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MEETING	DECISION SESSION - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING & ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES
DATE	27 OCTOBER 2009
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS MORLEY (EXECUTIVE MEMBER)
IN ATTENDANCE	COUNCILLOR T SIMPSON-LAING

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## 5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Executive Member was invited to declare at this point in the meeting any personal or prejudicial interests he might have in the business on the agenda. No interests were declared.

## 6. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Decision Session - Executive Member & Adult Social Services held on 23 June 2009 be approved and signed by the Executive Member as a correct record.

## 7. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - DECISION SESSION

Councillor Simpson-Laing had registered to speak on agenda items 4, 5 and 6. She also commented on the minutes from the previous meeting and thanked officers for the report on the Progress on the Improvement Plans for Adult Social Services and she looked forward to receiving the next update.

Regarding agenda item 4 (Former Tenant Arrears – Write Off) Councillor Simpson-Laing suggested officers:

- Include a case study on former tenant arrears in the next report.
- Liaise with the private sector to compare how they chase arrears.
- Include the total numbers at the end of six months and the total owed in future reports.

Regarding agenda item 5 (Local Authority Challenge – Building New Council Houses) she commented on the possible funding bids discussed at a meeting with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and sought clarification on the mix of rented and low cost homes for sale.

Regarding agenda item 6 (Consultation Response – Reform of Council Housing Finance) she felt officers could go into more detail when answering question 4 in annex 1 and suggested officers state that homes should meet environmental standards such as cavity wall insulation.

## **8. FORMER TENANT ARREARS - WRITE OFF**

The Executive Member considered a report which sought agreement to write off a number of former tenants arrears.

Officers responded to Councillor Simpson-Laing's comments and informed the Executive Member that:

- case studies could be included in future reports but would need to be sufficiently anonymised and officers felt this may be more appropriate to go to the Economic & City Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee, if requested by Scrutiny.
- the total account figures were raised at the Economic & City Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Officers stated that it could be difficult to give a true comparison of the total debt levels until year-end due to reasons such as free rent periods over Christmas.
- officers do contact tenants who are in 3 weeks arrears but that the court process could take between 6 to 8 months. Officers do try to limit high debt and the overall list had been reduced which was sending out a positive message.

The Executive Member was informed that currently officer's delegated powers were restricted to writing off debts of £2000 or less and currently there were 8 accounts in excess of £2000.

The Executive Member felt this was a very positive picture on balance and had no reason for concern.

RESOLVED: (i) That the Executive Member approves option B which involves writing off Former Tenant Arrears of £20,719.28 as detailed in Annex A.

Reason: This is in line with the recommendations of the audit report detailed in paragraph 1 and also for the financial implications listed above.

## **9. LOCAL AUTHORITY CHALLENGE - BUILDING NEW COUNCIL HOUSES**

The Executive Member consider a report that sought his support for a bid to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) for a grant to build approximately 18 new family council houses on the land off Lilbourne Drive and for the submission of the bid to be delegated to the Director of Housing and Adult Social Services.

Officers responded to Councillor Simpson-Laing's comments and informed the Executive Member that the funding mentioned at the HCA meeting was related to a different funding pot. Properties at Lilbourne Drive would be for rent.

Officers stated that the land was owned by the Housing Revenue Account and a feasibility study had been taken which had resulted in the potential new homes rising from 18 to 21. This would include 9 two bedroom houses and 12 three bedroom houses.

Officers had discussed the site with Local Ward Councillors and the responses received were in support of the bid and it was agreed that it would bring a significant benefit in providing much needed affordable family homes.

Officers informed the Executive Member that the homes would be built to code for sustainable homes level 5 i.e. higher levels of energy conservation and successful bids would be announced in December 2009.

The Executive Member welcomed the report and the increase of homes to be provided and felt the site would be suitable for this development.

RESOLVED: (i) That the Executive Member approves a bid for HCA funding to develop the site proposed in this report for affordable housing. (Option 1)

(ii) That the Director of Housing and Adult Social Services be given delegated authority to submit the final bid.

Reason: To enable the council to reduce the gap between affordable housing need/demand and supply.

#### **10. URGENT BUSINESS - CONSULTATION RESPONSE - REFORM OF COUNCIL HOUSING FINANCE**

The Executive Member considered a report which informed him that the Government was consulting on a proposal to dismantle the current Housing Revenue Account subsidy system and replace it with a devolved system of self financing for all local authorities. The system would depend on a national reallocation of housing debt, after which councils will be able to retain all their rental income and capital receipts.

Officers stated that until the outcome of the consultation and the detail involved were announced they were unable to assess the financial impact it would have on the business plan.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Member agrees that Annex 1 of the report be submitted as the council's response to the government's consultation paper.

Reason: In order that the Council is able to contribute towards the consultation exercise.

Councillor Morley, Executive Member  
[The meeting started at 4.00 pm and finished at 4.30 pm].