
MEETING	EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING & ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES ADVISORY PANEL
DATE	16 MARCH 2009
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS MORLEY (CHAIR), BOWGETT (VICE-CHAIR), SUE GALLOWAY (EXECUTIVE MEMBER), HYMAN, SIMPSON-LAING, WISEMAN, MCLAUGHLIN (NON-VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBER) AND GUMLEY (NON-VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBER)
APOLOGIES	COUNCILLORS HORTON, TAYLOR AND FUNNELL (AS SUBSTITUTE FOR CLLR HORTON)

53. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were invited to declare at this point in the meeting any personal or prejudicial interests they might have in the business on the agenda.

Councillor Morley declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 8, Changes to the Grants and Assistance Policy, as a landlord in York.

54. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That the Press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Annex 1 to agenda item 10 (External Painting and Associated Repairs Contract) (Minute 62 refers) on the grounds that it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information), which is classed as exempt under Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Section 100A of the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

55. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2009 be approved and signed by the Chair and Executive Member as a correct record.

56. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

57. 2008/9 SERVICE PLANS AND BUDGET 3RD MONITOR REPORT

Members considered a report advising them of progress against the service plan targets for Housing and Adult Social Services and the projected financial outturns for 2008/9 based on data as at the end of December 2008.

The Director of Housing and Adult Social Services asked Members to note that Housing Services in York had received an excellent rating in the recent CPA by the Audit Commission.

The Director informed Members that in the difficult economic downturn there was more pressure on people's incomes, and this had an effect with regard to arrears. He stated, with reference to paragraph 5 of the report, that there had been a reduction by over a third in the number of homeless acceptances. He also noted that there had been a successful joint bid with Children's Services to give more support to young parents that was bringing in £350k. It was reported that the Discus bungalow scheme had begun and that there had been a lot of support needed to make this happen. The Director stated that with regard to Adult Social Services that there had been a definite improvement against the plan. He also reported that the Handy Person Scheme and Sign Posting and Advice Scheme had been commissioned. With regard to the financial overview, the Director reported that this was stable and that the Housing General Fund was where it ought to be and that there was a small underspend predicted on social care.

Members then made comments and asked questions to which Officers responded.

- The Home Care Project Board. Officers confirmed that this had ended and that the project was now in the implementation stage with continuation of the newsletter, the continued engagement of staff, and keeping UNISON informed. Officers also confirmed that the quarterly meetings of the HASS JCC were another means of keeping the staff informed.
- With regard to rent arrears referred to on page 19 of the agenda, Officers confirmed that follow-up would begin in the second week and that with the economic downturn a key priority was early intervention. The Executive Member confirmed that as part of the Kingsway Project, 29 families had been identified with serious rent arrears and that the Economic Development Unit was working on a pilot on indebtedness based on the Leeds model. If this proved to be successful it would then be rolled out across the city.
- Mobile working solution. Officers confirmed that staff working in the field had mini laptops and had 'real time' access to the system for information.
- The Executive Member commented that it was pleasing to see the reductions achieved in sickness absence.

Advice of the Advisory Panel

That the Executive Member be advised to note and comment on the content of this report

Decision of the Executive Member

RESOLVED: That the advice of the Advisory Panel be accepted and endorsed.

REASON: So that the Executive Member is briefed on the projected performance and financial outturns for Housing & Adult Social Services.

58. HOUSING AND ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES CAPITAL PROGRAMME – MONITOR 3

Members received a report informing them of the likely outturn position of the 2008/09 Capital Programme based on the spend profile and information to January 2009 and sought approval to any resulting changes to the programme. The report also informed the Executive Member of any slippage and sought approval for the associated funding to be moved between the relevant financial years to reflect this.

Officers highlighted paragraphs 6 and 7 of the report and asked Members to note the net decrease of £172,000 and table 2 on page 51 of the agenda document.

Advice of the Advisory Panel

That the Executive Member be advised to note the progress on schemes and approve the variations listed in the report under paragraph 7.

Decision of the Executive Member

RESOLVED: That the advice of the Advisory Panel be accepted and endorsed.

REASON: To enable effective management and monitoring of the Council's capital programme.

59. FORMER TENANTS ARREARS – WRITE OFF

Members received a report seeking their agreement to write off a number of former tenants arrears (FTAs).

Officers stated that this was a regular six-monthly report and a requirement of the District Audit Commission in the management of the Housing Revenue Account. Members were asked to approve Option 2.

The report presented the following options for consideration:

- (i) Option 1: Maintain these FTAs on accounts. This would lead to an increase in the bad debt provision and would go against good practice as commented on in the Housing Inspectors report of October 2002.
- (ii) Option 2: Write the debts off on the understanding that if necessary they can be reinstated at a later date.

In answer to questions from Members, Officer confirmed that some of the debts were quite old, and that efforts had been exerted to trace the individuals but where no trace had been possible, then the Experion System had been used. Officers also confirmed that former tenants who had gone to prison with housing debts would not be considered for housing without re-instating the debt.

