

CABINET MEMBER FOR SAFE AND ATTRACTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS
2nd December, 2013

Present:- Councillor McNeely (in the Chair) and Councillor Goulty (Policy Advisor).

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Astbury.

J50. REVISION OF RMBC'S COUNCIL HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services submitted proposed revisions to the Allocations Policy to take into account the new flexibilities and opportunities offered to social housing landlords by the Localism Act 2011 and to make the system as fair as possible. The Policy also needed to be reviewed due to the size of the Housing Register and the likelihood of it increasing if no action was taken.

The proposed revisions had been considered by the Improving Places Select Commission, all Members Seminar, various stakeholders, applicants and staff. The consultation period had spanned over 1 year with the 3 key messages received being:-

- Council houses should be for people in housing need
- Rotherham Council homes should be for local people
- Council tenants with breaches in their tenancy should not be given another Council home

Full details of the proposed changes were set out in the report submitted but included:-

- Operate a Local Connection Criteria
 - A person will qualify to go on the Housing Register if they have a local connection to Rotherham for a minimum of 3 years
 - Operate a wider qualifying criteria
 - Create a Transfer Register by moving the applications from Council tenants with no tenancy breaches in the last 2 years from the current General Group into a Transfer Register
 - Create a Register of Housing Need with 3 groups
- Make changes to the advertised quota
- Amendments to the Register of Housing Need categories
 - Review applications with rent arrears and cumulative debt in accordance with the Council's Rent Policy
 - Changes to Policy and procedures in order to more effectively manage the Housing Register and encourage behaviour change
 - Cancellation of application following 2 refusals
 - Cancellation of application once applicant had agreed to major adaptation work that met their long term needs

- Unable to re-enter the Housing Register for 24 months, unless their circumstances changed, once an application had been cancelled
- Those accepted as statutory homeless who refused 1 suitable private sector/Council/RSL offer, downgraded to Band Three. On acceptance of a private rented offer, their application should be cancelled
- Encourage all new tenants to sign a Direct Debit or Standing Order to pay their rent and the right not to offer a property to those who could not afford to take on a tenancy

If approved, the Policy would be referred to the Cabinet for adoption by full Council and implementation in June, 2014. All applicants would receive a written explanation of the changes during March, 2014.

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised:-

- Emphasising to members of the public the need to only bid on those properties they were seriously interested in
- Instances where a property had been adapted for a couple but, following the death of 1 spouse, the remaining spouse was in an adapted property that was not required
- Implementation in June/July, 2014

Resolved:- (1) That the amendments to the Allocation Policy, set out in the report submitted, be approved.

(2) That the revised Allocation Policy, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report submitted, be approved.

(3) That the report be referred to Cabinet for adoption by Council.

J51. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING 2013-14

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Finance Manager, Neighbourhood and Adult Services, on the Housing Revenue Account which was forecasting an outturn on budget with a transfer to working balances (HRA reserves) of £1.845M, a reduction of £754,000 against the approved budget.

Appendix A of the report provided the Budget Operating Statement for 2013/14 showing the various income and expenditure budget lines which made up the net cost of delivering the Service. The latest forecast net cost of Service was £6.567M, together with Revenue contribution to Capital costs and interest received, would result in an overall deficit of £1.845M to be transferred from Working Balances.

Expenditure

Based upon expenditure and commitments to date, total expenditure was forecast to outturn at £73.125M compared to a budget provision of £73.090M, a decrease in spend of £35K. The main variations were:-

Contributions to Housing Repairs

- Repairs and Maintenance – Currently forecast to budget. The Empty Homes budget was difficult to forecast given it being a responsive service. At the end of Quarter 2 there had been 123 more completions than budgeted, the main reason being the impact of the Welfare Reform as more tenants requested a transfer to smaller properties. Overall forecast overspend on cyclical works offset by forecast underspends within unallocated Planned works to cover forecast overspends in responsive repairs and Empty Homes budget

Supervision and Management

- Forecast to outturn at £20.300M, overall overspend of £235k. The main reason for the variation was the transfer to the Furnished Homes reserve due to additional income as more clients used the Scheme reduced by lower than expected staff turnover and slippage on implementing the review of structures across a number of teams

