

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel **Date:** Monday, 5 March 2012

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 5.30 - 8.55 pm

Members Present: A Mitchell MBE (Vice-Chairman, acting as Chairman), Ms R Brookes, Ms J Hart, D Stallan, H Ulkun, Mrs J H Whitehouse and Hyde (Tenants and Leaseholders Federation)

Other Councillors: J Knapman and Mrs M McEwen

Apologies: S Murray, Mrs A Grigg and Mrs S Jones

Officers Present: A Hall (Director of Housing), L Swan (Assistant Director (Private Sector & Resources)) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

Also in attendance: A Chowns (CPC Project Services LLP) and P Wilson (Wilson Associates)

47. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

It was noted that Councillor Mrs J Lea was substituting for Councillor Mrs A Grigg.

48. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman took over the Chairmanship and proposed that Councillor D Stallan serve as Vice-Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor D Stallan serve as Vice-Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

49. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Member's Code of Conduct.

50. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the last meeting of the Panel held on 31 January 2012 be agreed.

51. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

(a) Terms of Reference

The Panel's Terms of Reference were noted.

(b) Work Programme

The following was noted:

(i) The following items were being deferred to the July 2012 meeting of the Panel:

- Item 17 Housing Service Strategy on Repairs and Maintenance
- Item 18 Housing Service Strategy on Energy Efficiency
- Item 19 Housing Service Strategy on Home Ownership
- Item 21 Housing Service Strategy on Rent Administration

(ii) Item 25 The Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme would be discussed in October 2012, it was advised that there was likely to be a fundamental change in the scheme.

(iii) Item 29 Licences for Park Home Sites. Officers were awaiting more information from Essex Fire and Rescue Service. It was hoped that an extra-ordinary meeting of the Panel would be scheduled some time in April 2012, otherwise it would be arranged for June 2012. The Panel were advised that it had been proposed by the Council's management Board that one representative of the Park Home Site owners and one representative of park homes resident's associations should be invited to speak at the meeting. However, both groups had asked that all site owners and representatives of all residents associations should be able to speak at the meeting. Officers therefore asked the Scrutiny Panel to determine the number of speakers that should be invited from each group.

RESOLVED:

That at the extra-ordinary meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel convened to discuss licences for park homes sites, the following public speaking arrangements be made:

- (1) That two representatives from the Park Home Site Owners in the District be permitted to speak regarding licence conditions for park homes; and
- (2) That two representatives from park home residents associations in the District be permitted to speak regarding licence conditions for park homes.

It was noted that the meeting would be webcast.

(iv) Item 32 Homelessness Strategy. This item was being held over to July 2012.

52. OUTCOME OF PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSE CONDITION SURVEY AND PROPOSED NEW PRIVATE SECTOR RENEWAL STRATEGY

The Panel received a report from the Assistant Director of Housing (Private Sector and Resources) regarding Private Sector Housing Strategy 2012 – 15.

The report sought the Panel's endorsement of the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy (PSHS) covering the period 2012 – 2015. The draft strategy implemented changes to the polices set out in the previous PSHS 2007 – 2011 for financial assistance to promote the repair and improvement of sub-standard private sector

housing and the adaptation of properties where there was a person with a disability. It also implemented changes to policies in the previous PSHS dealing with the enforcement of private sector housing standards and for giving advice, assistance and specialist support.

The District Council has a responsibility for keeping housing conditions within its borders under review, enforcing statutory standards to ensure satisfactory conditions in the private housing sector and offering financial assistance to repair and/or improve sub standard dwellings. Alongside these, a mandatory duty to provide Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) also existed.

By invitation, Mr A Chowns gave a presentation on the Private Sector House Condition Survey on behalf of CPC Project Services LLP and Mr P Wilson gave a presentation on the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy on behalf of Wilson Associates. The presentation slides used are attached to these notes.

RECOMMENDED:

- (1) That the Panel recommends the Draft Private Sector Housing Strategy 2012 – 15 for further consultation with key partners and stakeholders, with appropriate comments being incorporated in the final version of the Strategy;
- (2) That the final version of the Strategy be submitted to the Cabinet with recommendation that it be formally adopted; and
- (3) That the Panel monitors progress with the Action Plan on an annual basis.

53. CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSED LIST OF HOUSING IMPROVEMENTS AND SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

The Panel received a report from the Director of Housing regarding Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements – HRA Financial Plan.

At its meeting on 5 December 2011, the Cabinet approved the strategic approach to the new 30-Year HRA Financial Plan. The agreed approach was to plan the repayment of the required loans to fund the CLG's debt settlement over a 30 year period. This enabled the Council to maintain the housing stock to a modern standard, implement a new Council Housebuilding Programme and allow a lower rent increase in April 2012 than assumed by the Government. It also allowed for an additional £770,000 per annum to fund housing and service improvements. The Cabinet had asked the Panel to consider and recommend a proposal list of housing improvements and service enhancements, utilising the additional funding. A proposed list of 14 housing improvements and service enhancements were submitted to the Panel, they were as follows:

- (a) Acceleration of the Programme to install mains-powered smoke detectors in every Council property within 4/5 years
- (b) Provision of a free Handyperson Scheme for older and disabled tenants living in sheltered and other Council accommodation
- (c) Increasing the Disabled Adaptations Budget for one year
- (d) Conversion of existing toilet facilities in communal areas of sheltered housing schemes and community halls into disabled toilets

