

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

27 March 2013

Attendance:

Councillors:

Coates (Chairman) (P)

Stallard (P)

Tait (P)

Other invited Councillors:

J Berry (P)

Bodtger

Izard (P)

Scott

Weir (P)

TACT representatives:

Mrs J Steventon-Baker (P)

Mr J Bond (P)

1. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 30 January 2013 be approved and adopted (less exempt business).

2. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillors Stallard declared disclosable pecuniary interests in respect of Reports CAB2475, CAB2474, CAB2473, and CAB2472 due to her role as a County Councillor. However, as there was no material conflict of interest regarding any of these items, she remained in the room, spoke and voted under the dispensation granted on behalf of the Standards Committee.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Ms M Price, Manager of the Winchester Night Shelter spoke on the item relating to Tackling Homelessness in Winchester.

4. **PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR OFFER (PRSO) POLICY**
(Report CAB2475(HSG) refers)

In reply to Members' questions, the Head of Housing Services confirmed that although most cases of homelessness were encountered within the town area of Winchester, there was provision of temporary accommodation within Wickham to meet need in the southern parishes.

A pilot project had been undertaken with CRISIS to provide a comprehensive menu to attract private landlords to work with local authorities. For example, value could be added for landlords by providing advice on benefits, providing a photographic inventory of items and detailing the property's condition prior to occupation and assistance with safety certification and maintenance. The Council could also provide incentives to attract private landlords to the scheme, for example with private landlords not having to pay management fees and the setting up of tenancy agreements.

Tenants housed with private sector landlords would be provided with ongoing support by dedicated Council staff that would run the service. This would include officers working with tenants to address their concerns. Housing Options would consider the most appropriate prospective tenants that would have their housing needs best met in private rented accommodation. The tenancy would be a short hold assured 12 month tenancy and tenants would remain with Hampshire Home Choice. An objective was to build a working relationship with the landlord, including a Landlord hotline, to provide a degree of assurance that the tenancy relationship would work over the 12 month period. However, if the relationship did not work and the tenant was not at fault but became homeless, the Council would look to provide accommodation from within its own housing stock.

It was difficult to gauge the level of availability of accommodation that would be provided through the initiative, as much would rest with the degree of interest from private landlords. A register of suitable landlords was being developed to provide the Council with options to meet housing demand.

It was hoped that accommodation would be provided within the District but provision was challenging and neighbouring Boroughs such as Eastleigh and Basingstoke would be considered, but much would depend on the individual circumstances of those looking to be housed. The properties would be inspected by the Private Sector Team to ensure that they were of a decent homes standard and, with the landlord's consent, minor works would be carried out to make the property fit for purpose as required, for example introducing safety measures for children.

The decision making process of allocation between the social and private landlords would be as transparent as possible, but the involvement of third parties such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and councillors would be welcomed to provide openness in the decision making process. A procedure and flow chart would be provided to ensure that the correct checks and balances were in place and due process was achieved. There was also

guidance in the advice and assistance letter provided to prospective tenants and there was an appeals procedure.

Following debate, the Committee welcomed the initiative which provided a necessary addition to the Council's options and extended choices to meet individual housing needs, given the limitations in housing supply and affordability.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That a Private Rented Sector Offer Policy be adopted as detailed in this report to enable the Council to discharge its homelessness responsibilities where appropriate to do so, by arranging accommodation in the private rented sector.

2. That the option of a Private Rented Sector Offer should exist equally for all applicants as set out in paragraphs 4.2.3 and 4.4, subject in each case to it being deemed appropriate and suitable.

5. **TACKLING HOMELESSNESS IN WINCHESTER**
(Report CAB2474(HSG) refers)

During public participation, Mrs.M Price, Manager of the Winchester Night Shelter, explained that the Night Shelter would accept persons from outside of Winchester only in exceptional circumstances and would take people off the street when temperatures were below zero for three consecutive nights. Night shelter staff met with City Council Housing staff at team meetings and assisted where they could. A relationship had also been built with local estate agents through the Night Shelter's Advocate to obtain provision within the private sector, particularly for single people. A question was also raised on the role of the National Homelessness Advisor post as referred to in Appendix 3 of the Report.

The Head of Housing Services stated that the Council hosted the National Homelessness Advisor by providing office space and facilities, but their work was national. A meeting with Mrs. Price and officers would be arranged.

Provision remained in the budget for a wet shelter and joint work was required with the voluntary sector to discuss its possible location and how it would work, including funding for revenue costs. Discussions would need to take place with the Supported Housing Team at Hampshire County Council, as staffing levels at a wet shelter needed to be high, which had significant cost implications. Funding would be from the General Fund rather than the Housing Revenue Account.

