

## **CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING**

RECORD OF DECISIONS taken by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Darren Sanders, at his meeting held on Tuesday, 29 January 2019 at 3.00 pm at the Executive Meeting Room - The Guildhall

### **Present**

Councillor Darren Sanders (in the chair)

Councillor Tom Coles

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

Councillor Luke Stubbs had sent his apologies for absence and had submitted some comments.

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

Councillor Sanders wished to make non-pecuniary declarations in that he had grown up near the site of the Southsea Community Centre and also his mother lives in a PCC block affected by the rents and service charges report on the budget.

Two of the Residents Consortium/CLG representatives also wished to make declarations; Maria Cole regarding her Directorship of PATCH in Somerstown and both she and Adrian Blackwood were volunteers working with veterans.

#### **3. Southsea Community Centre Site Development (AI 3)**

Jo Bennett, Head of Business Relationships, Growth and Support presented the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services' report. She stressed that no one would be asked to move into property they could not afford and that the preference was to use this as temporary accommodation which would move people out of Bed & Breakfast accommodation. Wayne Layton, Finance Manager, explained that different options had been considered covering different types of rent, and that the preferred option with less reliance on B&Bs generated a positive net present value of £3.8m in savings to the General Fund. (The Council will receive income from rents for these properties which will generate a £370,000 positive net present value for the Housing Revenue account over 30 years.)

Residents Consortium/CLG representatives Maria Cole and Adrian Blackwood were supportive of this redevelopment.

Councillor Coles (as the Labour Spokesperson for Housing) also supported the new housing and the reduced reliance on B&B accommodation. He asked if there was parking provision - it was reported that there was not but there was planning consent in place from 2015.

Councillor Sanders read out the comments submitted by Councillor Stubbs (as Conservative Spokesperson for Housing) which questioned the cost of the scheme, believing the cost per unit to be expensive when compared to properties on the open market, although he supported the principle of the scheme. In response Jo Bennett confirmed that the PCC Quantity Surveyors had checked the values and she would report back to the 3 Housing Members on the outcome of the tender and she would also provide them with a breakdown of the costs.

Councillor Sanders was delighted by these positive proposals for a derelict site, which when built would help to tackle the issue of temporary accommodation.

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

**(1) approved the following Capital Expenditure amounting to £4m, delivering a new build of fourteen, 2 bed flats; five, 1 bed flats; three, 1 bed mobility flat and one, 2 bed mobility flat, totalling 23 flats to be retained within the HRA.**

**(2) delegated authority to the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services in consultation with the Director of Finance & S151 Officer to amend the spending profile and funding model of the proposed scheme whilst ensuring that the schemes remain financially viable following any necessary changes.**

**(3) delegated the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building to approve any application for any grant funding to support the scheme.**

#### **4. Housing allocations scheme (AI 4)**

Elaine Bastable, Head of Housing Options, presented the report by the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services. This represented a refresh of the policy and further minimal changes would be published when required via the Members' Information Service under the delegated powers of the Director. Section 4 of the report set out the changes that had been required, including links to the Armed Forces Covenant, Equalities Impact Assessment and updated information from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA of 2016).

CLG representative Adrian Blackwood gave his comments relating to his own personal experience of being assessed and more generally about some disabilities not being obvious ones, and he questioned why an application form was no longer used for which he felt doctors could have input.

Elaine Bastable explained the medical assessment process which sought to ascertain if an individual's current accommodation was unsuitable, and an independent review officer was involved.

Councillor Sanders, as Cabinet Member for Housing, explained that whilst individual circumstances could not be looked at here, the wider implications of medical input and "hidden" disabilities, such as mental health, would be kept under review.

Maria Cole of the Residents' Consortium also asked about why the qualifying age was set at 18 when some married at 16? Elaine Bastable responded that legally a tenancy could not be held under 18 years of age, but PCC do provide some supported housing for 16-18 year olds and under 18s were considered in exceptional circumstances.

Councillor Coles (Labour Spokesperson) was pleased to see the inclusion of veterans and appreciated it could be a hard transition for ex-service personnel.

Councillor Sanders Cabinet Member for Housing, queried the use of data from 2016 (the latest JSNA) and requested that officers keep abreast of new data and with this in mind and in welcoming the link to the Armed Forces Covenant he anticipated a minor amendment coming forward soon regarding Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He noted the consultations on this and rough sleepers and homeless accommodation. Councillor Sanders had read and noted the comments from the Homelessness Working Group, which included reference to pets of rough sleepers which Elaine Bastable explained did not come under the allocations policy but was covered by the landlord rules for properties by both PCC and social landlords.

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

**(1) To accept the new Housing Allocation Scheme.**

**(2) To delegate authority to the Director for Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services to agree any future minor amendments to the scheme. This will be reported to councillors through the Members' Information Service and added to the published scheme documents.**

**5. Draft Homelessness Strategy (AI 5)**

Paul Fielding, Assistant Director for Housing, presented the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services' report which set out to tackle homelessness, stating 2,382 homeless applications had been received in the previous 2 years (to April 2018).

CLG representative Mada Abrams gave her views on the need to provide further support through training and education.

Councillor Sanders, as Cabinet Member for Housing, responded that the report showed how many people were becoming homeless in circumstances out of their control, such as the end of private rented tenancies, being evicted by family or friends (such as when 'sofa surfing') and those surviving domestic abuse.

