

**CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE****10 December 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

Mr J Bond (P)

**Others in attendance who addressed the committee:**

Councillor Pines (a Ward Member for St John and All Saints)

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**1. MINUTES**

A correction was made to the first sentence of paragraph three of Minute 7 – Remodelling of the Extra Care Housing Service and Future use of Victoria House (Report CAB2391(HSG)) refers) to note that Councillor Hiscock was a Ward Member for St Bartholomew, not for St John and All Saints.

**RESOLVED:**

That subject to the above correction, the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 19 September 2012 be approved and adopted.

**2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Councillor Pines (a Ward Member for St John and All Saints) addressed the Committee with regard to Report CAB2418(HSG), as summarised at the relevant agenda item below.

3. **MAINTENANCE, STOCK IMPROVEMENTS AND NEW BUILDS –  
PROGRAMME UPDATE AND REVISED BUDGETS**  
(Report CAB2417(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.

Under the Council's Constitution Access to Information Procedure Rules (Rule 15.1 – General Exception), this was a key decision which had not been included in the Forward Plan. Under this procedure, the Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been informed.

The Head of Housing Services advised that The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would consider the required virement and supplementary estimate (as referred to in Recommendation 4 of the Report), under its powers of call-in.

During discussion, it was clarified that the proposed revised budget for Disabled Adaptations had been reduced because the Council had delivered, to date, all the adaptations successfully applied for. However, over the longer term, it was expected that there would continue to be an increase in demand for such adaptations. With regard to ongoing maintenance of housing stock, it was explained that the Council was not sufficiently resourced to be able to carry out regular systematic checks to ensure that properties were being looked after. However, it was likely that Council officers and/or contractors would generally be in contact with tenants at least once per year. Members were also assured that there were sufficient controls in place to dissuade the potential misuse of decorating vouchers given to tenants.

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

**RESOLVED:**

1 That the progress of the various projects against programme be noted.

**That it be recommended to Cabinet:**

2. That, in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 7.4, the revenue virements of £90,000 which are summarised in Appendix A be approved.

3. That, in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 7.2, a supplementary estimate in relation to an increase in spending on New Build schemes in 2012/13 funded by a reduction of £58,000 in the contribution to the New Build Reserve be approved.

**4. That subject to the matter being considered by The Overview and Scrutiny Committee under its powers of call-in, the revenue virement of £90,000 as summarised in Appendix A of the Report and the supplementary estimate in relation to an increase in spending on New Build schemes in 2012/13 funded by a reduction of £58,000 in the contribution to the New Build Reserve be approved.**

**5. That the Council approve amendments to the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme set out in Appendix A of the Report.**

**4. WINNALL FLATS – NEW HEATING AND HOT WATER SERVICES (CONSULTATION AND FINANCIAL APPRAISAL)**

(Report CAB2418(HSG) refers)

The Head of Housing Services advised that the consultation undertaken with tenants was a questionnaire with a covering letter. This did not seek to describe the technological basis of biomass heating, but did seek tenants' views on the principle of communal against individual heating systems. The Committee discussed whether further technical information (including comparison to biomass schemes elsewhere in the country, energy costs to tenants etc) might have potentially changed the outcome of the consultation: however, the potential for financial risk as determined by the appraisal was acknowledged.

During discussion, Members noted that tenants' main concern was likely to be the cost of the energy supplied to them. It was noted that the proposals were also likely to encompass improvements to the flats' insulation and introduction of extractor fans etc. The Head of Housing Services also undertook to take forward a suggestion that interactive energy boards be installed.

As a Ward Member for St John and All Saints, Councillor Pines addressed the Committee. He reported on heating and insulation problems at the flats inherent since the time of their construction. Although he acknowledged the comments of the Committee that a less traditional solution might have been preferable, he suggested that the heating improvements for the tenants were long overdue and should be implemented without delay.

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

**RESOLVED:**

1 That a new gas main be brought into each of the medium rise blocks at Winnall.

2 That individual gas systems be the preferred choice of the Council (because, at this point in time, it offered the most certainty in terms of lower fuel bills for tenants).

3 That tenants be offered the choice of a new gas system, whilst those preferring to remain on their current system be allowed to do so.

4 That as properties become empty, the existing arrangement be changed to a gas system (so that future tenants are given the best chance of lower fuel bills).

5 That the Head of Landlord Services be authorised to call off the installation of individual systems under the existing contracts with Liberty and Ray Williams.

6 That leaseholders remain totally responsible for the provision, maintenance and safe operation of the heating and hot water system within their flat.

7 That subject to individual leaseholders meeting the costs involved, the Council offer to install individual gas heating systems in leasehold flats in the Winnall blocks.