In addition, the Council was exploring the introduction of an IT system with partner agencies to assist with supported people, as at present manual records were relied upon. It was also explained that the £185,000 additional

grant received by the authority had been added to general provision and was not case specific.

In reply to Members' questions, the Head of Housing Services explained that although budgetary provision was made for rent deposits, the Council was exploring alternative method of housing provision, due to the substantial costs involved.

In supporting the Report, the Committee further debated the provision of the future housing mix and how a balanced judgment could be made on the types of property required.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the emerging issues and trends in homelessness be noted.
2. That the proposed expenditure on homelessness prevention for 2013/14 and projected spend for the following two years and approve that funding be released from the Earmarked Reserve to meet the 2013/14 proposals be noted.

6. **STRATEGY TO INCENTIVISE DOWNSIZING FOR COUNCIL TENANTS**
(Report CAB2473(HSG) refers)

The Head of Housing Services stated that, with the changes to Welfare Reform and reductions in Housing Benefits from April 2013, the Council had allocated £100,000 to support a scheme to assist tenants to downsize their properties should they wish to do so. The initiative had been advertised in the tenants' magazine and it was estimated that 300 people would be affected by the Social Sector Size Criteria and the change for Housing Benefits. It was also estimated that approximately 100 people might wish to take advantage of the downsizing scheme, which would be monitored, evaluated and adjusted to assist as many people as was possible.

Mrs Steventon Baker stated that TACT supported both the scheme and the support that would be given to individuals to facilitate a move, for example in arranging the installation of gas cookers, changes in utility bills and provision of carpets etc.

The officers would provide assistance and support to those wishing to downsize, but where possible and with the tenant's consent, their friends and family would be the principal source of assistance for bidding for suitable properties. Where the tenant was agreeable, contact could also be with the appropriate ward councillor to help the tenant settle into a new community. It was agreed that at the initial meeting, a tenant could also be signposted to the Citizens Advice Bureau and other support groups, in order that they could obtain independent advice on their options. Tenants making a move would

also be supported to ensure that their welfare needs were met, including the support of agencies including Age UK, the Village Agent's Scheme, local churches and parish councils.

The Council was also monitoring the incentive schemes provided by other social housing providers to gauge whether any adjustments needed to be made to Winchester's scheme. The scheme will be next reviewed by Committee in September/October 2013.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposal for an enhanced strategy to incentivise downsizing as detailed in paragraphs 4 – 8 be approved.
2. That the suggested future steps in paragraph 9 of the Report be noted.

7. **SCHEME OF ALLOCATION FOR SOCIAL HOUSING**
(Report CAB2472(HSG) refers)

The Head of Housing Services stated that all 3,500 applicants on the Housing Register would receive a letter to inform them of the changes in the scheme of allocation for social housing. Mrs Steventon Baker stated that TACT had no additional comments to add to the report.

In reply to Members' questions, the Head of Housing Services explained the eligibility test for rural exception sites and, in particular, their allocation to persons not having a local connection, especially as 40 properties were to be provided for cross border moves with the four neighbouring local authorities participating in the Hampshire Homes Choice Sub Regional Choice Based Letting Scheme.

It was noted that under the Local Plan Part 2, the building of rural exception sites did have criteria within community letting plans that prospective tenants had to satisfy and that 50 per cent of supply would be allocated to meet local needs for a maximum of five years. The Committee agreed that the parameters for local lettings needed to be clear and concise so that prospective tenants met the criteria.

Following debate, the Committee also agreed to define the Scheme's operation in relation to veterans from the armed forces, as set out in the resolution below.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the subject to 3 below, the draft Hampshire Home Choice Allocation Framework in Appendix 1 be adopted with effect from 1 April 2013.

2. That the draft revised Winchester Scheme of Allocations in Appendix 2 be adopted with effect from 1 April 2013.

3. That the Hampshire Home Choice Board be recommended to extend the armed forces definition to include former service personnel up to five years after they leave the services.

4. That the Winchester scheme of allocation be amended to extend the armed forces definition as per 3 above.

5. That the Portfolio Holder for Housing be given delegated authority to make any necessary minor amendments to the Winchester Scheme of Allocations.

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 of previous meeting held 10 January 2013:)
) Information relating to a particular individual. (Para 1 to Schedule 12A refers).
	• Housing Services staffing proposals)
) 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)
)
)

9. **EXEMPT MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the exempt minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 10 January 2013 relating to Housing Services staffing proposals be approved and adopted.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 1.05 pm

Chairman