

**CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE**

**30 January 2013**

Attendance:

Councillors:

Coates (Chairman) (P)

Stallard (P)

Tait (P)

Other invited Councillors:

J Berry (P)

Bodtger (P)

Izard (P)

Scott (P)

Weir (P)

TACT representatives:

Mrs J Steventon-Baker (P)

Mr J Bond (P)

Others in attendance who addressed the committee:

Councillor Pines

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1. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 10 December 2012 be approved and adopted.

2. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Councillor Pines addressed the Committee with regard to Report CAB2446(HSG) and CAB2445(HSG) as summarised at the relevant agenda item below.

3. **2011/12 PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKING REPORT – HOUSING SERVICES**

(Report CAB2446(HSG) refers)

The Head of Housing Services drew attention to the summary information at Appendix 1 to the Report which highlighted those areas that required greater focus from officers. He reported that more consistency in the reporting of responsive repair performance would assist in making improvements in this

particular area, although it was acknowledged that that some repairs were taking longer than average.

The Committee also discussed the detailed benchmarking information at Appendix 2 and the Head of Housing Services advised that the Council would look to ways to increase the percentage of tenants on whom it held diversity information. This could include at sign-up, via support packages and also as part of the stock condition survey – however there was likely to be costs associated with gathering this information. With regard to re-charges to the Housing Revenue Account from other Council services, the Head of Housing Services reported that that these were appropriate and that services were of high quality, but acknowledged that they had not been subject to detailed review recently. During discussion, he also confirmed that the Council had recently subscribed to the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) as this was likely to be beneficial to officers, members and tenants.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Pines addressed the Committee. He welcomed the availability of the benchmarking data and commented that the information provided represented an exemplar model that other Council services could follow. He did suggest that to help identify particular trends, there should also be more comparison to previous related Council data. As Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, he also welcomed greater enhancement of tenant scrutiny and requested that consideration be given to how this could dovetail with the role of his Committee.

In response, the Head of Housing Services acknowledged the important role of tenant scrutiny and the Council's commitment under the Localism Act to further develop this process.

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

RESOLVED:

That the performance benchmarking information in the Report be noted.

4. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2013/14 AND BUSINESS PLAN – 2013/14 TO 2043/44**  
(Report CAB2445(HSG) refers)

Councillor Stallard declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of actions taken or proposed with regard to this item, because of her position as a County Councillor and the joint working with the County Council as referred to in the Report. She remained in the room and spoke and voted thereon under the dispensation granted on behalf of the Standards Committee.

The Committee noted that the Report would also be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 13 February 2013 and at The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 February 2012.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Pines referred to proposals to utilise up to £5 million from the New Housing building capital budget to provide Extra Care accommodation. He queried whether there was an evidence base to suggest that such facilities were likely to free up family homes. Also, he believed that the identification of appropriate potential sites should be undertaken with the full consultation of local Ward Members and affected residents. Councillor Pines also requested that officers research whether new facilities could be provided in partnership with other specialist providers.

In response, the Head of Housing Services advised that no decision had been made about any particular site for a new Extra Care facility. Any provision of new facilities to meet increasing demand for elderly tenants would need to be reflected within the New Homes Development Strategy. It would also further enhance existing support services to the elderly and would be part of the HRA housing stock and deliver a rental income. He also drew attention to a detailed report on the matter recently considered by the Cabinet (Housing Delivery) Committee (Report CAB2441(HD) refers).

During his introduction of the Report, the Head of Housing Services explained that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan had been developed to be sustainable over its 30 year period and able to respond to a number of important priorities, notably ensuring stock was at a standard of good repair and also to allow for increasing services for older people. With regard to any surplus within the Business Plan, it was noted that these did not begin to arise until after year 15 (2027/28) although balances on the account varied each year before that.

The Head of Housing Services drew attention to new issues that had been identified since the previous year, such as changes to the Right-to-Buy initiative and proposals to increase budget with regard to Health and Wellbeing to assist the Council in meeting its responsibilities as a social landlord. Wherever possible, the Council would deliver such initiatives in partnership with other organisations and with other teams across the Council. With regard to the Right-to-Buy, during discussion, it was clarified that the number of sales were likely to be higher in the short term than originally projected in the Business Plan. The proposed Plan has been amended to reflect this. The overall impact of this would need to be studied, although it was unlikely that the majority of such sales would be of family homes. The Committee was reminded that the sales would also increase funds to support the HRA and that the use of these funds had been built into the overall funding of the capital programme..

During further discussion, the Head of Housing Services referred to a requirement for a new stock condition survey. The existing repairs programme would need to be rebalanced as new priorities were identified, such as roof repairs. Further to a question, he also reported that loft conversions continued to be prioritised within the limited resources available, having regard to tenants' needs and where a conversion could be undertaken relatively easily. Housing Services were also investigating incentive schemes to assist tenants who were considering downsizing their accommodation, so potentiality

increasing the number of family homes for which there was currently high demand.

With regard to proposals for investment in initiatives to support tenants from implications arising from Welfare Reform, the Head of Housing Services reminded that this was particularly necessary to help protect the Council's revenue that might otherwise be threatened from increased rental arrears to the HRA.

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

RESOLVED:

**That it be recommended to Cabinet (and Council):**

**1. That the HRA Revised budget for 2012/13 and the Budget for 2013/14 as set out in the Appendices 1 and 2 be approved.**

**2. That the HRA business plan as set out in Appendices 3 and 4 be approved.**

**3. That the Housing Capital programme as set out in Appendix 5 be approved.**

**4. That the 2013/14 Maintenance Programme as set out in Appendix 6 be approved.**

**5. That the treatment of surpluses and debt as set out in Paragraph 3 be noted and the forecast amount of debt to be repaid at 31 March 2013 be approved at £3.5M.**

**6. That the Business Plan priorities as set out in paragraph 4 of the report and the key service priorities for 2013/14 as detailed in Appendix 7 be approved.**

5. **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>
##	Housing Services Staffing Proposals	) Information relating to a particular individual. (Para 1 to Schedule 12A refers). ) ) Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual. (Para 2 to Schedule 12A refers) ) ) Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority. (Para 4 to Schedule 12A refers) )

6. **HOUSING SERVICES STAFFING PROPOSALS**  
(Report PER227 refers)

The Committee considered the Report which proposed changes to General Fund and Housing Revenue Account services resulting from the latest phase of organisational development and to take account of the impact of welfare reform changes (detail in exempt appendix).

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.25pm