition Spokesperson)

PART ONE

29. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

29(a) Declarations of Interests

29.1 There were none.

29(b) Exclusion of Press and Public

29.2 In accordance with section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 ("the Act"), the Cabinet Member considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during an item of business on the grounds that it was likely, in view of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the press and public were present during that item, there would be disclosure to them of confidential information (as defined in section 100A(3) of the Act) or exempt information (as defined in section 100I(1) of the Act).

29.3 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public not be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any items on the agenda.

30. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

30.1 Councillor Farrow drew attention to paragraph 17.1 which referred to the cap on housing benefit. He asked if officers were able to report back on this matter. The Lead Commissioner Housing reported that officers were waiting for the Localism Act to be published within the next few weeks. Following publication of the Act, officers would prepare a paper on housing benefit for the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting. The Lead Commissioner further reported that in addition to the Localism Act there would be a new consultation paper relating to supported accommodation changes. A further

report on that matter would be reported to the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting in due course.

- 30.2 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting held on 7 September 2011 be agreed and signed by the Cabinet Member.

31. CABINET MEMBER'S COMMUNICATIONS

Tenants Meetings

- 31.1 The Cabinet Member reported that she had been visiting many areas of the city and attending many tenants' meetings. She hoped to continue to attend tenants' meetings across the city for the next month or so.

32. ITEMS RESERVED FOR DISCUSSION

- 32.1 **RESOLVED** – That all items be reserved for discussion.

33. PETITIONS

- 33.1 There were none.

34. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- 34.1 There were none.

35. DEPUTATIONS

- 35.1 There were none.

36. LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 36.1 There were none.

37. WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 37.1 There were none.

38. NOTICES OF MOTIONS

- 38.1 There were none.

39. MINUTES OF THE ADULT SOCIAL CARE & HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 39.1 The Cabinet Member considered the minutes of the Adult Social Care & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on the 8 September 2011.

- 39.2 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 20.6 relating to the workshop on community meals. The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion reported that the issue of

community meals was the subject of scrutiny activity. Any questions about this matter should be directed to the relevant service head in Adult Social Care.

39.3 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes be noted.

40. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

40.1 The Cabinet Member considered the minutes of the Housing Management Consultative Committee meetings held on the 5 September and 26 September 2011.

40.2 Councillor Pelzer Dunn referred to paragraph 16.19 of the minutes of 5 September relating to Stewart Gover's comments about the legality of the proposed changes to Area Panels.

40.3 The Senior Lawyer reported that she had emailed a detailed answer to Councillor Pelzer Dunn (referred to in minute 32.6 in the HMCC minutes of 26 September 2011). The Senior Lawyer's advice had been that she had been unable to find anything in the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 to support Stewart Gover's proposition that it was illegal for the council to interfere with tenant representation at Area Panels. The Area Panel's Terms of Reference did not form part of the council's constitution. Legally, resident and tenant associations were independent bodies and it would not be proper for the council to interfere with the annual election of representatives to the Area Panels. However, the problem raised by Stewart Gover had related to the proposal to extend the life of various groups. There was no mention of groups within the Area Panel's constitution, and it was difficult to sustain the argument that extending the life of the groups was contrary to the constitution.

40.4 Councillor Peltzer Dunn thanked the Senior Lawyer for her explanation. He was prepared to accept this ruling but felt that it underscored some doubt.

40.5 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes be noted.

41. RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

41.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of Strategic Director Place which concluded the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group's (TCMG) current round of work on the Resident Involvement Strategy and presented the revised and recommended document. The Strategy was endorsed by the HMCC on 26 September 2011.

41.2 Councillor Peltzer Dunn drew attention to the reference to the Innovation Group in paragraph 4.10 of the report. The minutes of the HMCC of 5 September stated that this group was likely to commence in September. The current report simply referred to the establishment of an Innovation Group.

41.3 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion explained that there had been some delay in forming the group at the request of tenants. They had been keen to re-elect tenants from the Area Panels, rather than the previous election from the Tenant Compact Monitoring Group.

41.4 **RESOLVED** (1) That the Resident Involvement Strategy be approved.