**8 That in accordance with Financial Procedure Rule 6.4, the Committee recommend that Cabinet approve capital expenditure of £1,106,000, with this being funded from the capital planned improvements budget for 2013/14.**

9 That the additional revenue spending, estimated at £12,000 in a full year, be approved for inclusion in the detailed revenue budget for 2013/14 and the longer term HRA business plan

5. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – 2013/14 RENT SETTING AND BUDGET/BUSINESS PLAN OPTIONS**

(Report CAB2423(HSG) refers)

Councillor Tait declared a personal (but not prejudicial) interest in respect of this item, as he was a trustee of Winchester Mediation Service which the Council had an arrangement with in respect of tenants' financial affairs. Councillor Tait remained in the room and spoke and voted thereon.

The Committee noted that The Overview and Scrutiny Committee would also consider the Report at its meeting to be held on Monday 10 December 2012.

The Head of Housing Services detailed those areas where additional budgetary provision was required. Members referred to commitment for funding new posts to support tenants and help introduce changes to the allocations processes resultant from the Welfare Reform proposals. It was also explained that processes and programmes were being formulated to ensure that the additional investment of £50,000 for Health and Wellbeing was allocated appropriately towards assisting Council tenants.

The Committee regretted that the overall average rent increase of 4.2% was required and acknowledged that it was likely to impact in real terms on the already restricted budgets of tenants.

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

**RECOMMENDED (TO COUNCIL):**

**1 THAT THE HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES BE AUTHORISED TO IMPLEMENT THE HOUSING RENTS INCREASE FOR 2013/14 IN LINE WITH THE GOVERNMENT RENT RESTRUCTURING POLICY USED IN THE SELF-FINANCING SETTLEMENT, AS SET OUT IN SECTION 3 OF THE REPORT, RESULTING IN AN OVERALL AVERAGE INCREASE OF 4.2%.**

**2 THAT GARAGE RENTS BE INCREASED BY 2.6% IN LINE WITH THE INFLATION PROVISION INCLUDED IN THE INCREASE FOR DWELLING RENTS.**

**3 THAT ALL SERVICE CHARGES CONTINUE TO BE BASED ON ACTUAL COSTS INCURRED, BUT THAT COMBINED INCREASES FOR RENT AND SERVICE CHARGES FOR EXISTING TENANTS BE SUBJECT TO A MAXIMUM INCREASE OF 3.1% + £2.17 AND THE HEAD OF HOUSING SERVICES BE AUTHORISED TO IMPLEMENT THE CHANGES.**

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the options for service enhancements and additional expenditure as detailed in paragraph 6 be supported and the preparation of a detailed HRA budget and business plan based on these proposals be approved.

2. That the assumptions used to prepare the draft business plan be noted.

**6. TENANCY STRATEGY FOR THE WINCHESTER DISTRICT  
(Report CAB2224(HSG) refers)**

Under the Council's Constitution Access to Information Procedure Rules (Rule 15.1 – General Exception), this was a key decision which had not been included in the Forward Plan. Under this procedure, the Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been informed.

The Head of Housing Services introduced the Report and clarified that the views of current tenants and TACT had been sought. Consultation had also been welcomed via the Hampshire Home Choice website.

Mr Bond reiterated that TACT had concerns regarding the new affordable rent tenure which enabled housing providers to charge up to 80% of open market

rents, inclusive of service charges and stressed the importance that the full 80% should only be seen as a maximum charge and only applied in exceptional circumstances.

During discussion, Members referred to a current shortage of affordable housing across the District and also a desire for there to be a mixture of tenure types to contribute to developing more diverse and sustainable communities. New build homes should be constructed to a good standard which would assist tenants in keeping their household energy costs to a minimum. Tenants should be reminded of the importance of their appropriate conduct throughout their tenure.

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

RESOLVED:

1. That the Central and North Hampshire Tenancy Strategy Statement at Appendix 1 of the report be noted and approved.
2. That the local Winchester Tenancy Strategy at Appendix 2 of the report be approved.

7. **2012/13 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT – HOUSING SERVICES**  
(Report CAB2425(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.

At conclusion of discussion, the Committee congratulated and thanked officers for their hard work in maintaining good performance across all areas of responsibility of the Housing Services.

RESOLVED:

That the performance information Report be noted.

8. **ESTATE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME**  
(Report CAB2426(HSG))

Councillors Scott, J Berry and Bodtger declared personal (but not prejudicial) interests in respect of this item, as they were Council tenants who had taken part in the consultation exercise with regard to the Estate Improvement Programme. The Councillors remained in the room and spoke and voted thereon.

The Committee welcomed the progress and achievements of the Programme to date and requested that that the lead officer (who worked part-time)

continue to be given as much support as possible from within the Housing Services division.

RESOLVED

1. That the progress and achievements of the Estate Improvement programme be noted.

2. That a further report be brought back to this Committee on schemes currently subject to consultation and in particular on detailed proposals for Woolford Close, Stanmore.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 12.40pm

Chairman