- (e) Refurbishment of the Common Room and Kitchen Area at Jessopp Court, Waltham Abbey
- (f) Expansion and refurbishment of the Council's Play Area on the Princesfield Estate, Waltham Abbey
- (g) Making the existing temporary Part time Housing Officer (Social Housing Fraud) post permanent and full time (already recommended to the Cabinet)
- (h) Creation of a Senior Housing Officer (Social Housing Fraud) Post
- (i) Installation of Key Safes at Sheltered Housing Schemes
- (j) Creation of a new Post of Housing Under-Occupation Officer
- (k) Increasing the existing budget for Estate Improvements and Enhancements
- (l) Expansion of the VAEF Garden Maintenance Scheme for Older and Disabled Tenants
- (m) Provision of additional dog waste bins on housing estates
- (n) In-Year Housing Improvements and Enhancements Fund

At the meeting, it was suggested an additional proposal of providing a one-off grant of £10,000 to the Furniture Recycling Scheme Project that was trying to establish itself within the District, which the Panel agreed to include within the list recommended to the Cabinet.

It was estimated that the following additional funding could be made available within the Financial Plan for further housing improvements and service enhancements in future years:

- (i) An additional £750,000 per annum from April 2013;
- (ii) A further £250,000 per annum from April 2017;
- (iii) The bringing forward of the previously planned £4.7 million increase by one year in April 2019; and
- (iv) An additional £250,000 per annum in April 2019.

It was proposed that a further recommendation be made to the Cabinet that, at its meeting in January 2013, the Panel consider and recommend to the Cabinet the use of both the remaining and any additional funding available within the HRA Financial Plan for housing improvements and service enhancements in 2013/14 and future years.

The Tenants and leaseholders Federation had considered the proposals in advance of the Panel meeting and had supported all the proposals put forward by officers.

RECOMMENDED:

- (1) That, the Panel reports to the Cabinet and recommend the list of Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements funded from the

£770,000 per annum budget included within the 30-Year HRA Financial Plan as a result of the HRA self-financing arrangements;

(2) That, the Cabinet be asked to record the detailed recommendations emboldened in the Cabinet minutes;

(3) That a recommendation be made to the Cabinet that, at its meeting in January 2013, the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel consider and recommend to the Cabinet the use of both the remaining and any additional funding available within the HRA Financial Plan for housing improvements and service enhancements in 2013/14 and future years, after consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation;

(4) That the Panel's report to the Cabinet be based on the content and approach of the report by officers to the Panel; and

(5) That the Panel Chairman present this report to the Cabinet on the 23 April 2012.

54. HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN - 6 MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

The Panel received a report from the Director of Housing regarding the Housing Strategy - Six Month Progress Report on Key Action Plan 2011/12 and production of a new Housing Strategy.

At its meeting in September 2009, the Cabinet adopted the Housing Strategy 2009-2012. The Housing Strategy assessed the District's current and future housing needs and set out the Council's approach to meeting those needs. The strategy also included a Key Action Plan which set out the proposed actions that would be taken by the Council to contribute towards the achievement of the housing objectives over the first year of the Housing Strategy. The Cabinet also agreed that the Key Action Plans should be produced and updated on an annual basis for approval by the Cabinet and that progress with the Key Action Plans should be monitored on a 6 monthly basis by this Panel.

It was originally anticipated that the Housing Strategy would cover the three year period 2009-2012 and would be updated during 2012 to cover the following three years. However, there were a number of important issues that were expected to be concluded by the Council over the next year which would have a significant impact on the strategy. These included:

- A refresh of the Council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment;
- The production of the Council's Strategic Housing Land Assessment through the "Call for Sites" exercise;
- The production of the Council's Draft Local Plan, which would set out the Council's proposed plans on the number and proposed location of new homes in the District; and
- The Council's decisions on housing issues relating to the Localism Act, including a revised eligibility criteria for the Council's Housing Register and the possibility of the introduction of fixed term flexible tenancies by the Council, instead of "lifetime" secure tenancies.

Under these circumstances, it was not considered yet possible to formulate a robust and sustainable Housing Strategy for the next three years.

Therefore, it was suggested that consideration should be given to advising the Housing Portfolio Holder that the production of the next Housing Strategy be deferred for one year, and produced in 2013/14. In the meantime, it was further suggested that an updated Housing Strategy Key Action Plan for 2012/13 be considered by the Panel in July 2012, and that progress with the Action Plan be then monitored on a six monthly basis by the Panel in the normal way.

RECOMMENDED:

- (1) That the 6 Month progress Report on the Housing Strategy Key Action Plan 2011/12 be noted;
- (2) That a recommendation be made to the Housing Portfolio Holder that:
 - (a) The production of the next Housing Strategy be deferred for one year, and be produced in 2013./14, due to the number of issues that are expected to be concluded over the next year; and
 - (b) That, in the meantime, a further Housing Strategy Key Action Plan for 2012/13 be considered by the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel in July 2012 for recommendation to the Cabinet, with progress monitored on a six-monthly basis by the Panel.

55. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no reports being submitted to the forthcoming meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

56. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Panel was scheduled for Tuesday 13 March 2012 at 5.30p.m. in Committee Room 1.

CHAIRMAN