

7 MARCH 2012

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Wednesday 7 March 2012.

- p Cllr B Rickman (Chairman)
- p Cllr E J Heron (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- p Mrs D M Brooks
- p Mrs J L Cleary

Councillors:

- p F P Vickers
- p C A Wise

In Attendance:

Councillors:

- p Mrs D E Andrews
- p Mrs S Bennison
- p Ms L C Ford
- p C J Harrison
- p Mrs A J Hoare
- p Mrs P Jackman
- p J Penwarden

Councillors:

- p A W Rice TD
- p A J Swain
- p R A Wappet
- p Mrs C Ward
- p J G Ward
- p P R Woods

Also In Attendance:

Mr M Ackerman, Housing Policy and Report Focus Group Representative.

Officers Attending:

D Yates, R Jackson, J Mascal, G Bettle, K Connolly, D Brown, Miss J Debnam, Miss G O'Rourke, and Ms D Staples

69. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2012 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest made by members in connection with an agenda item.

71. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

72. PROPOSALS FOR A NEW HOUSING STRATEGY TO MEET THE NEW COUNCIL HOUSING FINANCE REGIME (REPORT A).

Changes to the finance regime for council housing required the Council to pay £143 million to the Government in respect of the Council's housing stock. Members were advised of the likely profile of the loans that would be sought when the loans were selected on 26 March 2012, as set out in Appendix 2 to Report A to the Cabinet. While the need for the Council to take on this debt burden was regrettable, it also meant that, in future, the Council would no longer need to pay £9 million per annum to the Government from the Housing Revenue Account. By careful structuring of the debt repayments, the greater financial freedom that the new arrangements offered could be used to allow the Council to become a direct provider of affordable housing. The new housing strategy had been developed to take advantage of this opportunity.

Members were advised that it was proposed that there would be no repayment of the principal sum of the loan for the first 5 years to allow an initial boost to the social housing programme. The financial resources that became available would be used to provide 200 additional affordable homes during this period. The Council would build some of the new dwellings on existing land holdings, such as underused garage blocks; and buy some homes on the open market; as well as continuing to fund schemes through partner Registered Social Landlords. The opportunity would also be taken to acquire additional land holdings for development where there was a favourable business case. During the 30 year business plan period it was anticipated that an additional 1,329 homes would be provided. It was anticipated that the loans would be repaid in 40 years. During that period 2,000 additional affordable homes would have been provided, the existing housing stock would have been maintained at a high standard and there would have been no effect on the Council Taxpayer.

The Cabinet was advised that the rules that would be applied to the Right to Buy were currently unclear although it was expected that that the Council would continue to be able to ensure that, with discounts, the property could not be sold for less than it had cost to construct it. It was however unclear whether the capital receipts could be retained locally and invested to replace properties lost to rental on a one for one basis, or whether the Government would take the capital receipt for use elsewhere.

Members of the Council and the representative of the Housing Policy and Report Focus Group warmly welcomed the revised strategy and the ability to provide much needed additional affordable dwellings to meet local housing need.

Members were advised that a Project Board, drawn from the Cabinet, had been established to develop a comprehensive and innovative approach to the overall management of the Council's housing stock in order to ensure that the maximum benefit was gained.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) ***That the Council endorses the revised Housing Strategy, as set out in Report A to the Cabinet, supported by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan which includes:***
- ***The provision for investment and working with our partner Registered Social Landlords to encourage the development of affordable housing by them (£100,000 provided for 2012/13).***
 - ***HRA Funds to be utilised in the provision of affordable housing by either the purchase of existing homes or new development on Council owned housing land.***
 - ***The opportunity purchase of land, subject to a business case, as and when appropriate, to provide the opportunity for future affordable housing development.***
 - ***An initial £6m in 2012/13 for investment in new affordable housing as detailed in the Business Plan.***
- (b) ***That the Heads of Service be authorised, in consultation with the Executive Director, to take all decisions including entering into all necessary contracts and agreements to implement the agreed strategy as contained in Report A to the Cabinet.***

73. OFFICE OPTIMISATION – OUT TURN (REPORT B).

The Cabinet was advised of the outcomes from the Office Optimisation Project which was drawing to a conclusion. In general terms, the project had been completed on time and under budget, and with the minimum of disruption to the provision of services. The management of the project, using a project board operating at a strategic level, with direct management by an implementation team of the Head of Housing, Head of Property Services and Head of Planning, had proved to be a successful model. There had also, importantly, been strict financial control of the contract, in particular for approved variations to the contract. A number of unexpected costs had arisen during the project, most notably to remedy structural defects in the roof for the Lymington Town Hall reception but these had been maintained within budget, with a final under spend of £77,000, which was 2.47% of the revised total project budget of £3,111,000.

