

Meeting	Decision Session - Executive Leader (incorporating Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods)
Date	23 January 2017
Present	Councillor Carr (Executive Leader)

17. Declarations of Interest

At this point in the meeting the Executive Leader was asked to declare if he had any personal prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interest in the business on the agenda. He declared he had none.

18. Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved: That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of annexes to Agenda Item 9 (Affordable Housing Commuted Sum Dispute) on the grounds that they are classed as exempt under paragraphs 3 and 5 respectively of Schedule 12A to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as revised by The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

19. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the Decision Session held on 17 October 2016 be approved and then signed by the Executive Leader as a correct record.

20. Public Participation

It was reported that there were no registrations to speak under the Councils Public Participation Scheme.

21. 2016/17 Tenant Satisfaction Survey Results

The Executive Leader considered a report that highlighted the outcomes of the 2016/17 annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey which was the biggest single gauge of satisfaction across landlord services by tenants of council owned housing stock. Officers gave an update and confirmed the survey had taken place between September and November 2016 and was primarily carried out by post. The number of questions asked in the survey had been reduced from 44 to 25 and it was sent to 2800 tenants generating a 23% response rate.

Officers discussed the analysis and confirmed:

- the 2016/17 results were statistically significant to within +/- 3.69%.
- it was not possible to compare City of York Council's performance with other providers until later in 2017 due to the time lag in data collection and analysis.
- satisfaction had increased across four of the six Housemark core questions.
- satisfaction regarding complaints had decreased in all areas.
- satisfaction within the four housing themes Your Property, Your Place, Your Service and Your Say had generally improved in most areas with a significant increase in the availability of storage space.
- the Estate Improvement Grant would be allocated in April 2017 and would bring a range of changes including a renewed focus on targeting ward priorities identified through the survey.
- the results would be used to inform a restructure of housing services which would move towards a new staffing model to address tenants preference to have a single clear point of contact within housing services.

In answer to the Executive Leaders questions and concerns regarding the decline in satisfaction within complaints handling, officers confirmed they would be investigating the issues raised with the Customer Complaints and Feedback Team.

The Executive Leader thanked officers for their update.

Resolved:

- (i) That the results of the 2016/17 Tenant Satisfaction Survey be considered and that the officer comments regarding future actions be noted.
- (ii) That an update report highlighting the actions taken to improve the process of making a complaint be brought to a future Executive Leader (incorporating Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods) Decision Session.
- (iii) That a Tenant Satisfaction Survey for 2017/18 be agreed.

Reason: To ensure that City of York Council had up to date information regarding customer satisfaction, enabling landlord and building services to target resources and improvements to those services prioritised by customers, and to feed into the annual Housemark benchmarking return.

22. Sheltered Housing: Be Independent Charges

The Executive Leader considered a report that provided an update on the background and current situation with regard to the subsidy provided to Council sheltered housing tenants of the Be Independent service.

Officers gave an update and confirmed the proposal to remove the current blanket subsidy to tenants in Council sheltered housing and instead adopt a means tested approach, that was currently used in all other tenures, would achieve a more equitable position. They explained that Be Independent offered an out of hours emergency response service to customers in sheltered housing at a reduced charge of £4.30 per week compared to £7.00 per week in a general needs property.

In answer to the Executive Leaders questions officers confirmed:

- customers on a low income would receive financial support to cover the cost of this service which was in line with customers in other tenure types.

- consultation with tenants would be undertaken and would include site visits where 1-1 meetings would be offered to any tenants affected in order to discuss their financial circumstances and identify any impact or concerns.

The Executive Leader thanked officers for their report and noted that the charges were in line with general needs council housing and other sheltered housing properties.

Resolved: That the proposal to charge customers in sheltered housing schemes for using the Be Independent service be approved.

Reason: This will create an equitable position where all customers receive a subsidy based on an assessment of means, rather than some customers receiving a subsidy as a result of the type of housing they live in.

23. The Future of Customer Focussed and Sustainable Housing Management in Sheltered Housing.

The Executive Leader considered a report that provided an update on the way in which tenants in sheltered housing and sheltered with care housing would be affected by the proposed housing re-structure.

Officers gave an update and confirmed there were 11 sheltered housing and sheltered with care schemes in York that provided self contained accommodation with access to communal areas and an element of on site staffing. They explained the variety of schemes available to tenants that provided safe, appropriate and sustainable homes for those who needed supported housing.

