

**MINUTES of the meeting of Housing Services Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee held on 30 January 2013 at 7:00pm**

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**Present:** Councillors Charles Curtis (Chair), Diana Hale, Steve Liddiard,  
Bukky Okunade and Andrew Roast

**Apologies:** Councillors Rob Gledhill and Gemma Riddles

**In attendance:** Councillor Val Morris-Cook – Cabinet Member for Housing

Ms B Brownlee – Director of Housing

Ms K Adedeji – Client Contract Manager (Interim)

Mr M Jones – Management Accountant

Ms E Sheridan – Electoral & Democratic Services Officer

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**The Chair informed those present that the meeting was audio recorded.**

**8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor R Gledhill and Gemma Riddles.

**9 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee, held on 21 November 2012, were approved as a correct record.

**10 ADDITIONAL ITEMS**

None

**11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

**12 BUDGET 2013/14 – 2014/15 SAVINGS AND CAPITAL PROPOSALS**

The Director of Housing introduced the report and in response to questions confirmed that the alternative budget proposal items had been emailed to [the Chair] Councillor Gledhill. The Committee discussed and agreed that the proposals would be reviewed at the meeting.

The saving proposals were reviewed individually and the Director outlined that the Alternative Budget Proposals were not savings, they had been fully

discussed but they are alternative suggestions that may bring future savings. Individually the alternative budget proposals don't deliver the savings on the General Fund required this year on their own.

The Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed she had reviewed the alternative budget proposals and had no real issues and stressed the importance for the proposals to be discussed in advance of budget night. Other members were in agreement that the proposals be heard.

The items in Appendix 1 were discussed as follows:

### **Housing General Fund - Disabled facilities**

The Director of Housing outlined the proposed saving of £62k.

The Committee had no further questions and agreed the proposal.

### **Housing General Fund - Homelessness**

The Director of Housing outlined the proposed saving of £50k to be achieved by creating furnished lets instead of paying for accommodation.

Members questioned if this would afford emergency cold weather arrangements in empty buildings. The Director of Housing confirmed no budget increase had been requested for that and arrangements would have to be managed within budget. The Finance Officer confirmed that examples of high demand had been experienced previously but the budget not overspent. There was still room to work within budget.

In response to further questioning the Director of Housing confirmed that if funds were required in future they would need to look for imaginative ways of working with available funds or apply for reserve funds.

Members debated the benefit changes and welcomed the imaginative use of empty buildings as temporary accommodation.

The Committee had no further questions and agreed the proposal.

### **Housing General Fund - Strategy**

The Director of Housing outlined the proposed saving of £30k achieved through the Strategy officer working solely on Housing Revenue functions.

The Committee had no further questions and agreed the proposal.

### **Housing General Fund - Homelessness**

The Director of Housing outlined the proposed £21k saving achieved by reducing the overtime budget and using the call centre more efficiently.

The Committee had no further questions and agreed the proposal.

## **Capital Programme – Appendix 2**

The Finance Officer outlined Appendix 2, Capital Programme and described the proposals for the Disabled Facilities Grant in the capital report for Cabinet in February 2013.

### **Alternative Budget Proposals**

- a) £100k to improve housing owned park at Corringham Park**
- b) Increase the Environmental Services Budget by £200k**

The Director of Housing outlined that these (a and b) proposals are linked. The Director of Housing informed Members that the request to improve Corringham Park could not be agreed regardless of whether the increase to Environmental Services budget is agreed as the park is not owned by Housing and cannot be funded by HRA.

The Cabinet Member for Housing urged Members to vote against the growth proposal for Environmental Services and stated that a further proposal (market testing for Environmental Services) was already timetabled for June 2013 and they did not want to wait until September. The review would determine if the Service provided market value and the Committee was asked not to give £200k to Environmental Services until it was known if the service provided market value for the work carried out.

The Committee had no further questions and rejected the proposal to increase the Environmental Services Budget by £200k.

The Director of Housing outlined that Corringham Park (A) cannot be approved.

- c) Implement Low Energy, Energy Saving devices**

The Director of Housing and the Cabinet Member outlined their support for this item. Members were informed that this was not in the current budget.

The Committee had no further questions and approved the proposal.

- d) Review of staffing and costs of supplying the concierge service**
- e) Review of the current delivery model for tenant participation**

The Director of Housing outlined that both proposals (d and e) could offer savings although the detail of how much was not known. The Cabinet Member for Housing outlined that it was right that such Service reviews are undertaken to ensure that everyone was reached through tenant participation and the concierge service provided value for money.

Members were keen to ensure that the review covered the whole of council stock in Thurrock and not only those areas with an existing concierge service. Members were supportive of the tenant participation review and commented that the voluntary sector should be involved. The Director of Housing confirmed that the outcome of the review would return to Housing Overview and Scrutiny for further comment.

The Committee had no further questions and approved both proposals (d and e) with the request that the reviews cover the whole of Thurrock housing stock.

**f) Market testing of environmental services for housing**

The Director of Housing outlined that this was already part of ongoing work for Housing.

The Committee had no further questions and approved the proposal.

**RESOLVED that**

- a) the Committee notes and reviews the additional proposals for budget savings set out in Appendices 1 and 3
- b) the Committee notes and reviews the capital bids set out in Appendix 2 to this report.

**13 FIVE YEAR HOUSING CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME REPORT**

The Client Contract Manager introduced the report to the Committee. And reminded members of the new standard which agreed investment principles and takes account of how, when and where investment is made in the housing stock.

The Cabinet Member for Housing welcomed the programme and outlined this enables homes to be fixed properly and have everything completed in one hit.

Members welcomed the programme but highlighted concerns that members would insist their tenants were higher priority. In response to questions officers clarified the works to be carried out within the programme.

Hale – welcomes it, what impact will right to buy have and anticipating the new community hubs, grouped in wards helpful, not area housing officers, should be regrouped in wards.

Members questioned the impact Right to Buy would have on scheduled works. The Client Contract manager outlined the process indicating the receipt of notification on the system and if a Right to Buy application is received then the property will not have the capital investment. Notice of the works to be carried out will be served and often the Right to Buy application is dropped.

Members questioned and received assurance that the money was available for the programme. The Committee were assured that the programme would be robustly promoted and the consultation programme had begun.

**RESOLVED that**

- a) The committee notes the outline five year Housing capital programme for existing housing detailed in the report and in Appendix 1**
- b) The committee notes this is an indicative programme which remains subject to change based on a number of key factors outlined in section 4.3 of the report.**

**14 WORK PROGRAMME**

Members reviewed the work programme and specifically discussed the area site visit currently being arranged for 19 February 2013. Some Members were sceptical about the site visits whilst others were enthusiastic. The draft programme for the site visit was outlined and it was noted that this may be too full. Wellington Road, Tilbury and Stifford Clays were noted as areas to visit within the programme.

The Director of Housing outlined the objective of the site visit and members debated the practicalities and reasons for a site visit to the estates.

Following debate the Chair agreed that officers would organise the event and invite Members.

**RESOLVED:**

That the work programme is noted and officers are requested to continue organising the site visit for 19 February 2013.

**The meeting finished at 8.04pm.**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIRMAN**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
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or alternatively e-mail [esheridan@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:esheridan@thurrock.gov.uk)**