CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS Monday, 18th January, 2010

Present:- Councillor Akhtar (in the Chair); Councillors Goulty and Kaye (Policy Advisors).

J118. ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS PARTNERING BOARD

Consideration was given to representation on the Environmental Works Partnering Board.

Resolved:- That Councillor McNeely be appointed as representative on the Environmental Works Partnering Board, and Councillor P Russell as substitute.

J119. AREA ASSEMBLIES DEVOLVED BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods presented an update on the proposals from the Rotherham South Area Assembly Co-ordinating Group for projects identified to be funded through Local Authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI) within the 2009/10 financial year.

The bid for £23,000 had been to fund Police Community Support Officers to maintain the number of PCSOs in the Area Assembly. However, as 2009 progressed it became clear that the proposed funding was not required in Rotherham South as no PCSO funding was or was to be reduced during the term the LABGI funding was available. The Coordinating Group therefore agreed to withdraw the PCSO funding and fund 4 additional projects.

The bids were the result of partnership working between the Area Assembly, Elected Members, South Yorkshire Police and Youth Services. Although the same eligibility criteria and application process had been applied, they were the result of direct bids to the Co-ordinating Group and, due to the timescales involved, had not been through any element of public voting.

The projects were:-

South Yorkshire Police PS3 Club Project RMBC Youth Service – Operation Coverage RMBC CCTV Maintenance Whiston Cinema Club

Resolved:- (1) That the LABGI project proposals detailed above be approved.

(2) That the LAGBI project proposals be submitted to the Cabinet for ratification.

J120. ALLOCATION POLICY REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report which detailed progress since the last review of the Allocation Policy on 27th July 2009 and recommendations for amendments to both the Allocation Policy and Local Lettings Policies following the publication of the Governments Fair and Flexible consultation document and subsequent statutory guidance published on the 4th December 2009.

The proposed amendments to the Allocation Policy were:-

- More priority to be given to households with waiting time by increasing the quota in the General band from 10% to 20% and reducing the General Plus band from 40% to 30%
- Amend occupancy levels in section 2.2 On rare occasions three individual adults can make a joint housing application to move, the eligibility rules must ensure that they are eligible for family houses (section 2.2) Joint applications must comply with the rules for joint tenancies. The occupancy levels for couples and single people need amending so that they are also eligible for 3 bedroom upper floor flats.
- More information is included in section 2,4 regarding offering of properties to the advertised quotas.
- Clarification that Priority Plus awarded detailed in Section 2.5.7 of the Allocation Policy for households with multiple needs to only include those households assessed as having two reasonable preference grounds detailed in section 2.2.1 of the Allocation Policy procedures
- Include households under occupying without an assessed need willing to downsize in the Priority Plus group
- Increase housing options for disabled people to ensure the needs of disabled people are adequately met by offering all adapted properties in date turn order irrespective of age.

The proposed changes to the Local Lettings Policies were:-

- Set aside 50% of vacancies in rural areas detailed in appendix 2a for applicants with a local connection to that area
- That a local letting policy to help applicants into employment is adopted in specific areas of the borough
- Support for people in work or seeking work
- To include in the Local Lettings Policy in respect of Management Difficulties: "where a conviction for an offence of anti social behaviour or where of illegal drug use played a major part in their conviction in the last 12 months, i.e. stolen goods to pay for drug addiction was more than 12 months and they MUST have also demonstrated good behaviour in the community for the last 12 months.

Resolved:- That the amendments to the Allocation Policy as identified in Section 7.7 be agreed.

J121. HOUSING RENT INCREASE 2010/11

The Finance Manager presented a report setting out the proposed housing rent, garage rent and heating charge increases for 2010/11.

The national rent setting regime had been in place since 2002/03 which required all authorities to use a prescribed formula to calculate each tenant's rent and to apply annual increases to actual rents to achieve the Formula Rent. This formula for 2010/11 produced an average rent increase for Rotherham tenants of 2.91%, however, for 2010/11, the DCLG had set a national guideline rent increase of 3.1%.

The average rent for 2009/10 was £56.88 collected over 48 weeks: the proposed 2010/11 average weekly rent collected over 48 weeks would rise to £58.54, an increase of £1.66 per week.

The Garage Site Improvement Programme had received £100,000 investment in 2009/10 with substantial works having been carried out in 2008/09. It was proposed to increase the rents by 2.91% in line with the rent increase.

In accordance with a previous decision, the District Heating Strategy was a phased increase over 3 years to achieve full recovery of district heating costs thereby avoiding any shortfall being effectively funded by all Council house tenants.

It was proposed to increase the unit rate charged from 5.25 pence per kWh to 5.93 pence per kWh (an increase of 12.9%) in order to recover the costs of the District Heating Service.

It was also proposed to increase pre-payments in 2010/11 from between 5% for 3 bed properties to 15% for 2 bed properties. This was due to the unit rate increase of 12.95% and the increases having been adjusted depending on the levels of credits or debits residents had had in the previous year.