Maria Cole of the Residents' Consortium was pleased to see empty properties being reviewed and was interested in how ex-offenders were treated.

Councillor Sanders stressed that the strategy allowed for the approach to rehousing to be built around the individual and also welcomed the use of empty properties and voids. The strategy sought to tackle the causes of homelessness and to provide a better service for those experiencing homelessness. The consultation would go on-line the following day.

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

- (1) To endorse the council's draft Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023.**
- (2) To instruct officers to undertake formal consultation on the strategy with relevant partners and stakeholders.**
- (3) That following consultation, officers should return to councillors with a final strategy, and action plan, for agreement.**

**6. Council Housing Budget 2019/20 (AI 6)**

Wayne Layton, Finance Manager, presented the report on behalf of both the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services and the Director of Financial Services and S151 Officer. The rents were proposed to be decreased in accordance with central government social rent setting policy and these, along with the proposed service charges, had been through a consultation exercise with the residents. A Residents' Consortium meeting had been held on 6 December 2018 and another meeting had been held on 10 January 2019 for their feedback. There had also been an article in House-Talk magazine to all tenants.

The Finance Manager reported that this was the last year of the Welfare Reform Act requirement to reduce dwelling rents by 1%, which had the effect of reducing rental income by £2.5m (a cost to PCC of £6.3m over 4 years) as set out in Appendix 4 of the report. He clarified that the cost of removing cladding at Leamington and Horatia Houses of £1.3m was a capital one, which did not feature in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) but the loss of income from over 200 units from these and home-loss payments amounted to £1m (with some offset of maintenance costs).

Service charges had generally gone up in line with inflation (as set out in Appendix 5), it was slightly higher for flats (calculated by dividing the number of tenancies, and lower for sheltered accommodation. For the laundry charges the policy was to try to recover the full cost, and these had been held in previous years, and were economical compared to commercial laundrette charges.

The increase in heating charges of 10% (Appendix 8) still represented the benefit of PCC's buying power to be substantially cheaper than if it was purchased on an individual basis. Parking charges were only increased in line

with inflation for residents' nearby parking spaces but increase 10% for commuters (with a variation in that those areas where spaces and garages were not in high demand charges were kept lower).

Wayne Layton reported that officers were working to find ways to reduce the in-year deficit position and by the end of 2020 it was forecasted that there would be £23m Reserves.

Questions were then raised, firstly by the Residents' Consortium/CLG representatives on the homeless and removal payments to tenants of Horatia and Leamington Houses and regarding the effect of the solar panels on PCC properties. Meredydd Hughes, Assistant Director Building Services, confirmed that the income generated by these did come into the HRA and LED lighting had also been installed to help reduce costs and the heating charges were based on estimates so the selling of electricity to the national grid would be reflected when known. It was also asked by Maria Cole why the costs for the Hub Café were doubling? James Hill, Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services, explained that this had been taken in-house and the offer had been expanded but it would take a year for the business to settle and the actual costs to be known, however there had been very positive feedback from tenants using the café. In response to a question on the heading "City Government" Wayne Layton reported that this covered services including Freedom of Information (FOI), Democratic Services and other meeting charges, which had reduced.

James Hill explained that the previous "line by line" method of discussion with residents had not been possible due to tight timescales this year but these could be re-introduced.

Councillor Coles (Labour Spokesperson) asked about the calculation of social rent - Wayne Layton undertook to send him a copy of the guidance on this complex formula.

Councillor Sanders as Cabinet Member for Housing welcomed the undertaking in paragraph 6.2 of the report to work to reduce and eradicate the current deficit for future years whilst providing better services. Some of the pressures had been out of the hands of PCC with the government policy on rents and the independent assessment of the need to decant the two properties.

**DECISIONS - The Cabinet Member for Housing approved the following (please refer to report and appendices):**

- (i) The revised budget as set out at appendix 3.**
- (ii) All rents and charges to be effective from 1st April 2019 or such other date as determined by the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services in consultation with the Director of Finance and Information Services.**

- (iii) Dwelling rents for 2019/20 to be set as in accordance with Central Government's Social Rent Policy.**
- (iv) General Service charges for 2019/20 to be set at this meeting as set out in this report, and in accordance with Appendix 5.**
- (v) Sheltered Housing Service charges for 2019/20 to be set at this meeting as set out in this report, and in accordance with Appendix 6.**
- (vi) Laundry charges for 2019/20 to be set at this meeting as set out in this report, and in accordance with Appendix 7.**
- (vii) Heating charges to be set in accordance with Appendix 8.**
- (viii) Garages and parking site rents as shown on Appendix 9 be approved and authority to let garages at reduced rents where demand is low be delegated to the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services in consultation with the Director of Finance and Information Services.**
- (ix) Revenue budget 2019/20 as set out in Appendix 3 be approved and authority given to the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services in consultation with the Director of Finance and Information Services to amend the budgets to reflect the latest available information prior to finalising budgets for 2019/20.**
- (xi) The relevant Managers be authorised to incur expenditure in 2019/20.**
- (xii) The forecast Revenue Budgets for 2020/21 to 2021/22 as set out in Appendix 3 arising from the proposals contained in this report, be noted.**

The meeting concluded at 4.30 pm.

---

Councillor Darren Sanders  
Cabinet Member for Housing