

Item 16 on agenda

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING CABINET MEMBER MEETING

4.00PM, 4 JUNE 2008

ROOM ONE HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Caulfield, Cabinet Member for Housing.

Also in attendance:

Cabinet Member: Councillor Mears, Leader.

Other Members: Councillors; Simpson (Opposition Spokesperson), Elgood, Morgan and Wrighton.

PART ONE

1 PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

1a Declarations of Interests

1a.1 There were none.

1b Exclusion of Press and Public

1b.1 The Committee considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A, Part 5A, Section 100A(4) or 100 1 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

1b.2 **RESOLVED** - That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

2.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Strategy & Governance concerning the Terms of Reference of the Housing Cabinet Member Meeting (for copy see minute book).

2.2 **RESOLVED** – That the Terms of Reference be noted.

3 MINUTES

- 3.1 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Committee held on 27 March 2008 be noted
- 3.2 In response to questions from the Opposition Spokesperson the Cabinet Member explained that written reports on the Housing Green Paper and the Procurement Strategy would be considered by both the Housing Management Consultative Committee and the Housing Cabinet Member meeting in due course.
- 3.3 Cabinet Member was aware of issues being discussed in the press and local community about Sheltered Housing. Formal feedback from the Sheltered Housing Focus Group and related matters would be considered by the appropriate body in due course.

4 CABINET MEMBER'S COMMUNICATIONS

- 4.1 Cabinet Member welcomed everyone to the inaugural Housing Cabinet Member Meeting introducing officers and members.
- 4.2 Cabinet Member noted that the agenda for the first meeting was slight as it was planned that everyone could take the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the new arrangements.
- 4.3 Cabinet Member noted that housing would remain client focussed, with tenants at the heart of housing management.

5 ITEMS RESERVED FOR DISCUSSION

- 5.1 **RESOLVED** – All items were reserved for discussion.

6 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- 6.1 There were none.

7 WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

- 7.1 The Cabinet Member reported that one written question had been received from Councillor Morgan.
- 7.2 Councillor Morgan asked the following question:

'Following the focus group review, can the Cabinet Member for Housing confirm that an estate warden is being appointed to cover the Craven Vale estate, and give a date for that warden taking up his/her post please?'

7.3 The Cabinet Member replied,

'In Autumn 2007, a short-term focus group of residents was established at the request of the Chairman of Housing to review the Estates Service, on a citywide basis. The results of this review were presented to Housing Management Sub-Committee in January 2008.

The main role of a Community Warden is to link local communities with the council and other organisations and act as the 'eyes and ears' of the housing management service. The residents' focus group reported the following findings in relation to the post of Community Warden:

- That residents' experiences of Community Wardens varied widely across the city, from excellent to unsatisfactory
- That the work of the Community Wardens has more in common with the work of the local housing offices than the Estates Service
- That parts of the Community Wardens' job description duplicates tasks carried out by other people working in the same communities e.g. PCSOs, Mobile Wardens and Housing Officers.

To address these issues, the focus group recommended that the post of Community Warden was moved from the Estates Service and reviewed. Community Wardens and tenancy management staff welcomed this proposal and the opportunity to work more closely together.

Following the focus group, the Community Warden post for Craven Vale was kept vacant whilst a detailed review of the Estate Service took place to introduce the recommendations of the focus group. The outcome of this exercise would be reported to the Housing Management Consultative Committee and Housing Cabinet Members Meeting.

As an interim measure, the Community Warden for the Albion Hill area was covering the Craven Vale area. From this June, fortnightly surgeries were being held at a community centre in Craven Vale. The warden would also have weekly meetings with the Housing Officer for Craven Vale and spend between one and two days per week on the Craven Vale estate. These arrangements would continue until the Estate Service review was completed.'

- 7.4 Councillor Morgan asked a supplementary question noting the length of time afforded to the review and asked if it could genuinely be considered 'short-term'.
- 7.5 Cabinet Member responded that getting the service right was key, and that the long-term outcome was more important than making a quick decision. The length of the review was in part, due to the summer recess and the timetabling of decision-making meetings. She concluded that the interim arrangements had been provided in recognition of the extensive review and that Tenants would continue to monitor the service once the review had concluded.

8 PETITIONS

- 8.1 There were none.

9 DEPUTATIONS

- 9.1 The Cabinet Member reported that two Deputations had been received. The first Deputation concerned 40 & 50 Brunswick Place, Hove and had been presented at Council on 24 April 2008 by Mr. Pope.
- 9.2 The Cabinet Member welcomed Mr Pope to the meeting and noted the deputation as presented at Council. She explained that a cross-party working group had been set up to look at the area as a whole and would meet in June.

Discussions were taking place with Hove YMCA and the Children and Young Peoples Trust Board regarding management of the property.

Since the incident with a tenant prior to Easter the buildings continued to be managed as general needs temporary accommodation.

Overnight security had continued and there had been no further serious incidents of nuisance at either properties.

Since April a few issues which had been reported and resolved forthwith.

A tenant who caused the damage immediately prior to Easter was removed and legal action was being fast-tracked. Repairs at the property were near completion.

- 9.3 Mr Pope thanked the Cabinet Member for her comments.
- 9.4 The second Deputation concerned consultants, targets and 'value for money' and had been presented at Council on 24 April 2008 by Mr. Melson.
- 9.5 The Cabinet Member welcomed Mr Melson to the meeting and noted the deputation as presented at Council.
- 9.6 She confirmed that consultants would only be appointed following approval of a clear business case and cost benefit analysis. Members would not make unnecessary use consultants, preferring to maximise officers' expertise and experience. Cabinet Member was committed to reducing the costs of consultancy fees in housing revenue and accounts budgets by £20M over the life of the thirty year business plan.

9.7 Cabinet Member was committed to ensuring Housing Management services improved and would use targets to measure improvement, though she agreed that targets should not be overused. It was acknowledged that reaching a target did not always accurately reflect customer values. Cabinet Member was keen to maintain open dialogue with customers to set local performance targets and ensure that performance reports were discussed at the new Housing Management Consultative Committee.

9.8 Mr Melson thanked the Cabinet Member for her comments.

10 LETTERS FROM COUNCILLORS

10.1 There were none.

11 NOTICE OF MOTION REFERRED FROM COUNCIL

11.1 There were none.

12 MATTERS REFERRED FOR RECONSIDERATION

12.1 There were none.

13 REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13.1 There were none.

14 REPORT OF THE HOUSING MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE 11 MARCH 2008

14.1 The Cabinet Member considered a report of the Director of Strategy & Governance concerning the decisions taken by the Housing Management Sub-Committee on 11 March 2008 (for copy see minute book).

14.2 **RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

The meeting concluded at 4.25 pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

2008

