

HOUSING

RECORD OF DECISIONS taken by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Steven Wylie, at his special decision meeting held on Thursday 30 July 2009 at 10.00 am in the Guildhall, Portsmouth. Also present were Opposition Spokespersons Councillors Jim Fleming and Jim Patey.

Councillors Terry Henderson and Lee Mason were also present to participate in the discussion.

22 Declaration of Members' Interests (AI 1)

There were no declared interests.

23 Category 2.5 Sheltered Housing - Improvements to Night Service (Key Decision) (AI 2)

(TAKE IN REPORT BY HEAD OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT)

James Hill presented the Head of Housing Management's report. Extra copies of the full Appendix 4 from the financial appraisal were circulated at the meeting (which were correctly displayed on the website). James Hill gave the background to the preparation of the report and the fact that there had been no choice but to review the service due to external factors such as the European Working Time Directive (EUWTD) and internally the Local Pay Review (LPR) implementation. There was also the cut in the Supporting People funding of £35,000 from January 2010 to take account of. The findings of the demand for out of hours service by customers was analysed within Appendix 2 and 3 of the report. Residents had received a letter regarding the proposed changes and were invited (with family) to the explanatory sessions and the mixed response was set out within the report. It was proposed that for the remainder of the financial year there would not be increased charges to residents and the extra costs would be met by the use of contingency funding. There would be a detailed report regarding Supporting People grant to a future meeting of the Cabinet Member for Housing.

Deputations were then made. Honorary Alderman Elaine Baker spoke on behalf of concerned residents and relatives and she felt there should have been more involvement of the councillors and referred to a previous scheme in the 1990s of Homecare using a night service which, in her opinion, had been unsuccessful. She believed that people were frightened and they had paid for the service and her main concern was the health of the residents. Mr Smith then spoke on behalf of residents at Ian Gibson Court stating that peace of mind was more important than the finances, there could be emergencies at the same time of night at different areas and also raising the concern that strangers would be coming in to help people. Mrs Brown and her husband Mr Brown then spoke also on behalf of relatives at Ian Gibson Court and their concern for their care. She pointed out that residents had not been asked if they would be able to meet the extra costs themselves and many of them would be paying from their benefits and reiterating that for relatives and residents there was peace of mind with the current service staff on hand and she asked that all residents could be checked in the evening as they were in the morning.

Councillor Henderson then spoke with particular concern to Arthur Dann Court however he was against the change generally and felt that residents had been betrayed by having the service taken away when they had moved there to have this reassurance. Councillor Lee Mason also spoke against the proposal which he felt to be ill thought out and questioning the timings of journeys between premises and getting to people, the issue of the rapport between residents and staff they did not know and the security issues with the access to keys. Councillor Jim Fleming then spoke as the Opposition Spokesperson for the Conservative Group and read out the representation made by Councillor Wemyss, who could not be present, in which he set out his concerns and his opposition to option 1. He felt the current service should be continued rather than putting residents at risk.

Councillor Fleming then spoke on his own behalf, raising his concern for the vulnerable residents; he would not support cutting this front line service. He felt there were risks that should not be taken and that the elderly people did deserve certainty in pulling the emergency cord that they would be attended to. Councillor Patey then spoke asking Councillor Wylie to defer a decision for further consideration to the way forward as there was a need to protect and support the most vulnerable residents which was a PCC priority. He also spoke on behalf of the Paulsgrove residents who were furthest away from the range of the service and thereby the most at risk. Councillor Fleming disagreed with the request made by Councillor Patey for the decision to be deferred; he felt it was clear that a decision should be made now. Councillor Patey felt that if this could not be deferred he would wish to retain the current arrangements.

David Mearns responded to some of the points raised by the deputations explaining how the support assistants worked in teams and to cover other schemes at night and took on board to look at the suggestion to extend the service to visit each resident in each evening. He stressed that the equipment would work in the same way as it currently did in summoning help and stressed that if in the unusual event of calls being received at the same time there would be a prioritisation of requests to see which was an emergency and if necessary an ambulance would be called. He stressed that it was a dedicated service for the sheltered schemes and staff would be recruited and trained accordingly. There would be a back-up vehicle available in case of breakdown and special arrangements should there be emergencies/epidemics. He also mentioned cases where particular residents needed extra checks within the night to stop them from wandering and causing nuisance to others but the new mobile service would have these benefits to allow checks throughout the night.

Peter Pennekett then reported on the financial aspects of the scheme advising that with the exception of the costs of providing personal care, the costs arising from sheltered housing were met from the Housing Revenue Account. He reiterated that there would need to be a separate report regarding the reduced Supporting People grant. He suggested that the issue of whether the additional costs could be partly or fully met by the residents through increased service charges should be dealt with through the normal budget process which involved residents' representatives in extensive consultation.

Councillor Wylie then asked if there would be continued tracking by David Mearns of service demands, which was confirmed with figures collated for the past 67 nights. The maximum number of calls had been ten on one night but the average was three and some of the calls did not require a visit just reassurance. In response to questions from Councillor Wylie, David Mearns reported that if option 2 was implemented there would be a need to recruit more staff and there would be significant changes for existing staff but option 3 would be harder to implement within the time available with recruiting of 14 night workers with additional costs. David Mearns reiterated the restrictions of the Local Pay Review deadline for changes to working conditions. Before making a decision Councillor Wylie took a short adjournment.

Councillor Wylie had discussed the options fully with the officers and was aware on the constraints on time frames but had listened to all the deputations with great interest. He was aware that there was a need to be mindful of the LPR and EUWTD restrictions. Local authorities were not able to opt out of the European Directive and he also reported that he had received and considered letters from residents. There was the further restriction that the General Fund could not be used to pay for an enhanced service and therefore he would favour option 1 but with the need for extra monitoring and regular reports to himself and the spokespersons regarding the implementation of the service. Councillor Wylie was concerned regarding additional charges being borne by residents within the other options. There would also be a separate report regarding the Supporting People grant to a future meeting. All residents would be spoken to about how the service could be implemented.

DECISIONS:

- (1) The proposed improvements to the night service in Category 2.5 sheltered housing schemes be approved by the introduction of a mobile night service (Option1) on 1st November 2009**
- (2) That every Category 2.5 resident be contacted individually before 1st November 2009 and offered a personal explanation about the new service and associated costs and charges.**
- (3) The Supporting People Commissioning Body be asked to explain the rationale for the planned reductions in support for Portsmouth's most vulnerable older residents in PCC sheltered housing schemes and that a further report be submitted to the Cabinet.**
- (4) Sheltered Housing Service Charges and Supporting People Service Charges remain unchanged as shown in the attached financial appraisal and that the additional costs falling on the Housing Revenue Account for 2009/10 be met from within the HRA contingency provision.**
- (5) Delegated authority be given to the Head of Housing Management in consultation with the Head of Financial Services to adjust existing HRA budgets where necessary to ensure smooth implementation of the changes.**

- (6) Local Ward Councillors and residents continue to be closely involved with the implementation of the new service**
- (7) The Head of Housing Management bring forward a report outlining the effects of continued reductions in Supporting People Grant and the options for meeting costs arising in 2010/11 and future years.**
- (8) Furthermore, that there be regular reports to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Opposition Spokespersons, on the implementation of the mobile night service.**

The meeting concluded at 12.07 pm.

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Councillor Steven Wylie
Cabinet Member for Housing

JW/DMF
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