

CABINET MEMBER FOR SAFE AND ATTRACTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS
14th July, 2014

Present:- Councillor McNeely (in the Chair); Councillors Godfrey and Roddison.

J18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

No Declarations of Interest were made.

J19. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 16TH JUNE 2014

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods held on 16th June, 2014, were considered.

Resolved: - That the minutes be agreed as an accurate record.

J20. NEIGHBOURHOODS GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2014/15

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Neighbourhood and Adult Services Finance Manager (Business Partnering, Financial Services, Resources Directorate) that provided a forecast to the end of the 2014/2015 financial year based on actual income and expenditure to the end of May, 2014.

The forecast to the end of the 2014/2015 financial year was an underspend of £113, 000 against the approved net revenue budget of £583,000. This represented a variation of -19.38% of the total budget.

A summary was provided in relation to the Service headings regarding the main areas of variance.

Discussion ensued on the information reported.

Resolved: - (1) That the forecast to the end of the 2014/2015 financial year, based on actual income and expenditure to 31st May, 2014, be noted.

(2) That further reports be presented to the Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods relating to the 2014/2015 financial year forecast.

J21. AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS EXTENSION AND POLICY REVIEW

Consideration was given to the report and appendices presented by the Director for Housing and Neighbourhoods (Neighbourhood and Adult Services Directorate) that outlined proposed changes to the Council's Aids and Adaptations Extension policy. This had been prompted by customer complaints regarding the maximum mandatory amount of the

Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), a grant limit that was set by Central Government.

The report noted that the Adoptions Service had eradicated their backlog and had reduced the time taken from receiving a request to approving it to less than four weeks. The team were seeking to further improve by reducing contractor turn-around times and re-assessing the way extensions were recommended and approved.

In addition, the Aids and Adaptations Policy (2011) had been revised to comply with Occupational Therapy guidelines.

A number of customer, Councillor and MP enquiries in recent months had related to the amount of funding available under the DFG, at a time of increasing costs of labours and materials but a static £30,000 DFG. This often left a short-fall for customers to pay. Whilst every effort was made to minimise costs, it was still common for the grant limit to be exceeded.

Data for the last five years was considered that showed the average costs of extensions. Eight bedroom and bathroom extensions took place over this period, and seven cost above the £30,000 threshold.

The Local Authority had the option to apply Additional Discretionary Funding if they wished to under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act (1996). There was no upper limit to the increase above the statutory £30,000. However, there was no legal obligation to provide additional funding.

It was suggested that Rotherham apply an Additional Discretionary Funding amount of £5,000 that would be agreed under the delegated powers of the Director for Housing and Neighbourhoods Services. There was no additional funding to cover this, and costs would be met from the same budget that the Disabled Facilities Grant came from.

It was also proposed that the Additional Discretionary Funding be offered as a last resort following a number of criteria being met. These criteria would be: -

- The extension was absolutely necessary and no alternative adaptions could adequately meet the customer's needs;
- There were no alternative ways the extension could be built to cut the cost of works;
- A minimum of three quotations must be received to ensure the best possible price;
- The implications within the policy for people who under-occupied their homes;
- Rehousing could not be offered within a six-month period from the date of applications.

Cost saving strategies were outlined in the submitted report: -

- Reduce fees on all extensions – not recommended;
- Only approve extensions on properties that do not have a second ground floor room (i.e. dining room) that can be utilised;
- Promoting re-housing as an alternative to an extension;
- Possibility of adapting a void to adequately meet customer's needs instead of extending their current property (required more research);
- Utilising the Specialist Equipment Budget to fund specialist baths required as well as extensions;
- Applying a legal charge on privately owned properties.

Discussion ensued and the following issues were raised: -

- Ensuring that a balance of reasonableness and fairness was met for families in the current context of reducing resources and increasing demand;
- Demographically there was an ageing population but resources were not keeping pace with needs;
- The importance of utilising existing adapted properties that were void before making new adaptions.

Resolved: - (1) That the grant limit of £30,000 remain the same for the next six-months.

(2) That approved extensions that cost above the grant limit of £30,000 only receive Additional Discretionary Funding if no alternative solution could be offered. Additional Discretionary Funding would be an additional £5,000 to make a maximum contribution of £35,000.

(3) That the Aids and Adaptations Policy be amended as detailed in the submitted report and appendices to reduce the number of extensions recommended, and a review of the effectiveness of the change be undertaken in twelve months' time.

(4) That the recommended cost savings as outlined in the submitted report be accepted.

(5) That the proposed amendments outlined in the submitted report to the Adaptations Policy be adopted into the new Adaptations Policy.

J22. REVISED HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2014/15

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Business and Commercial Programme Manager (Housing and Neighbourhood Services, Neighbourhood and Adult Services Directorate). The report provided an update on revisions to the Housing Investment Programme for 2014/2015.

The Capital Programme ended 2016/2017 but was regularly reviewed to ensure that the policy was aligned with strategic priorities and vision for Rotherham.

The report contained a table that showed the current budget allocation for 2014/2015 and a revised 2014/2015 budget proposal.

The Business and Commercial Programme Manager discussed the areas of variance and the reasons for the changes.