The Executive Member asked for feedback on the Kingsway West Area scheme before it was rolled out.

Advice of the Advisory Panel

That the Executive Member be advised to approve Option 2, which involves writing off FTAs of £59,624.11 as detailed in Annex A.

Decision of the Executive Member

RESOLVED: That the advice of the Advisory Panel be accepted and endorsed.

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

60. CHANGES TO THE GRANTS AND ASSISTANCE POLICY

Members considered a report outlining the proposed key changes to the Grants and Assistance Policy to take account of the findings of the private stock condition survey. The report was a response to the challenges identified in the new Private Sector Housing Strategy agreed by EMAP on 8th December 2008.

The report presented 2 options for consideration:

- (i) Option 1 – Will deliver a new assistance programme which is aligned with the new Private Sector Strategy and which aims to make best use of resources by recycling more money into future investment programmes whilst recognising that the council should continue to provide a safety net for the most vulnerable residents.

- (ii) Option 2 – Will result in the council not having clear policies based on the new evidence base and will not contribute to the agreed five strategic aims.

Members then raised questions about the policy.

On the question of HMOS, referred to on page 63 of the agenda, paragraph iii) a, Officers confirmed that about 400 had been registered and that they were halfway through the 5-year programme. With regard to Home Safety Loans, Officers agreed that it was the owner's responsibility to bring the property up to standard, that in very rare cases private tenants might do these repairs and that something was needed in the policy with regard to this. Concerns were expressed by Members about sub-standard private accommodation and Officers responded that these complaints could be investigated using current housing legislation. Officers confirmed that strict vetting procedures were carried out prior to a loan being made. Officers confirmed that work was underway with Credit Unions to help open up channels for potential lenders. With regard to the paragraph on Exceptional Circumstances on page 79 of the agenda, Officers agreed to include in the introduction the additional wording that: 'where someone is not in receipt of benefit, but cannot access commercial loans...'

Officers confirmed that publicity on the changes and the policy would be effective immediately and that this would emphasise that the change was from a grant to a loan that would potentially enable the money to be recycled to support future loans.

Advice of the Advisory Panel

That the Executive Member be advised to approve Option 1 in the report and the new assistance policy including the provision that monies are recycled back into the future investment programmes for the private sector and adaptations.

Decision of the Executive Member

RESOLVED: That the advice of the Advisory Panel be accepted and endorsed.

REASON: To ensure that the new assistance policy contributes to the five strategic aims of the Private Housing Strategy 2008-2013.

61. SERVICE PLANS 2009-2012

Members considered a report seeking the Executive Member's approval of the service plans for Housing and Adult Social Services covering the period 2009-2012.

The Director of Housing and Adult Social Services introduced the report, which covered the plans for the next three years. By way of

exemplification, he referred Members to the Housing General Fund Annex D, which detailed the Service, the Drivers, or influences that had to be factored in and the Critical Success Factors. He explained that this document would then be used in developing more detailed team plans.

The Executive Member thanked Officers for their work and the time spent on the Service Plans.

Advice of the Advisory Panel

That the Executive Member be advised to endorse and approve the service plans for Housing and Adult Social Services.

Decision of the Executive Member

RESOLVED: That the advice of the Advisory Panel be accepted and endorsed.

REASON: So that the Council's corporate and departmental objectives can be achieved.

62. EXTERNAL PAINTING AND ASSOCIATED REPAIRS CONTRACT APRIL 2009 - OCTOBER 2011

Members considered a report seeking approval to appoint four contractors to the External Painting and Associated Repairs Contract for a 3 year period with the option to extend for a further 2 years.

The report presented 2 options for consideration:

- (i) Option 1 – To appoint the four highest ranked contractors under the MEAT (Most Economically Advantageous Tender) process.
- (ii) Option 2 – To appoint the four cheapest bidders

Officers introduced the report and process, which they stated had followed procurement protocol. Following questions from Members, Officers explained that the assessment process was ranked on price and quality and the reference process was backed up by proof and evidence.

The Non-Voting Co-opted Members of the panel commented that they were pleased with recent painting work undertaken on their Council properties and stated that this had stood the test of time.

On behalf of the Panel Members, the Chair thanked the Non-voting Co-opted Members for their involvement with the Advisory Panel.

Advice of the Advisory Panel

That the Executive Member be advised to approve Option 1 “to appoint the four highest ranked contractors under the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) process”.

Decision of the Executive Member

RESOLVED: That the advice of the Advisory Panel be accepted and endorsed.

REASON: In order to provide quality workmanship and organisation in a contract which is specifically aimed at achieving a full lifecycle for the timber doors and windows in its stock.

Councillor Sue Galloway, Executive Member

Councillor J Morley, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.00 pm and finished at 5.55 pm].

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