

## **CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING**

RECORD OF DECISIONS taken by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Steve Wemyss, at his meeting held on Monday, 13 March 2017 at 5.30 pm in Conference Room A, Floor 2, Civic Offices

### **Present**

Councillor Steve Wemyss (Cabinet Member)

Councillor Tom Wood (Opposition Spokesperson)

Also in attendance - Councillor D Sanders as Chair of Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel

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

Councillors Stuart Potter and Stephen Morgan had sent their apologies for absence.

#### **16. Declaration of Interests (AI 2)**

There were no declarations of members' interests.

#### **17. Council Housing Maintenance & Improvements and Housing IT Business Software 2017/18 (AI 3)**

Meredydd Hughes, the Assistant Director of Property and Housing, presented the report which set out the capital and revenue spending for council housing following the Council's setting of the budget in February. The report set out the individual areas of spend and Meredydd apologised for the late circulation of the Maintenance & Improvements detailed summaries for each of the housing areas, as these had been subject to amendments leading up to the meeting.

Councillor Wemyss stressed that these documents acted as guides for the spending but the exact sums were not fixed; Meredydd Hughes agreed that some of the works were going out to evaluation and tendering and some were due to have feasibility studies for the year ahead. If there were emergencies requiring urgent attention work would be undertaken where it was most needed.

#### **DECISIONS:**

- (1) That the area programmes and allocation of finance for the funding of the Revenue Budgets for repairs and maintenance of dwellings be noted.**
- (2) That the capital budgets listed in Appendix B and Appendix C commencing in 2017/18 be approved and the Local Authority Housing Manager be authorised under Financial Rules, Section B14 to proceed with schemes within the sums approved.**

**(3) That the Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer's financial appraisal be approved for the capital programme - global provision.**

**18. Housing White Paper (AI 4)**

Councillor Darren Sanders attended the meeting as the Chair of the Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel to present some observations, as within their current review of 'Housing Need' the White Paper had been looked at. These points included:

- Concern on the retention of 1% reduction in social rents and the impact on the Housing Revenue Account budget, and wanted clarity on dates to assess the impact
- On the Right to Buy pilot for Housing Associations it would be interesting to see what contribution is expected from local authorities
- 5-10% selling off of higher value homes caused concern although the panel welcomed Jo Bennett's proposed Arms-Length company to build more council housing
- The sections relating to private sector landlords were welcomed
- More clarity was needed around the planning numbers for housing
- Councillor Sanders hoped that the formal response could be shared and he later commented on the planning application and appeal system, rise of HMOs and the use of viability statements to reduce social housing provision.

Councillor Tom Wood, Opposition Spokesperson, felt that there would be areas of consensus on the subjects for comment, and he asked that the following issues be covered:

- Changing the nature of tenancy agreements based on circumstances
- Requesting more power over requiring viability assessments for new developments to provide for affordable housing
- Retaining 100% of Right To Buy sale receipts
- There should not be a cap on borrowing to invest in housing

Councillor Wemyss, as the Cabinet Member for Housing, reported that the Leader (acting with responsibility for Planning, Regeneration & Economic Development) had also received an information report on the planning aspects of the White Paper for Housing, as there was an overlap. He therefore felt it would be useful to invite the Housing Minister to visit Portsmouth to see the constraints of this land-locked island city, where there are large areas of protected open space (Portsdown Hill and Farlington Marshes) and other areas which had remedial problems (which meant higher construction costs). The low playing pitch provision for the population also meant that these open spaces should be retained for public use. He was also concerned regarding how the Right to Buy for Housing Association tenants would be funded in the future, and this could contradict the intentions of the Homelessness Reduction Bill.

Councillor Wemyss felt that the perceived demand was for high density but in fact there is a need for 3 and 4 bedroom houses of lower density. He queried the impact of the planned 6000 homes in the neighbouring Welborne development outside Fareham and whether building on land owned by PCC in Havant (such as Leigh Park) could contribute towards Portsmouth's housing quota? The White Paper hinted that if a local authority fails to meet its targets it could be penalised or have construction imposed upon it. Work with other local authorities was encouraged.

Other issues to be addressed in the response letter would include income caps, affordability of property, the importance of social housing provision to Portsmouth and aspects of the planning application system (which would be covered by the PRED portfolio).

Councillor Wemyss would write a formal response, in conjunction officers, and he invited the Opposition Spokespersons and the Chair of Housing & Social Care Scrutiny Panel to submit their views to him for consideration in making his formal response by 31 March 2017. Councillor Wemyss would then invite the Housing Minister to visit Portsmouth.

**DECISIONS - The Cabinet Member for Housing:**

**(1) noted the content of the report with regard to the proposals within the Housing White Paper;**

**(2) would make a formal response to the Housing White Paper, and any related consultations that may be subsequently released.**

The meeting concluded at 6.10 pm.

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Councillor Steve Wemyss  
Cabinet Member for Housing