Resolved: - That the revisions to the Housing Investment Programme, 2014/2015, be approved as contained in the submitted report.

J23. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE (HOUSING LAND)

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Director for Housing and Neighbourhoods that outlined the arrangements for grounds maintenance of Council administered land as financed by the Council's General Fund. The current pressure on the General Fund had led to a reduced service offer and periods in-between grassing cutting lengthened with subsequent impacts on communities and, in particular, vulnerable people. The report outlined a proposal to enhance the Borough-wide approach to grounds maintenance for council housing areas and funds provided for a limited period from the Housing Revenue Account.

The report detailed how the increased length in-between grass cutting had impacted on communities, and particularly those that lived in shared complexes, blocks of flats and estates where green spaces had been incorporated as quality amenity areas.

Two proposals were made: -

- Increase the frequency of grass-cutting to **aged-persons' complexes** from 5 cuts to 10 cuts. A financial contribution of £50,000 would be required from the Housing Revenue Account in 2014/2015.
- Increase the frequency of grass-cutting to **general housing land** from 5 cuts to 10 cuts. A financial contribution of £236,231 would be required from the Housing Revenue Account in 2014/2015.

These proposals were made for the remainder of 2014/2015 and for 2015/2016. Further consideration would be made for the availability of budget for 2016/2017 onwards.

Resolved: - (1) That the Borough-wide approach to grounds maintenance for housing land be enhanced as outlined in the submitted report to an annual cost of £286, 000 from the Housing Revenue Account for the 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 Financial years.

(2) That a review be undertaken to consider the appropriateness of continuing this service beyond 2015/2016.

(3) That a further report on the opportunities to undertake environmental improvements in respect of shrub and flower beds for 2015/2016 be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods.

J24. REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES 2014-15

Resolved: - (1) That the following appointments of representatives on Outside Bodies for the 2014/2015 Municipal Year: -

- Rotherham Licence Watch Steering Group – Councillor Dalton, Chair of the Licensing Board;
- South Yorkshire Trading Standards Committee – Councillor McNeely, Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods and Councillor Wyatt, Cabinet Member for Finance;
- Environmental Protection UK Yorkshire and Humberside Division – Four representatives from the Improving Places Select Commission;
- Warm Homes – Cabinet Member TBC;
- Women's Refuge – One representative from the Improving Places Select Commission;
- Sheffield City Region Housing and Regeneration Board – Councillor McNeely, Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods.

(2) That no appointment be made to the Yorkshire and Humberside Pollution Advisory Council as the organisation was in the process of closing.

J25. INSTALLATION OF WOOD BURNING STOVES OR OTHER SOLID FUEL APPLIANCES IN COUNCIL PROPERTIES.

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Director for Housing and Neighbourhood Services that outlined a proposed policy in respect of the installation of wood burning stoves or other solid fuel appliances in Council properties.

The report outlined the potential benefits of wood burning stoves and other types of solid fuel appliance concerning their cost effectiveness and ability to meet the requirements of the Clean Air Act, 1993, considerations relating to carbon monoxide and the cost-benefits consideration of savings against gas bills.

The report outlined the roles and responsibility of the Council as landlord in Council properties if wood burning stoves or other solid fuel appliances were installed. The Council would be responsible for health and safety risks, structural risks to the property if any alterations were undertaken and not done properly, maintenance risk, enforcement risk and potential nuisance risk.

A very small number of appliances had been installed in Council-owned properties through a pilot scheme.

Resolved: - That the Council's policy would be to decline applications for Tenant alterations relating to the installation of wood burning stoves and other solid fuel appliances in Council properties.

J26. 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.

J27. INTRODUCTORY TENANCY REVIEW PANEL

It was noted that an Introductory Tenancy Review Panel had been held on 25th April, 2014, comprising Councillors Pitchley (in the Chair), Buckley and Tweed to review a decision to terminate an Introductory Tenancy.

The decision made by the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer to serve a Notice of Proceedings of Possession on 19th May, 2014, was confirmed by the Panel.

(Exempt under Paragraph 2 of the Act – information likely to reveal the identity of an individual)

J28. STAGE 3 COMPLAINT

It was noted that a Stage Three Complaint had been heard on 23rd June, 2014, by Councillors Ellis (in the Chair), Beaumont and Whysall.

The Panel did not uphold the complaints made by Mr. S.

(Exempt under Paragraph 2 of the Act – information likely to reveal the identity of an individual)

J29. LITTLE LONDON, MALTBY - RESPONSE TO RESIDENT PETITION.

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services that related to the investigations that had taken place following receipt of a petition relating to Little London, Maltby (Minute No. J2 of 16th June, 2014, refers).

The report outlined the options that were available in response to concerns of local residents and the petitioners relating to the condition of the Little London area.

Resolved: - (1) That the work that is being undertaken to tackle the issue of decline in Little London be acknowledged.

(2) That the local Ward Councillors be informed about the work being undertaken.

(3) That a letter be sent to the Lead Petitioner to inform them of the work being undertaken.

(4) That an update report be brought to the Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods in six months' time outlining the progress made against decline in Little London.

(Exempt under Paragraph 2 and 3 of the Act – information likely to reveal the identity of an individual and financial and business affairs)