

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

30 November 2015

Attendance:

Councillors:

Horrill (Chairman) (P)

Byrnes (P)

Miller (P)

Other invited Councillors:

J Berry (P)

Scott (P)

Dibden (P)

Tait (P)

Izard

Thacker

TACT representatives:

Mr D Chafe (P)

Mr D Light (P)

Other in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillor Weston

1. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillors J Berry and Scott declared disclosable pecuniary interests in respect of Report CAB2738(HSG) due to them both being Council tenants. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, they both remained in the room and spoke under the dispensation granted on behalf of the Standards Committee to participate in all matters related to the Council house rent reduction.

2. **MINUTES**

Councillor Scott stated that he had made the same disclosure of interest as had Councillor J Berry with regard to him also being a Council tenant.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above correction, the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 30 September 2015, less exempt minute, be approved and adopted.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There are no statements made or questions asked.

4. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) REVISED BUDGET, BUSINESS PLAN AND BUDGET OPTIONS REPORT**

(Report CAB2738(HSG) refers)

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) highlighted the various financial challenges facing Housing Services, notably in response to the Welfare Reform and Work Bill and the Housing and Planning Bill. Particular reference was made to the likely impact on the HRA Business Plan from the proposed 1% reduction in Council House rents.

On behalf of TACT, Mr D Chafe advised that tenants generally recognised that the Council endeavoured to maintain its existing services to tenants wherever possible.

Members asked a number of detailed questions on the likely key changes to HRA funding, as well as future budget options going forward as highlighted in the Report. The Assistant Director clarified that a number of assumptions had been made, pending receipt of the further detail of the new regulations. For example, with regard to changes to the 'pay-to-stay' policy, it was likely that there would be exceptions for those tenants in receipt of benefits. It was likely that certain types of tenure and property would be exempt from the proposed 1% rent reduction – probably services to older people and hostels.

With regard to the possibility of reducing or ceasing discretionary programmes of work, the Assistant Director also clarified that the Decent Homes Standard would be maintained and that it was not proposed at this time to reduce the existing core repairs programme. It was reported that the best use of the Council's garage assets would continue to be investigated and it was acknowledged that in some cases, loft conversions were an appropriate use of funds. Members were reminded that disabled adaptations were undertaken as part of a separate programme of works.

In response to further discussion of the various financial pressures on the HRA, officers advised that restructuring of its self-financing debt may be necessary. It was envisaged that there would be no negative impact on the existing new build programme, nor were any changes to existing staffing levels proposed over the short term. However, as part of general efficiencies, alternative delivery models were likely to be investigated for all programmes of work within the Business Plan. It was also clarified that the Council had made representation to the DCLG with regard to proposed changes to Right-to-Buy and the possible requirement for the sale of high value Council house assets.

At conclusion of debate, it was noted that changes proposed by new legislation would provide the Council an opportunity to review how it currently delivered the various priorities within the HRA Business Plan. Officers would continue to work with tenants with regard to any decisions to be taken and impact on their existing services.

The Committee agreed to the following for the reasons set out above and outlined in the Report.

RECOMMENDED:

1. THAT SUBJECT TO THE RELEVANT LEGISLATION COMING INTO FORCE, A RENT REDUCTION OF 1%, WITH EFFECT FROM APRIL 2016 AND FOR THE FOLLOWING 3 YEARS (AS INCLUDED IN THE WELFARE REFORM AND WORK BILL) BE APPROVED AND THAT DELEGATED AUTHORITY BE GIVEN TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER) TO APPLY ADJUSTMENTS TO THE REDUCTION AS REGULATIONS ARE PUBLISHED.

2. THAT, SUBJECT TO THE FINAL REGULATIONS, ANY PROPERTY TYPE CLASSED AS AN "EXCEPTION" TO THE RENT REDUCTION PLANS BE SUBJECT TO A RENT INCREASE IN LINE WITH THE NATIONAL RENT POLICY (CURRENTLY AN INCREASE BY CPI AS AT SEPTEMBER 2015 PLUS 1%, RESULTING IN A NET INCREASE OF 0.9% FROM 4 APRIL 2016).

3. THAT DELEGATED AUTHORITY BE GIVEN TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER), IN CONSULTATION WITH THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING SERVICES AND THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER, TO APPROVE FINAL RENTS FOR EXCEPTION PROPERTIES IN LIGHT OF THE FINAL REGULATIONS OR CHANGES TO NATIONAL RENT POLICY.

4. THAT DELEGATED AUTHORITY BE GIVEN TO THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER) TO APPLY SERVICE CHARGES ACROSS ALL APPROPRIATE PROPERTY AND TENURE TYPES TO RECOVER COSTS TO THE HRA IN MEETING HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICES.

