

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

19 June 2013

Attendance:

Councillors:

Coates (Chairman) (P)

Godfrey (P)

Weston (P)

Other invited Councillors:

J Berry (P)

Izard (P)

McLean (P)

Scott (P)

Rutter (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 27 March 2013 be approved and adopted.

2. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillors Godfrey declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of the agenda items due to his employment by the County Council. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, he remained in the room, spoke and voted under the dispensation granted on behalf of the Standards Committee to participate and vote in all matters which might have a County Council involvement.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mrs M Gill (Chair of the Sheltered Housing Scrutiny Group) spoke regarding CAB2496(HSG) and her comments are summarised under the relevant agenda item below.

4. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2012/13 OUTTURN**
(Report CAB2494(HSG) refers)

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) clarified that since the Report was made available, further analysis of the accounts had indicated that there would be a positive variance for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) of approximately £21,000.

In response to questions regarding the budget for estate improvements, the Assistant Director confirmed that the current budget for 2013/14 was already oversubscribed and Members could decide to allocate more resources. However, this would involve a consequential reduction in resources for another budget area. He advised that he had information detailing which estates improvements had been completed and the schedule for those outstanding and agreed to circulate this to Committee Members outside of the meeting.

The Assistant Director advised that discussions were ongoing with the County Council Occupational Therapist Team as to the reasons for the reduction in demand for disabled adaptations in the early part of 2012/13; this could have been partly due to a staffing restructure at the County Council. However, the Committee noted that spending on disabled adaptations had risen considerably over recent years.

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

RECOMMENDED:

**THAT SUBJECT TO ANY COMMENTS FROM THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**

**1. THE REVENUE CARRY FORWARDS AMOUNTING TO
£414,000 BE APPROVED, AS SET OUT IN PARAGRAPH 4 OF THE
REPORT.**

**2. THE CAPITAL CARRY FORWARDS AMOUNTING TO
£700,000 BE APPROVED, AS SET OUT IN PARAGRAPH 4 OF THE
REPORT.**

RESOLVED:

That the financial performance information in the Report be noted.

5. **2012/13 PERFORMANCE MONITORING OUTTURN – HOUSING REVENUE
ACCOUNT (HRA) SERVICES**
(Report CAB2495(HSG) refers)

With regard to the Tenants' Satisfaction Survey referred to in Paragraph 2.1(e) of the Report, the Assistant Director advised that overall tenant satisfaction

had increased slightly on the last survey. However, in comparison with all social landlords nationally, the Council's satisfaction rate had fallen slightly on previous years, because the performance of social landlords had generally improved. The Assistant Director confirmed that further information on the detailed findings of the survey would be made available on the Council's Intranet pages.

The Assistant Director advised that it was intended to regularly report back to Committee on the information within the Housing Arrears/Welfare Reform Performance Scorecard (Appendix 3 of the Report). He confirmed that he could provide Committee Members with further information regarding the level of take up for the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme, but emphasised that decisions were made on a case-by-case basis and any support provided was only short-term. Any residents adversely affected by the Government's Welfare Reform changes (in relation to the number of bedrooms in a property compared with number of occupiers) were given additional priority in terms of re-housing to smaller properties. The Assistant Director advised that a Report on Discretionary Housing Payment scheme would be submitted to a future Cabinet or Committee meeting.

In response to further discussions, the Assistant Director confirmed that the impact of Welfare Reform on increasing the demand for one or two-bedroom accommodation was having some influence on discussions regarding the most appropriate size for new Council dwellings. In addition, the changes also had the impact of releasing larger properties for others on the waiting list.

Members welcomed the reduction in the average re-let time to 20 days and the Assistant Director advised that he was hopeful this time could be reduced further in 2013/14.

In relation to repairs, the Assistant Director stated that after any repair work was undertaken, the tenant received a customer care card to complete and return to the Council. Contractors undertaking major works on behalf of the Council were also required to leave a customer care card to be completed by the tenant. One Member requested more detailed information be provided on the Major Works listed in Appendix 2 of the Report. The Assistant Director agreed to consider how a more meaningful breakdown of figures could be achieved.

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

RESOLVED:

That the performance information be noted and that further information be provided on the following areas:

- Estates improvements (as requested under discussion of CAB2494(HSG) above);
- Major repairs;
- Tenant Satisfaction Survey.

6. **MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMMES – APPROVAL OF HRA CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2013/14**
(Report CAB2488(HSG) refers)

The Assistant Director emphasised that although it was still the intention to fund the programme within existing staffing resources, there were ongoing issues within the Team due to staff sickness which might impact upon this.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director confirmed that work was ongoing to try and encourage uptake for those tenants with kitchens and bathroom over 20 years old to upgrade.

