

## **EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING**

NOTES OF THE DECISIONS taken by Councillor Hugh Mason as the Executive Member for Housing, at his decision meeting held on Tuesday 5 February 2008 at 4 pm in the Guildhall, Portsmouth. Also in attendance were Councillors Anthony Martin (Group Spokesperson) and Ward Councillors Terry Hall, Terry Henderson and Luke Stubbs.

### **1 Apologies for Absence (AI 1)**

These had been received from Councillor Mike Park, Group Spokesperson.

### **2 Declaration of Members' Interests in accordance with Standing Order No 14 (AI 2)**

Councillor Mason had no declarations of interest but during the last item relating to housing allocations Councillor Martin made a personal but non-prejudicial interest in that he was on the Housing Waiting List.

### **3 Mobile Homes and Mobile Home Sites – Commission Charge Update (AI 3)**

(TAKE IN REPORT BY THE HEAD OF LOCAL  
AUTHORITY HOUSING MANAGEMENT)

Councillor Hugh Mason reported that in the last couple of days officers had been working hard to prepare an amended set of recommendations which he read out at the meeting, copies of which were circulated. He stressed that the two major differences were that increases were linked to the RPI measure of inflation for the foreseeable future and secondly that if the Council was able to expand the sites by a minimum of six pitches the level of future commission could be levied at 7% rather than the previously suggested 10%. Deputations were heard from Mr Francis representing the Residents' Association at Cliffdale Gardens. He explained how he had undertaken the survey and the results of this. Mr Bates of Henderson Road Association was still concerned with regard to the effect on the elderly, and Mr Austin who felt that the need for a levy was linked to the cost of sickness absence at the Council. Three Ward Councillors then spoke; Terry Hall, Terry Henderson and Luke Stubbs who still voiced concerns regarding the proposed commission rates although they welcomed the improved situation with the reduction in the levy level. Councillor Martin supported the Ward Councillors. Another resident then spoke with regard to the legality of charging a levy when they had been unaware of this when they had purchased their property in 2005.

Councillor Mason thanked all the people who had made a deputation and stressed that the problem had been in trying to get the best possible compromise between the aspirations for the licence holders and the operational requirement of being able to demonstrate to the government's auditors that the parks were both being brought up to model standards and operating in a financially prudent manner. He hoped that the compromise that had been reached was a fair one and stressed that the licence fees in Portsmouth remained amongst the lowest in this part of the country and the licence fee increase of 3.9% was considerably below the 5% increase in rent

being set for council tenants. He accepted that results of the surveys showed that the compromise was the least unacceptable alternative with a number of people remaining dissatisfied. He therefore gave the assurance to residents and Ward Councillors that if in the seven months before the phasing of the commission was started for the existing licences, the residents' associations could suggest an alternative structure which meets the requirements of the commercial viability he would ensure that both Housing Finance and himself would give it detailed consideration. The amended recommendations expressed that if planning permission for expansion was forthcoming it would allow the maximum commission for existing pitch holders to be set at 7% rather than the previously proposed 10%. He was grateful for the assistance of officers in preparing the amendments and for looking into the possibility of being able to expand the sites to accommodate extra pitches.

## **DECISIONS**

- (1) That the Executive Member notes the results of the survey undertaken by the Residents' Association at Clifdale Gardens and the Residents' Association at Henderson Road.**
- (2) That from April 2008 mobile home license fee increases to be set at the increase in the "RPI all items" measure of inflation for the preceding September published by the Office of National Statistics.**
- (3) That Mobile home residents purchasing on or after 1 April 2007 will pay 10% commission when they sell.**
- (4) That for Mobile Home residents who purchased sites before 1 April 2007 repayment of commission be calculated as follows:**
  - (a) conditional upon planning permission being granted for expansion of existing Mobile Home sites by a minimum of six extra pitches the level of commission be set as follows:**
    - Sales from Feb to September 2008 - No commission charged**
    - Sales October 2008 - October 2009 - 3% commission charged**
    - Sales October 2009 - October 2010 - 6% commission charged**
    - Sales October 2010 onwards - 7% commission charged**
  - (b) that if the planning permission referred to in 4 (a) above is not approved the phased introduction of a commission charge be agreed in the following detail:**
    - Sales from Feb to September 2008 - No commission charged**
    - Sales October 2008 - October 2009 - 3% commission charged**
    - Sales October 2009 - October 2010 - 6% commission charged**
    - Sales October 2010 onwards - 10% commission charged**

#### **4 Council Housing Budget for 2008/09 (AI 4)**

(TAKE IN REPORT BY THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR FOR HEALTH HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE AND STRATEGIC DIRECTOR FOR CORPORATE RESOURCES & SERVICES)

Mr Pat Stoddart made a deputation on behalf of the Residents' Consortium and information was circulated which had been prepared by the Residents' Consortium regarding the tenants' responses to the questionnaire on the setting of rents. Mr Stoddart referred to the 'daylight robbery' campaign which needed to be sustained to keep Portsmouth raised money within Portsmouth. Peter Pennekett who had prepared the report thanked the residents' representatives for their involvement in the budget consultation process and the assistance of the Heads of Service and their managers in the preparation of it. Councillor Martin also supported the lobbying of government regarding the need to keep Portsmouth raised money to benefit tenants. Councillor Mason reported that he had been contacted by Chesterfield Council and was working with them and Winchester and Cambridge Councils to discuss this issue further. Councillor Mason very much regretted that it was necessary to increase the charges on the city's tenants above the rate of inflation but felt that there was no option due to the Housing Revenue Account not being able to fall into deficit, being made more difficult by the operation of the Housing Revenue account subsidy. Recommendations 7 and 8 referred to the lobbying action to seek mitigation of the burdens placed on Portsmouth by central government and to seek a fairer national housing system.