5. THAT THE AMENDED HOUSING SERVICES AND NEW BUILD CAPITAL PROGRAMMES AS DETAILED IN APPENDICES 3 AND 4 TO THE REPORT BE APPROVED.

6. THE FUNDING PROPOSALS DETAILED IN APPENDIX 5, INCLUDING THE REQUIREMENT FOR HRA BORROWING, ARE APPROVED.

RESOLVED:

1. That the 2015/16 HRA revised budget as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2 to the Report be approved.

2. That the recommended budget options as set out in paragraph 5 and Appendix 6 of the Report be supported.

5. **FIRE SAFETY IN COUNCIL HOUSING**

(Report CAB2742(HSG) refers)

On behalf of TACT, Mr D Chafe highlighted that some properties had only one entrance and exit as means of escape and tenants would continue to work with officers to ensure compliance with fire safety regulations.

During discussion, the Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) reminded Members that smoking in communal areas was unlawful. Officers were also working with the Estates Team to obtain fire risk assessments for commercial premises below maisonettes. It was also reported that it was a priority to renew the Tenants' Handbook next year and this would contain further information on fire safety, including tenants' responsibilities with regard to communal areas and pathways.

The Committee agreed to the following for the reasons set out above and outlined in the Report.

RESOLVED:

1. That detailed information contained within the Report be noted
2. That the recommendations contained within Appendix A to the Report, which can be met from within existing financial resources, be approved.
3. That the Fire Safety Policy - Housing Services be approved (Appendix C).
4. That improved guidance and advice be provided to tenants in the form of an updated and dedicated section to fire safety in the next re-draft of the Tenants' Handbook, improved on-site (i.e. property specific) guidance and better awareness (of what action to take in the event of a fire) at tenancy sign-up.

6. **PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY UPDATE**

(Report CAB2747(HSG) refers)

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) described the work of Homelessness Forum, which brought together various partner organisations to help ensure a joined-up approach in supporting clients. Officers continued to work with BID and other partners to help tackle street begging, including supporting the 'spare change for real change' initiative. An increase in the provision of more 'Stage 2' accommodation was also being investigated to help those moving away from chaotic lifestyles. Members congratulated officers in successfully achieving 'Silver' Status in the Gold Standard Programme.

The Committee agreed to the following for the reasons set out above and outlined in the Report.

RESOLVED:

1. The outcome of the 7 Gold Standard Challenges applied for be noted, in addition to the Council achieving 'Silver' Status in the Gold Standard Programme.

2. The progress to date against the Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2013/14 – 2018/19 be noted.

7. **2015/16 HALF YEAR PERFORMANCE MONITORING – HOUSING SERVICES**

(Report CAB2748(HSG) refers)

On behalf of TACT, Mr D Chafe welcomed the report which demonstrated that good performance had been maintained.

In response to discussion, the Assistant Director explained that it was a key aspiration for all housing repairs to be completed in one visit. There was currently no consistent approach to how repairs service levels were monitored and proposed changes to this would be reported to the Committee in due course.

With regard to the new Self Service Portal, it was reported that new tenants in particular were being targeted and encouraged to register. It was also clarified that notices served seeking possession of properties were always a last resort. The number of evictions had continued to decrease during the second half of 2015/16. Officers provided support and gave advice to tenants who may be in financial difficulties.

The Committee agreed to the following for the reasons set out above and outlined in the Report.

RESOLVED:

That the performance information be noted.

8. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

RESOLVED:

1. That in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

2. That the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following items of business because it is likely that, if members of the public were present, there would be disclosure to them of 'exempt information' as defined by Section 100I and Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

<u>Minute Number</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Description of Exempt Information</u>
##	Exempt Minutes: • Extra Care – Authorisation to Proceed with the Scheme (exempt appendices)) Information relating to the) financial or business affairs of) any particular person (including) the authority holding that) information). (Para 3 Schedule) 12A refers)))
##	Housing Term Maintenance Contracts – Extension to Osborne Contracts))))
##	Housing Term Maintenance Contracts – Extension to Osborne Contracts) Information in respect of which a) claim to legal professional) privilege could be maintained in) legal proceedings. (Para 5) Schedule 12A refers)

9. **EXEMPT MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the exempt minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 30 September 2015 be approved and adopted.

10. **HOUSING TERM MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS – EXTENSION TO OSBORNE CONTRACTS**

(Report CAB2743(HSG) refers)

The Committee considered the content of the exempt Report which set out proposals to extent the Housing Term Maintenance contracts (detail in exempt minute).

The meeting commenced at 4.00pm and concluded at 6.20pm.