The Assistant Director confirmed that the Council monitored the latest carbon reducing technology on heating provision etc to ascertain whether it could be utilised in Council properties. However, there were no plans at the current time to invest further in solar power, although this could be kept under review. In addition, a Council policy regarding provision of types of central heating could form part of the forthcoming Asset Management Strategy, which in turn would be informed by the Stock Condition Survey.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) be authorised to progress the Capital Programme for 2013/14, as outlined in the Report.

2. That authority be given to incur capital expenditure of £6.574m for the schemes outlined in the Report, in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 6.4.

3. That the Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer), following consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, be given delegated authority to make adjustments within the overall programme (£7.980m) including the flexibility to substitute projects and re-balance expenditure within and between the different elements/schemes in order to meet operational needs, changing priorities and commitment targets, with any changes being reported to the Committee at the earliest opportunity.

7. **LOFT CONVERSIONS AND EXTENSIONS**
(Report CAB2472(HSG) refers)

Members generally supported the suggestion that the programme be expanded to include consideration of loft conversions or extensions to void properties as they arose, funding permitting. The Assistant Director explained that it was not appropriate to use resources allocated to the new homes delivery programme as that would negatively impact upon that programme in future years. However, the third recommendation of the Report would give some flexibility for the Committee to consider at a future meeting the option of

viring resources from other budgets, should good progress be made on completing schemes.

A number of Members commented that, where possible, the Council should seek to provide additional double bedrooms, as opposed to single rooms. The Committee agreed that a maximum financial cap of £30,000 be placed on any one scheme.

There were some concerns expressed about the possibility of the proposals being offered to tenants in arrears. However, following discussion, it was agreed that provided a robust repayment procedure was in place and being adhered to, this could be permissible. The Assistant Director confirmed that it was made clear to any tenants interested in the proposals that an additional room would increase the rent payable. In addition, Officers would ensure an adaptation would not have a negative impact on a tenant in terms of the Government's Welfare reforms.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That progress with the current programme be noted.
 2. That, for the purposes of Financial Procedure Rule 6.4, total spending of £400,000 be approved, of which £200,000 is currently funded in 2013/14 and £200,000 in 2014/15.
 3. That a report on progress with the schemes and the requirement to bring forward, if required, budget provision from 2014/15 or to vire resources from other budgets be considered by the Committee in November 2013.
 4. That a financial cap of £30,000 be placed on the cost of any single adaptation, with Committee approval being sought for any scheme in excess of this.
 5. That, if tenants are in arrears, an adaptation only be approved if a robust repayment scheme was in place and being adhered to.
 6. That schemes should not progress until any notices with regard to breach of tenancy had been addressed or withdrawn.
8. **FLOATING SUPPORT SERVICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE**
(Report CAB2496(HSG) refers)

The Assistant Director drew Members' attention to Paragraph 3.5 of the Report which set out the key issues for the Council to consider if it decided to surrender the contract with the County Council to provide support services for

older people across the District, regardless of their type of ownership or tenure.

The Assistant Director advised that an open forum meeting had been arranged that week at which approximately 90 sheltered housing tenants had attended. At this meeting, tenants had in general understood the reasons for the proposed changes and the potential for an enhanced housing management service had been emphasised.

During the public participation period, Mrs M Gill spoke as Chair of the Sheltered Housing Scrutiny Group and confirmed that tenants generally accepted the need for the proposals and she would work with Council Officers as far as possible to assist with its implementation. She believed that tenants would welcome the option to "opt out" of paying support.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Gill for her work and support.

In response to questions, the Assistant Director clarified that the purpose of the Report was to seek Committee's approval to the pilot floating support service. This was required in order for the City Council to comply fully with the terms of the contract with the County Council, the terms of which had already been approved by Members. There were no changes required to the job descriptions of the Officers affected as they were sufficiently flexible to enable the new way of working proposed.

The Assistant Director explained that it was envisaged that the pilot scheme would operate for approximately five months which would result in an evaluation being undertaken in November 2013. At this stage, a report would be submitted to Committee for a decision as to the pilot's success and consequentially, whether the City Council should continue to operate the contract.

The Assistant Director clarified that the contract stipulated the maximum number of people the Council was required to offer support services to and the Council would therefore not exceed this number, unless it received additional funds from the County Council.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That consultation with existing sheltered tenants over proposed revisions to the way support services are delivered proceed.
2. That an informal meeting between the Chairman of the Committee and representatives of TACT and the Sheltered Housing Scrutiny Group be arranged to discuss the implications of these service revisions upon existing tenants.

3. That, subject to the outcome of the consultation, the establishment by the Council of a floating support service for older people in Winchester District to work across all tenures be approved.

4. That, subject to the outcome of the consultation, a small pilot sheltered housing management team be established to provide services to all tenants in sheltered housing.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.15pm

Chairman