#### **DECISIONS:**

- (1) that all changes in rents and charges to be effective from 7th April 2008 or such other date close to the beginning of the financial year as determined by the Strategic Directors for Health, Housing & Social Care and Corporate Resources & Services;**
- (2) that the amount by which dwelling rents & the General Charge should rise for next year to be set in line with Option 1 as follows:**
  - Rents to rise by an average of 5% as described in the report
  - General Charge increase of 78p/week for properties receiving cleaning/grounds maintenance services
  - General Charge increase of 40p/week for all other properties receiving fewer services
- (3) that mobile home license fees to rise by 3.9% (see Appendix page 16 lines 4 to 6) with future annual increases to be set at the increase in the "RPI all items" measure of inflation for the preceding September published by the Office of National Statistics;**
- (4) that garage & parking site rents for next year as shown on Appendix page 16 (Column D, lines 8 to 25) be approved;**

- (5) that Sheltered Housing Service Charges & Supporting People Charges as shown on Appendix page 17 be approved;
- (6) that increases in charges for heating to be capped at 15% and the charges set out in Appendix page 18 be approved;
- (7) that a report be brought to the next meeting of this Executive setting out plans for a co-ordinated approach by tenants, leaseholders, councillors, MPs and other local authorities to press for changes to the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy System (HRASS), the "Pooling" arrangements for HRA capital receipts and the Rent Rebate Subsidy Limitation arrangements;
- (8) that the Strategic Director for Health, Housing and Social Care write to the Department of Communities & Local Government to ask that the proposed review of the HRASS be expanded to include review of the "Pooling" arrangements for HRA capital receipts and the Rent Rebate Subsidy Limitation arrangements;
- (9) that revenue budgets for 2007/08 & 2008/09 be approved & authority be given to the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources & Services in consultation with the Strategic Director for Health, Housing & Social Care to amend the budgets to reflect the latest available information prior to completing the Budget Book for 2008/09;
- (10) that the relevant Managers be authorised to incur routine expenditure in 2008/09. Routine expenditure is any expenditure incurred to meet the day to day operational requirements of the service. Expenditure that is not routine would require further approval as set out in the City Constitution;
- (11) that repayment of debt to be calculated annually as described in the report.

**5 Housing Investment Programme (HIP) 2007/2008 to 2013/14 (AI 5)**

**(TAKE IN REPORT BY THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR FOR HEALTH, HOUSING & SOCIAL CARE AND THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR FOR CORPORATE RESOURCES & SERVICES)**

Councillor Mason supported the report and explained that the sum budgeted for in this programme for next year is £27,504,000 representing an increase of 7.2% on the current year which he did not believe to be excessive as the city has an ageing population and an ageing housing stock which needed to be addressed.

## **DECISIONS:**

**That it be RECOMMENDED to Council that –**

- (1) the HIP programme set out in Appendix 4 be approved in the sum of £25.7 million and £27.5 million respectively for 2007/08 and 2008/09;**
- (2) The programmes of £24.6 million, £22.1 million, £23.3 million, £24.1 million and £26 million for the five financial years 2009/10 to 2013/14 be noted;**
- (3) The Prudential Indicators for the Housing Revenue Account set out in Appendix 6 be approved;**
- (4) That for the purposes of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance) (Amendment) Regulations 2003 the City Council resolve to spend £20 million on affordable housing in both 2007/08 & 2008/09 and that the capital receipts arising in each year from the disposal of surplus HRA assets be used 100% for the provision of affordable housing;**
- (5) Authority be delegated to the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources & Services to alter the mix of capital funding sources used to finance the HIP to maximise the resources available to the Council.**

## **6 Housing Allocation Policy (AI 6)**

**(TAKE IN REPORT BY HEAD OF COMMUNITY HOUSING)**

Councillor Anthony Martin made his declaration of interest but was invited to stay as this was not judged to be prejudicial. Ivan Western brought along examples of how the scheme worked explaining assessment of the criteria on the banding system. Councillor Mason stressed that the housing allocation had been trialled for some months whilst the government's preferred strategy was that of a choice based lettings scheme which had been examined for Portsmouth and not judged to be suitable to the needs of Portsmouth or for housing owned in the Borough of Havant. That scheme would involve high ongoing revenue costs, the maintenance of a large open housing list and long void periods. The old points system had been complex and inefficient and had required revision. This was being replaced by a simple banding system with four levels of clearly defined criteria. Housing would be allocated to the applicants with the highest priority for a particular property, determined first by band and secondly by date order. He therefore felt the system which had been trialled to be transparent, fair, compassionate and efficient.

**DECISION:**

**That the Executive Member for Housing endorse the housing allocation policy as attached at Appendix 1 of the report.**

The meeting concluded at 5.20 pm

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Councillor Hugh Mason  
Executive Member for Housing

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