

SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2013 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)

Cllrs. Brown, Mrs. Ayres, Ayres, Ball, Mrs. Dibsdall, Horwood, Neal, Mrs. Parkin, Pett and Miss. Stack

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Davison, Abraham, Edwards-Winser, Fittock, Mrs. George, Piper, Raikes, Scholey and Towell, Mrs. Clark and Fleming

Cllr. Brookbank was also present.

30. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Services Select Committee held on 1 November 2012 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

31. Declarations of interest.

Councillor Mrs Parkin declared that she had relatives in social housing.

32. Formal Response from the Cabinet following matters referred by the Committee and/or requests from the Performance and Governance Committee (please refer to the minutes as indicated):

a) Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management (Cabinet 08.11.12 Minute 49)

A Councillor suggested that changes to the operation of the Household Waste Recycling Centres was a significant issue that frequently affected people. The Committee agreed that County Council Members should be invited to a future meeting to provide an update on the issue.

Action 1: That County Council Members be invited to a future meeting to provide an update on changes to the operation of the household waste recycling centres operations

b) 2013/14 Budget and Review of Service Plans (Cabinet 06.12.12 Minute 38)

Noted.

33. Actions from the Previous Meeting

Action 1 – Rural Broadband – The Vice-Chairman reported that the Chairman of the Environment Select Committee had agreed to the Services Select Committee undertaking an in-depth scrutiny review of rural broadband. The Committee

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agreed that the scope of the scrutiny review and potential terms of reference should be considered at the April 2013 meeting.

Action 2: That the scope and terms of reference of the In-depth Scrutiny Review of Rural Broadband be considered at the Services Select Committee in April 2013.

Action 2 – Localisation of Council Tax Support – Members noted that a further update would be provided later in the meeting.

34. Future Business, the Work Plan 2012/13 (attached) and the Forward Plan.

The Vice-Chairman reported that the Business Rates Retention Item would be moved to the June 2013 meeting and the Benefits Performance item would be moved to the November 2013 meeting. This would enable the September 2013 meeting to be cancelled.

The Vice-Chairman also reported that that the Committee would undertake a review of the Tenancy Strategy on June 2013.

A Member requested that the Committee receive an update on Universal Credits in November 2013 and another Member suggested that this be linked to an update on the impact of changes to benefits on the housing service.

(See Minute 35 and Minute 36 for further updates to the work plan)

35. Sevenoaks District Tenancy Strategy and Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Policy

The Head of Housing and Communications presented the report which covered the District Council's proposed Tenants strategy and the approach to the current welfare reform whilst ensuring that the District's limited affordable housing supply would go to those deemed in most need (with more emphasis now through the Allocation policy on local connection and employment) and that future rent revenues were fair but maximised opportunities for Registered Social providers to generate funding for the provision of new social sector housing. The Head of Housing and Communications reported that that Allocation Policy was developed in conjunction with the local community and local providers through consultation. Its main purpose is to identify fairly who should have priority on the Register for rehousing and this is to be undertaken by using 4 bands instead of points, in line with rest of Kent. Members were also provided with an update on the on-going work with West Kent Housing Association surrounding the Housing Register. West Kent HA had agreed to manage the Register for a further 2 years from 1st April 2013. Officers and West Kent HA would be undertaking a review of people currently on the register and hoped to reduce it by half to around 1000. There were many registered who would not be re housed in the near future and they would be given other options to consider.

The proposed Tenancy Strategy would also be trialled on a 10% sample of the Housing Register. An update on this trial would be provided to the June 2013 Committee.

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The Head of Housing and Communications reported that the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Balanced Communities had also reviewed the Housing Register Allocations Policy and had suggested that paragraph 1.1 be amended to read:

“Anyone living in the United Kingdom who is at least 18 years old, and who is applying for a social housing property to use as their only or principal residence and who has a local connection to the Sevenoaks District, may apply to the SDHR.”