Income

- Total forecast income collectable was £79.692M, an increase of £789k above budget
- Dwelling rental income was projected to over-recover by £85k as well as non-dwelling rents by £6k due to additional income from garage sites
- Income from charges for services and facilities were forecasting an outturn of £4.197M, an over-recovery of £595k mainly due to additional income on Furnished Homes due to increase in the number of clients. However, there was a forecast under-recovery of income from clients using Sheltered Neighbourhood Centres services as tenants opted out of the laundry charge and more than the anticipated level of voids on District Heating Schemes resulting in a slight under-recovery of income
- Other fees and charges were forecasting an over-recovery of income of £102k related to additional unbudgeted income in respect of the sale of tenants contents insurance, recovery of Court costs, income from second hand furniture and income from utility companies for the use of solar panels

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- The impact of the Bedroom Tax
- The number of tenants that had been in debt prior to the Bedroom Tax

Resolved:- That the latest financial projection against budget for 2013/14 be noted.

J52. NEIGHBOURHOODS GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2013-14

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Finance Manager in relation to the budget monitoring and financial forecast for the Neighbourhoods General Fund within the Neighbourhoods and Adult Services Directorate to 31st March, 2014, based on actual income and expenditure for the period ending October, 2013.

The latest forecast showed an overall underspend of £93,000 against an approved net revenue budget of £2.463M as follows:-

Strategic Housing and Investment Service (+£11k)

- Small shortfall on the staffing budget

Housing Options (-£44k)

- Projected underspend on the Dispersed Units' Trading Account which would be requested as an earmarked balance to be carried forward at year end to support ongoing refurbishment programme for the units
- Small surplus within Private Sector Adaptations Service due to increased fee income and a projected overspend on Key Choices Property Management Service as a result of lower than anticipated income

Housing and Communities (-£44k)

- Projected underspends within Area Assemblies and Supplies and Services as a result of the moratorium on non-essential spend
- Small overspend on Anti-Social Behaviour due to lower than expected staff turnover together with underspend on Community Safety Unit as a result of a recent vacancy
- Underspend within Community Leadership Fund

Central (-£9k)

- Small underspend due to savings on Supplies and Services

Business Regulation (-£18k)

- Pressures on staffing costs within Health and Safety, Food and Drugs and Animal Health budgets
- Offset by additional income from Dignity contract and savings within Trading Standards due to vacant posts

Safer Neighbourhoods (-4k)

- Savings within Community Protection through vacancy management and moratorium on non-essential spend
- Pressure on income due to reduced Environmental Protection Act applications
- Essential health and safety work on landfill sites

To date there had been no spend on Agency or Consultancy within Neighbourhoods' General Fund budgets but there had been minor expenditure (£200) on non-contractual overtime within Safer Neighbourhoods for weekend enforcement of the removal of travellers from a Town Centre site.

Resolved:- That the report be received and the latest financial projection against budget for 2013/14 noted.

J53. 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 Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council)).

J54. EXTERNAL WORKS TO 171 COUNCIL DWELLINGS - MALTBY

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods reported on the tender process undertaken for external works to 171 properties in Maltby.

The tender had been offered to the market via an established EU compliant construction framework agreement YORBuild. Price submissions had been evaluated and checked.

The works were expected to take 20 weeks and would start on site in January, 2014.

Resolved:- (1) That the tender submitted by Hall Construction Group, dated 4th November, 2013, in the sum of £1,142,772.55, for the delivery of the re-pointing and re-rendering work to 171 properties at Maltby, be approved.

(2) That any owner-occupiers within the scheme be offered the opportunity to participate in the works at their own expense.

J55. EXTERNAL WORKS TO 261 COUNCIL DWELLINGS - WATH UPON DEARNE

The Director of Housing and Neighbourhoods reported on the tender process undertaken for external works to 261 properties in Wath upon Dearne.

The tender had been offered to the market via an established EU compliant construction framework agreement YORBuild. Price submissions had been evaluated and checked.

The works were expected to take 20 weeks and would commence on site in January, 2014.

Resolved:- (1) That the tender submitted by Hall Construction Group, dated 4th November, 2013, in the sum of £1,664,350.78, for the upgrading of insulation, pointing, render and roof works to 261 properties at Wath upon Dearne, be approved.

(2) That any owner-occupiers within the scheme be offered the opportunity to participate in the works at their own expense.

(3) That the Council, in partnership with Hall Construction, pursue ECO funding for carbon savings as a result of the works and that funding secured be returned to the Housing Revenue Account as a budget saving.