The Executive Leader noted that currently 7 sheltered housing schemes had an housing officer on site for 24 hours per week and the proposal to reduce the hours at Barstow House and Gale Farm Court, to bring them in line with other sheltered housing schemes, would provide a holistic housing management service with continued regular welfare checks and emergency response.

In order to support the new approach officers explained how an Active Communities Officer role would be created. This role would develop volunteering, community activity and community cohesion across the housing stock with particular reference to sheltered housing schemes. The Executive Leader agreed this new role would

benefit tenants and would actively involve local people to reduce social isolation and develop strong communities.

In answer to the Executive Leaders questions officers confirmed they would write to and consult with all tenants as a group or individually to ensure they were aware of and understood the new arrangements.
Resolved:

- (i) That the proposal for providing housing management services to tenants in sheltered housing as part of a re-focussed housing landlord service be approved.
- (ii) That following appropriate consultation with tenants, the on site service provision in Gale Farm Court and Barstow House be changed to bring them in line with other sheltered housing schemes.

Reason: To bring these schemes in line with the other sheltered schemes and support the proposals to restructure the landlord service.

24. Replacement of the Estate Improvement Grant with the Housing Environmental Improvement Programme

The Executive Leader considered a report that sought approval to replace the existing Estate Improvement Grant (EIG) Scheme and introduce a Housing Environmental Improvement Programme (HEIP) that would continue to directly benefit council tenants by improving housing assets. It was noted that added value would be achieved by blending the use of the Housing Revenue Account money with that of the ward monies, and increase the engagement with ward committees.

Officers gave an update and confirmed that over the last 25 years the Estate Improvement Grant had been offered every year to the Residents Associations (RA's) within council housing areas. With it being an annual allocation the amount of funding available to tackle significant issues such as parking and storage had been restricted. The RA's sought views of tenants annually to determine what improvements the funding would provide and the Executive Leader noted the various estate improvement schemes the EIG had funded including those that were not necessarily strategic or were unachievable due to insufficient funds.

Officers stated that the tenancies in council estates had fallen over the years due to the right to buy schemes resulting in mixed tenure estates. Given that the EIG budget had to demonstrably benefit councils tenants this had become more difficult to justify with the rise of privately owned homes. They clarified that under the new proposals the HEIP funding would be allocated on a 4 year basis, across all wards, with the final decisions being made by the HEIP panel which would include ward councillors, officers, interested tenants/residents and resident association representatives. The £30,000 currently allocated to the federation would continue to be prioritised by the federation. It was noted that this approach would allow the potential to combine ward and HEIP funding streams to enable larger schemes to be delivered that would have a more significant impact on the estates and allow the funding to benefit tenants and residents.

In answer to the Executive Leaders questions officers confirmed:

- the development of larger schemes in mixed tenure estates would be split between the HEIP and other ward based funding or grant bids.
- they had consulted with the Federation of Tenant and Residents Association.
- the consultation did not bring up any substantive objections but some residents groups did show some dissatisfaction to aspects of the new proposals, however, they understood the new approach would still give them the opportunity to feed into potential schemes at ward committees.
- the Communities and Equalities team would support Ward Councillors through the new proposals.

The Executive Member noted that the new approach was more democratic, more flexible and more sustainable which would make a tangible difference in some areas.

Resolved: That the Housing Environmental Improvement Programme (Annex A of the report) and spending criteria (Annex B of the report) from April 2017 be agreed.

Reason: This scheme takes a more strategic approach to environmental improvements, it is less bureaucratic, can combine with other funding schemes to provide better schemes that reflect the needs across the whole council stock.

25. Affordable Housing Commuted Sum Dispute

The Executive Leader considered a report that provided an update on a legal matter between the council and a developer regarding the obligation to pay a commuted sum in lieu of onsite affordable housing.

Resolved:

- (i) That the proposals to pursue legal action against the developer as necessary, including arrangements for the Assistant Director of Housing and Community Safety, in consultation with the Assistant Director of Legal & Governance to apply delegated powers to reach a final negotiation within the best interests of the Council be endorsed.
- (ii) That officers proceed to negotiate a settlement within the best possible interest of the Council for this long running dispute subject to the further formal approval of the Executive Leader (incorporating Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods) and that the final settlement figure be formally presented at a future Executive Leader (incorporating Housing & Safer Neighbourhoods) Decision Session.

Reason: To protect the authority's position in relation to developers honouring their obligations under Section 106 Agreements and ensure the authority maximises its position regarding commuted sums.

Cllr Carr, Executive Leader

[The meeting started at 3.05 pm and finished at 3.55 pm].