The Committee endorsed the amended wording.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted the equality impacts arising from the report on the Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Policy and Tenancy Strategy. Members noted that there was no adverse impact with regards to the Tenancy Strategy. With regard to the Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Policy, Members noted that there would be sections of the Community who would be considered to have a greater need than others and therefore would be allocated more priority to assist them to achieve rehousing more quickly.

The Vice-Chairman welcomed the inclusion of the greater emphasis on local connection to Sevenoaks in the new banding systems.

Members considered the Housing Register Allocations Policy and the Priority Banding System and a Member highlighted that there appeared to be very little support for young working people on low wages. Members stressed that they felt that the policy should be clearer in rewarding people in work and should accommodate employment, for example where possible, workers should be found accommodation which enabled them to keep working. The Head of Housing and Communications responded that Officers recognised the issues and continuously sought solutions. The Council offered a Deposit Bond Scheme and encouraged tenants to consider housing which was outside the District. Younger people were also encouraged to consider shared ownership opportunities and the Council was also looking to establish a Single Persons Scheme and Officers were investigating a suitable site for this. Intermediate rental properties were also available.

In response to a question, the Housing Manager, reported that people with no access to the internet would be able to obtain information through the Council's magazine, In Shape; information would also appear in local newspapers; West Kent Housing Association would also be writing to people on the Housing Register and, if required, customers could be sent personalised sheets of suitable properties that were available.

Members also considered the need for suitable temporary accommodation across the District. A Member stressed the importance of consideration being given to where affordable housing was located. The Vice-Chairman suggested that the Group Manager – Planning be invited to attend the June 2013 Committee meeting to provide an update on Section 106 money and comment on social and affordable housing across the District.

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Action 3: That the Group Manager – Planning be invited to attend the June 2013 Committee meeting to provide an update on Section 106 money and comment on social and affordable housing across the District.

Resolved: That the adoption of the Sevenoaks District Tenancy Strategy and Sevenoaks District Housing Register Allocations Policy be supported subject to the comments above, and both documents be RECOMMENDED to Cabinet for approval as District Council policy.

36. Localising Support for Council Tax

The Group Manager – Financial Services, provided an update to the Committee on Localising Support for Council Tax explaining that Council Tax Benefit was a national scheme administered by local authorities but funded by central Government. From 1 April 2013 each billing authority would need to have a local scheme for Council Tax Support, and pensioners would be fully protected under the new scheme. Government funding would be 10% less than under Council Tax Benefit.

Billing authorities (SDC) and Major Precepting Authorities (MPAs) – KCC, Fire, Police, would be affected by the new Scheme. The Government had previously stated that Town and Parish Councils would not be affected but this was no longer the case.

The Scheme for Sevenoaks had been approved by Council on 27th November 2012. The scheme consists of the following:

- Agreement to operate for three years.
- Standard reduction to their discount of 18.5% on all non-pensioner claimants – reduced to 8.5% in first year; (i.e. currently receive 100% CT benefit, then receive 91.5% CT support)
- MPAs would pay £125,000 to each billing authority for administration, collection and recovery costs;

Officers would write to all affected residents at the end of January. Two different letters would be sent informing people of the new scheme, giving them a simple example of the scheme and outlining where they could obtain financial and budgetary advice. One letter would be sent to those paying Council Tax for the first time and one letter to those paying increased Council tax. The letters would also ask service users to reply stating which payment option they would like to choose. A further letter will be sent to those who had failed to respond towards the end of February. Information on the new Scheme would be included in Council Tax bills and an article would appear in the Council's magazine, Inshape. Some of the £125,000 from MPAs would be used to pay for additional staff to provide support for part of the year.

A Member requested that information be provide to the Committee regarding the qualifying criteria for full Council Tax Support. The Group Manager – Financial Services agreed to circulate this information following the meeting.

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Action 4: That information regarding the qualifying criteria for full Council Tax Support be provided following the meeting.

Resolved: that a further update be provided to the Committee in April 2013.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.24 PM

CHAIRMAN