

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE

19 September 2012

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)

1. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 20 June 2012 be approved and adopted.

2. **PUBLIC PARTICPATION**

Councillor Hiscock (a Ward Member for St Bartholomew) addressed the Committee with regard to Report CAB2391(HSG) – Remodelling of Extra Care Housing Service and Future Use of Victoria House. Councillor Hiscock's representation is summarised at the relevant agenda item below.

3. **HOUSING TERM MAINTENCAE CONTRACTS – PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2012/13 (CONTRACTOR GEOFFREY OSBORNE LIMITED)**

(Report CAB2387(HSG) refers)

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr McLaughlin, Account Manager for Geoffrey Osborne Limited.

The Head of Housing Services introduced the Report and in summary, advised that although performance was still below the expected levels, recent trends now showed continual improvement to more acceptable levels. These positive trends had occurred since the new Account Manager had been in post

and it was envisaged that improvements would continue in response to changes to process and the addressing of staffing issues that had been especially apparent during the early part of the contract. Attention was drawn to changes to Customer Care Cards which now additionally asked tenants how many visits the contractor had taken to complete the job. The response from these, both positive and negative, was fed back to Osborne.

Mrs Steventon-Baker (TACT) reiterated TACT's comments as set out at paragraph 8 of the Report and was pleased that performance was now showing positive improvement.

During further discussion, the Head of Housing Services reminded that a period of 'bedding-in' was normally to be expected after the start of a new contract. However, it had been acknowledged that this had taken an unacceptably long time with Osborne. It was likely that this had been partly due to high level management issues which were thought to have now been resolved.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr McLaughlin responded to questions and he advised that Osborne's was working to achieve consistency in response times.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the performance information in the Report be noted.
2. That these performance reports for Osborne be produced and brought before the Committee once a year in May to review performance in the previous financial year.

4. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) REVISED 2012/13 BUDGET**
(Report CAB2386(HSG) refers)

The Head of Housing Services advised that The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider the required supplementary estimate within the HRA Revised Budget (as referred to in paragraph 3 (e) of the Report), under its powers of call-in.

During discussion, with regard to Rents and other Income (paragraph 3.1(h) page 5 of the Report refers), the Head of Housing Services advised that officers would in future endeavour to achieve more accurate projections.

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

RESOLVED:

1. **That, having regard to Recommendation 4 below, the Committee recommend that Cabinet approve the revised HRA**

Budget for 2012/13, incorporating the changes detailed in paragraph 3 and set out in Appendix 1, 2 and 4.

2. That balances be retained at £2.445M at this time and that further consideration be given to the appropriate level of balances as part of the budget process for 2013/14, which will enable the level of balances to be considered alongside the updated 30 years HRA Business Plan

3. That a New Build Reserve be established to ensure appropriate funds are earmarked for New Homes Delivery as soon as they become available.

4. That, subject to the matter being considered by The Overview and Scrutiny Committee under its powers of call-in, the Committee recommend that Cabinet approve the supplementary estimate referred to in paragraph 3 (e) of the Report with regard to the potential of incurring “home loss payments” to residents moving from Victoria House Extra Care Scheme (up to £80,000)

5. That The Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider whether there are any other matters of significance that it wishes to draw to the attention of Cabinet or the Portfolio Holder.

5. **MEASURES TO ADDRESS CONDENSATION/MOULD IN COUNCIL PROPERTIES (OPTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT)**
(Report CAB2388(HSG) refers)

The Head of Housing Services advised that it was proposed that the additional expenditure required to make the ventilation improvements referred to in the Report would be included within the HRA Budget 2013/14 onwards. Those works undertaken within the current year would be financed from the approved Maintenance Programme.

The Committee discussed how the proposed works would be prioritised and, where appropriate, how tenants would be supported in making behavioural lifestyle changes to improve condensation and mould problems within their homes. It was noted that this may include fixing security stays to windows (so that they could be safely left open to improve ventilation) and also the potential for estate improvement grants to be utilised to install tumble driers in communal areas.

During discussion, the Committee noted that communication to tenants of suggestions to address the issues. It was suggested that publicity be more regular and proactive, as opposed to relying on the information in the tenant handbook, or the issuing of information once damp/mould had become a problem for the tenant. Members also were in agreement that the design faults inherent in some older properties that exacerbated the issues must not be replicated in new build properties. This matter should be given proper regard as part of the design brief of new council dwellings.