There were two district heating systems that were not part of the pooled, metered district heating schemes which were Beeversleigh and Tickhill Road. It was proposed that they were increased as per the 3 year plan previously agreed by Cabinet on 17th September 2007. The proposed charges were:-

Beversleigh	Proposed	Increase
	Charge	
One bedroom flat	£15.36	31.06%
Two bedroom flat	£17.29	30.98%

Tickhill Road

One bedroom flat	£19.42	23.30%
Three bedroom	£28.16	0%
(leasehold)		
Three bedroom (tenanted)	£22.27	0%

There was a third category of district heating, which was charged by the installation of "switch 2" card meters. These were at St Ann's and Swinton. It was proposed that the charges were increased from 3.02 pence per kWh to 3.4 pence per kWh, which amounted to an increase of 12.58% and was roughly in line with the pooled increase.

The Wardens Service was currently subject to a full service review with any potential new charges likely to be implemented in or around June, 2010. Current rates would continue until the outcomes of the review were confirmed.

It was noted that the Cabinet would consider the report at its meeting on 20th January, 2010.

Resolved:- That the Cabinet be requested to recommend to Council:-

- (1) An average rent increase of 2.91% based on the DCLG subsidy and rent proposals which result in an average increase of £1.66 to £58.54 per week when collected over 48 weeks.
- (2) That garage rents be increased by 2.91% in 2010/11.
- (3) That the unit rate for District Heating be increased from 5.25p per kWh to 5.93p per kWh (an increase of 12.95%) in order to recover the costs of the District Heating Service.
- (4) That pre-payments in 2010/11 be increased from between 5% for 3 bed properties to 15% for 2 bed properties.
- (5) That the proposed charges relating to the properties at Beeversleigh and Tickhill Road be not approved and a further report be submitted to the next meeting detailing the historical reasons for these large increases
- (6) That the current rates for the Wardens Service continue, pending the outcome of the full service review.

J122. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in those paragraphs of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

J123. NEW COUNCIL HOUSES

Richard Waller, Team Manager of the Non-Contentious Team presented the submitted report in respect of New Council Houses.

The Homes and Communities Agency had awarded the Council a grant for the construction of 36 new council houses on council land at Wood Street/School Street. In order to achieve the very tight timetable set by the HCA, the Council had been working with its selected RSL partner for the delivery of affordable housing in the Borough, Chevin Housing Association, to prepare the grant submission and was now proposing to commission Chevin and its development arm, Synergy Housing Solutions Ltd., which was responsible for the delivery of affordable housing development programme of Chevin and its seven other RSL partners, to project manage the construction of the new houses.

The overall value of the services to be provided by Chevin and Synergy would be capped at £150,000, which was below the threshold for procurement under the EU rules. For a contract of this value, Standing Orders required invitations to tender to be issued to 3-6 contractors. The Cabinet Member was therefore requested to exempt the contract for the provision of project management services from the requirements of Standing Order 48.1, which required invitations to be issued to 3-6 tenderers for contracts with an estimated value of £50,000 or more.

The HCA had awarded the Council a further grant to build 29 new Council houses at Albert Street, West Melton, following the close of the second round of bidding for grant monies. The timetable for the construction of these houses was equally tight and, in view of its work in connection with the first round of bidding for HCA grant, Chevin and Synergy were best placed to deliver the required project management services for the best price. Accordingly, the Cabinet Member was also requested to exempt the contract for the provision of project management services from the requirements of Standing Order 48.1.

Resolved:- (1) That an exemption from Standing Order 48.1 be granted and the contracts for the provision of project management services, in connection with the construction of 36 Council houses at Wood Street/School Street, Dalton, and 29 council houses at Albert Street, West Melton, be awarded to Chevin Housing Association Limited and its construction arm, Synergy Housing Solutions Ltd.

(2) That the overall contract price in respect of each contract be capped at £150,000.

(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council))

J124. HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME (HIP) 2009/10

Consideration was given to a report which set out details of the progress on the 2009/10 Housing Investment Programme (HIP) and Non HIP Capital Schemes for the period to 15th December 2009.

Resolved:- That the contents of the report be noted.

(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council))

J125. HOUSING GENERAL FUND

Consideration was given to a report which detailed the income, expenditure and net position for the Neighbourhoods department within the Neighbourhoods and Adult Services Directorate compared to the profiled budgets for the period ending 30th November 2009. It also included the projected year end outturn position which currently showed a forecast overspend of £687k (16.21% by the end of March 2010, prior to any management actions which may be implemented following the current review of the Independent Support Service.

Resolved:- That the report be received and noted.

(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council))

(THE CHAIRMAN AUTHORISED CONSIDERATION OF THE FOLLOWING ITEM TO ENABLE THE MATTER TO BE PROCESSED.)

J126. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING TO 31ST DECEMBER 2009

The Finance Manager presented the submitted report which detailed the projected outturn for the Housing Revenue Account by the end of March 2010.

Resolved:- That the report be noted and received.

(Exempt under Paragraph 3 of the Act - information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council))