The project had brought a number of benefits, including an estimated total saving to the taxpayer of around £400,000 per annum from the rationalisation of office space and the sharing of the Town Hall site with the New Forest National Park Authority. The arrangement was also more convenient to the public, who only needed to visit one location.

One particular benefit was the provision of an additional 46 parking places at the Town Hall at weekends, following the removal of the old portacabins on the campus. In addition, 23 spaces at the bottom of the Town Hall car park were being made available for public parking through the adjacent Barfields car park on all days of the week. At times when the Town Hall was quieter, in the summer months, it was also hoped to include a further 24 spaces in the public parking area.

In addition, 47 spaces in the Canon Street long stay car park were being designated as short stay places, providing more parking for people wishing to visit the town for shopping and recreation. The provision of additional parking had been welcomed by the Lymington Chamber of Commerce.

The Cabinet were pleased to note that the employee side comments on the project were very positive.

In addition to thanking the Office Optimisation Team and the contractors, the Cabinet commended all staff affected, who had made every effort to ensure the project was successful.

RESOLVED:

That the successful completion of the Office Optimisation Project be noted.

74. ICT SECURITY POLICY (REPORT C).

The Cabinet considered a revised ICT Security Policy to take account of changes in working practices and in the media now used, following continuing technical developments.

It was also agreed that, in the light of accelerating technical advancements, consideration should be given to identifying a mechanism to allow the policy to be updated without it needing to be referred to the Cabinet and Council.

RECOMMENDED:

That the ICT Security Policy at Appendix 1 to Report C to the Cabinet be approved and adopted.

75. DELEGATION OF POWERS TO OFFICERS.

RESOLVED:

That the current delegations numbered as 479, 480, 481, 483, 484 and 568 be deleted and replaced with the following:

Source	Power Delegated	Delegation to
Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act 1997	To issue administrative Penalties under the Act	Senior Investigations Officer, or Investigations Officer
Social Security Fraud Act 2001 s110A Social Security Administration Act 1992	Appointment as authorised officer to obtain information from financial institutions and other bodies	Samantha Kitcher (Senior Investigations Officer)

Source	Power Delegated	Delegation to
Social Security Administration Act 1992 S109 b and c	Appointment as authorised officers to obtain details from employers	Robert Duncan (Senior Investigations Officer), or Martin Mortimer (Investigations Officer), or Samantha Kitcher (Senior Investigations Officer), or Nicola Message (Auditor and Assistant Investigator)
Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 Terrorism Act 2000 Money Laundering Regulations 2007 (as amended)	Appointment as Accredited Financial Investigator to apply for production and restraint orders at the Crown Court	Robert Duncan (Senior Investigations Officer)
	Appointment as Senior Appropriate Officer to authorise accredited financial investigators to apply to the Crown Court for production and restraint orders	Samantha Kitcher (Senior Investigations Officer)
	To be the officer nominated to receive disclosures about money laundering/terrorist financing activity within the Council	Glynne Miles (Head of Customer and Financial Services)
Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001 S19	Appointment as Single Point of Contact for all purposes under s19 of the Act	Robert Duncan (Senior Investigations Officer)
	Appointment as Authorised Officer to obtain information for HM Revenues and Customs	Samantha Kitcher (Senior Investigations officer)

Source	Power Delegated	Delegation to
County Courts Act 1984 s 60 (2)	To address the District Judge in action for: (a) the recovery of possession of a house belonging to the Council (b) The recovery of any rent, mesne profits, damages or other sums claimed by the Council in respect of the occupation of any person of such a house	Michelle Ashness (Legal Officer), or Gordon Ballantyne (Housing Income Recover Manager), or Kerry Leach (Senior Income Recover Officer), or Jane Cole, Joanne Rolle or Peter Roberts (Income Recovery Officers), or Pauline Lewis (Housing Estates Manager), or Vicky Bray (Senior Neighbourhood and Tenancy Management Officer), or Sophie Rogers, or Sharon Wicks (Neighbourhood and Tenancy Management Officers)

CHAIRMAN

(DEMOCRAT/CB070312/MINUTES.DOC)