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

RESOLVED:

1 That the approach and proposals outlined in the report for additional investment in mechanical extract fans, and /or positive input ventilation, be approved.

2 That the additional investment be funded from within the existing 2012/13 repairs and maintenance budget.

3 That the source of funding for these proposals from 2013/14 onwards be determined by the 2013 business planning process.

6. **IMPLICATIONS OF WELFARE REFORM FOR COUNCIL TENANTS**
(Report CAB2390(HSG) refers)

During discussion, the Head of Housing Services clarified that the Council had commenced discussion with its Hampshire Home Choice partners as to whether it should align its allocation policies with the new welfare reform rules, or allow tenants to continue chose their own property and be responsible to make up the difference in rent, when a shortfall in benefits may apply once the new rules are in place. In addition, consideration would have to be given to ensure that the rent levels for new build Council homes with affordable rents (up to 80%) would be affordable for tenants, bearing in mind the potential reduction in benefit levels.

Discussion was also on-going with Hampshire Home Choice partners about whether incentives should be considered for those wishing to downsize. It was noted that tenants occupying homes with more bedrooms than necessary were likely to have their benefits reduced by a proportion per bedroom. The Committee were concerned that this would impact on those who may need additional room for carers, either now or in the near future, and also where there were no smaller properties immediately available for those wishing to avoid having to pay the additional rent.

The Head of Housing Services emphasised that, in order to avoid a potentially large increase in arrears to the Council (where rents were no longer met by housing benefit in full), it was important that the Council continued to plan towards the changes and work closely with those tenants who had so far been identified as likely to have their benefits reduced. Members also noted the likely impact of the welfare changes in the private sector and therefore the potential increase of residents looking to be temporarily re-homed by the Council. It was also noted that officers were exploring the impact of the welfare changes on existing service charges

The Committee raised concerns that there may be a greater emphasis for claimants to manage their benefits on-line. Whilst acknowledging that such details had yet to be finalised by Government, there still remained a large percentage of tenants without access to computers who were therefore likely

to be disadvantaged. Members also supported the possible expansion of a Winchester Credit Union.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee notes the potential impact of Welfare Reform on City Council tenants as detailed in the report.

2. That the Committee notes the range of measures proposed to mitigate the impact on Council tenants as detailed in paragraph 4.10 of the report and comment on any additional measures they wish to be considered and reviewed

3. That a further report detailing actions and resource requirements be brought to the January 2013 meeting of the Committee.

7. **REMODELLING OF THE EXTRA CARE HOUSING SERVICE AND FUTURE USE OF VICTORIA**

(Report CAB2391(HSG) refers)

Councillor Stallard declared personal (but non-prejudicial) interests in 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 part of the proposals. She remained in the room and spoke and voted thereon.

The Head of Housing Services introduced the Report and in response to TACT's comments at paragraph 7 of the Report, it was confirmed that the Council was looking for new opportunities to increase extra care housing, including the possibility of new build property

As a Ward Member for St John and All Saints, Councillor Hiscock addressed the Committee. Whilst acknowledging the care and compassion of officers in moving tenants out of Victoria House, Councillor Hiscock was concerned at the possibility of it being replaced by a hostel for clients with various, complex, support needs. He drew attention to the existing large number of supported housing projects in the immediate vicinity and the likely negative impact of clients being in close proximity to each other (which would not assist with their integration in the community) and consequences for other residents or the area. Councillor Hiscock urged Members to visit the area around Victoria House and also to consult Hampshire Constabulary and other supported housing providers in the vicinity on any firm proposals, as well as local residents.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Hiscock for his comments and the Head of Housing Services advised that officers would ordinarily carry out an extensive consultation exercise with regard to any new proposals for the site, which, in this instance, would include other supported housing providers. The Council

would also wish to finalise the details for the future use of the site reasonably quickly.

RESOLVED:

1. That Committee approve the commencement of decanting of tenants from Victoria House and where appropriate from Matilda Place and Danemark Court to facilitate closure of the existing scheme.
2. That officers be authorised to commit the necessary expenditure on meeting any statutory payments and the costs incurred by tenants in moving home.
3. That officers be authorised to continue to investigate and develop options for the disposal or re-use of the premises at Victoria House including undertaking an extensive consultation exercise to include other supported housing providers in the vicinity, with a view to bringing a further report to a future meeting of Cabinet (Housing) Committee.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.25pm

Chairman