42. CUSTOMER ACCESS PHASE 3 - CUSTOMER SERVICE & ACCESS STRATEGY FOR HOUSING & SOCIAL INCLUSION

- 42.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which provided an update on the review of customer access arrangements for the Housing Management Service and presented the Housing & Social Inclusion Customer Service and Access Strategy for consideration.
- 42.2 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to paragraph 2.1 (3) in relation to the Victoria Road Housing Office. He stated that there was a perception from tenants and leaseholders in the West of the city that all their services were being taken away from them. He stressed that it was important to reassure the residents that this was not the case.
- 42.3 The Head of Housing and Social Inclusion concurred. He stated that he was in discussion with officers about this issue. Officers would ensure that residents were fully kept up to date and engaged in the process. Residents would get the same service in a different building in the same location.
- 42.4 **RESOLVED** - (1) That the Customer Service and Access Strategy that is presented with the report as Phase 3 of the Customer Access Review, be approved. Key areas for action within the strategy include:

(a) Promotion and support for customers to use more effective methods for accessing housing information and services in line with council-wide 'Improving Customer Experience' work and our corporate Channel Shift Strategy.

(b) Consultations with staff on staffing structure to support proposed new customer access arrangements and service improvement.

(c) Consideration of opportunities for further office moves and best future use of some housing offices – notably Manor Place Housing Office and Victoria Road Housing Office.

43. ALLOCATIONS POLICY - REVIEW

- 43.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which suggested a review of the Allocations Policy including consultation with the city. A further report would then be brought back to HMCC and the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting with final proposals, following the consultation.
- 43.2 The current Housing Register Allocations Policy was implemented in early May 2011. Under the new policy, Care leavers were not automatically awarded priority for housing, but were assessed for housing depending on their housing need in the same way as other applicants are assessed. The Children & Young People's Trust, care leavers and their representatives had raised concerns over the new approach and, in the view of the Council's significant responsibilities as Corporate Parent, this report proposed a further review of the Allocations Policy.
- 43.3 **RESOLVED** – (1) That the undertaking of a Review of the current Allocation Policy be approved. Following the Review, proposals will be brought back to HMCC and Housing CMM for final approval.

44. EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY PANEL ON LETTINGS AGENTS

- 44.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Strategic Director Place which explained that a cross party Scrutiny Panel (prior to May 2011) consisting of former Councillor Paul Elgood, Councillor Bill Randall & former Councillor Christine Simpson, considered issues in relation to the activities of letting agents in the city. These were set out in paragraph 1.1 of the report. The Panel made 6 recommendations which were detailed in the report and appendix.
- 44.2 The Executive response welcomed the recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel on Letting Agents, and recommended their acceptance in principle and where appropriate, and updates on progress on implementation to date. The Executive response also recommended that the Scrutiny Report was considered in full at the next meeting of the Strategic Housing Partnership prior to a further report on progress to a future Housing Cabinet Member Meeting.
- 44.3 Councillor Peltzer Dunn stated that some form of further regulation of letting agents was long overdue. Successive governments had failed to instigate a proper legal governance scheme to ensure people were safeguarded. Councillor Peltzer Dunn was worried that the council were considering a localised scheme and wondered if it would be useful to look at other large conurbations, particularly university towns, to see if they had similar problems. Meanwhile, he welcomed the report and looked forward to hearing the recommendations in due course.
- 44.4 The Chair stated that Councillor Peltzer Dunn's comments would be taken on board. She agreed it was important to learn from other towns, especially university towns.
- 44.5 Councillor Peltzer Dunn referred to Appendix 2 (the Scrutiny Panel report). He stated that it would have been helpful if this had had a heading stating that it was Appendix 2. The Chair concurred and stated that in future all appendices should have a correct heading.
- 44.6 **RESOLVED** - (1) That the evidence, findings and recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel on Lettings Agents be noted (see Appendix 2).
- (2) That the responses summarised in Appendix 1 to this report be approved, subject to a further report on progress to a future Housing Cabinet Member Meeting, following consideration of the Panel's recommendations at the next meeting of the Strategic Housing Partnership.

The meeting concluded at 4.25pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of