

CABINET (HOUSING) COMMITTEE**28 November 2013****Attendance:**

Councillors:

Coates (Chairman) (P)

Godfrey (P)

Weston (P)

Other invited Councillors:

J Berry (P)

Izard (P)

McLean

Scott (P)

Rutter (P)

TACT representatives:

Mrs J Steventon-Baker (P)

Mr J Bond (P)

Others in attendance who did not address the meeting:

Councillor Tait

1. MINUTES

The Assistant Director (Chief Housing Officer) reported that the numbers of housing swaps undertaken since the 'Meet, Greet and Swap' event held earlier in the year would be reported in due course. Officers hoped to arrange a similar event in the southern parishes in due course.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 18 September 2013 (less exempt item) be approved and adopted.

2. ESTATE IMPROVEMENTS – WOOLFORD CLOSE, STANMORE
(Report CAB2534(HSG) refers)

The Assistant Director explained how the proposals outlined in the Report were to lead to significant improvements in the area. Although the scheme's costs had increased, they would continue to be allocated from the overall Estate Improvements budget for the current financial year and offset against those scheduled schemes within the programme, which were not at as an advanced at this stage. It was envisaged that the Woolford Close

improvements would commence within the current financial year but not completed until June 2014.

During further discussion, the Assistant Director advised that all garage licences (including those to be reallocated to existing tenants of Woolford Close) stipulated that garages were to be utilised only for cars. He agreed to further investigate the potential merit of instigating a 'garage swap' scheme for all tenants across the district, i.e. for those who may have moved house.

It was also reiterated that on-going work to deliver estate improvements schemes (including tenant consultation) would continue to be delivered from within existing officer resources, with area housing managers taking up some of the smaller schemes coming forward. All proposed schemes were assessed by a Panel (which included the Portfolio Holder for Housing) in advance of any significant investment of resources.

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

RESOLVED:

1 That the proposals set out in the report for improvements to Woolford Close flats and the surrounding estate, at a cost of £280,000, funded from the existing Estate Improvement programme budget, be approved.

2 That approval under Financial Procedure Rule 6.4 be given to the expenditure of £280,000 for the scheme.

3 That existing garage licence agreements be terminated prior to the commencement of works and that the garages be allocated to existing tenants where possible.

4 That any resident of Stanmore who had their garage licence terminated as part of this exercise be given priority for an alternative garage elsewhere in Stanmore, subject to confirmation that it was to be used for parking a car.

3. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – 2014/15 RENT SETTING AND BUDGET OPTIONS/ BUSINESS PLAN OPTIONS**
(Report CAB2535(HSG) refers)

The Assistant Director drew attention to paragraph 4.1 option (2) (page 5 of the Report refers) and explained that the applying of an 'affordability' limit would be the most appropriate method to move straight to target rents.

During discussion, the Assistant Director explained that comparing rents to private landlords was appropriate in this instance, as there were very few local authorities with retained housing stock in the region. The Committee also discussed comparisons to affordable and social rents and requested that Council rents continue to be maintained as affordable as possible.

Mrs Steventon Baker commented that TACT recognised the reasoning behind the proposed rent increases and supported the recommended approach in the Report.

The Assistant Director advised that the Council's existing commissioning of the Citizen's Advice Bureau, to provide tenants with financial advice, had been supplemented by additional officer resource to provide specific support. Officers from Housing Services also worked closely with the Benefits Team to ensure that the discretionary payment scheme was properly targeted. He also reported that rent arrears to the HRA following the implementation of welfare reform had not been as significant as initially projected.

The Head of New Homes Delivery clarified that a review of the existing Council House Development Strategy was to be undertaken utilising external consultants. Any significant changes proposed would be reported to this Committee, in addition to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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

RECOMMENDED (TO COUNCIL):

1. THAT THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER) BE AUTHORISED TO IMPLEMENT THE SOCIAL HOUSING RENTS INCREASE FOR 2014/15 ON THE BASIS THAT ALL RENTS ARE SET AT TARGET RENT LEVELS FOR THAT YEAR SUBJECT TO AN OVERALL MAXIMUM INCREASE OF RPI PLUS 0.5% PLUS £3.00, RESULTING IN AN OVERALL AVERAGE RENT INCREASE OF 5.38%.

2. THAT WHEN PROPERTIES ON SOCIAL RENTS ARE RELET, THE POLICY OF SETTING RENTS AT TARGET RENT BE RETAINED

3. THAT THE COUNCIL POLICY FOR SOCIAL RENT INCREASES IN FUTURE YEARS BE AMENDED IN ACCORDANCE WITH LATEST GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS AND LIMITED TO AN INCREASE BASED ON THE SEPTEMBER CONSUMER PRICE INDEX + 1%, WITH NO FURTHER ADJUSTMENTS TOWARDS TARGET RENTS FOR EXISTING TENANCIES

4. THAT THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER) BE AUTHORISED TO IMPLEMENT AN INCREASE IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING RENTS FOR 2014/15 OF 3.7%.

5. THAT GARAGE RENTS BE INCREASED BY 3.2% IN LINE WITH THE INFLATION PROVISION INCLUDED IN THE INCREASE FOR DWELLING RENTS

6. THAT THE UPDATED COUNCIL NEW HOMES PROGRAMME, AS DETAILED IN APPENDIX 4, BE APPROVED

7. THAT RENTS AT THE NEW BUILD SCHEME IN DEVER CLOSE MICHELDEVER BE SET AT LEVELS AS DETAILED IN PARAGRAPH 5 OF THE REPORT

8. THAT THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CHIEF HOUSING OFFICER) BE GIVEN DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO DETERMINE ACTUAL RENTS FOR ALL NEW BUILD SCHEMES AND NEWLY ACQUIRED PROPERTIES, SUBJECT TO THEM BEING THE MINIMUM AMOUNT THAT COVERS ALL CAPITAL AND OPERATING COSTS OVER A 30 YEAR PERIOD IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PRINCIPLES SET OUT IN THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND SATISFYING THE AFFORDABILITY TEST INCLUDED IN THE COUNCIL'S TENANCY STRATEGY

RESOLVED:

1. That the revised budget for 2013/14 as set out in Appendix 1 be approved and the options for service enhancements and additional expenditure and income as detailed in paragraph 8 be supported as the basis for the preparation of a detailed HRA budget and business plan.

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

4. **2013/14 HALF YEAR PERFORMANCE MONITORING UPDATE – HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) SERVICES**

(Report CAB2536(HSG) refers)

During discussion, the Assistant Director explained that all void dwellings were advertised once the required four week notice had been given. This included those properties having become void following the death of a tenant. It was emphasised that the property's address was not disclosed at that time and therefore the privacy of grieving families was generally maintained. However, where the deceased was known within the community, this may generate some unwelcome intrusion from those potentially interested in taking on the tenancy the empty house – but this was beyond the immediate control of officers.

With reference to Appendix 3 to the Report (Housing Arrears/Performance Scorecard), it was clarified that the Council had not seen an increase in numbers of evictions as a direct consequence of welfare reform. Officers continued to monitor the situation and offered support where appropriate. However, where a tenant was in breach of their tenancy agreement and wilfully not paying their rent, then the Council had a duty to protect its revenue by taking robust action.

RESOLVED:

That the performance information be noted.

3. **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 Minute of the previous meeting on 18 September 2013: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winnall flats – Gas Main & External Wall Insulation)) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (Para 3 Schedule 12A refers).

4. **EXEMPT MINUTE**

RESOLVED:

That the exempt minute of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 18 September 2013 be approved and adopted.

The meeting commenced at 9.30am and concluded at 11.05am

Chairman