

HOUSING PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S MEETING

WEDNESDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2013

DECISIONS

Set out below is a summary of the decisions taken at the Housing Portfolio Holder's Meeting held on Wednesday, 16 October 2013. Decisions made by the Portfolio Holder will be subject to call-in. Recommendations made to the Cabinet or to the Council are not subject to call-in. The wording used does not necessarily reflect the actual wording that will appear in the minutes.

If you have any queries about any matters referred to in this decision sheet please contact Ian Senior.

1. **LINTON: SALE OF LAND ADJACENT 70 BALSHAM ROAD**

The Housing Portfolio Holder agreed to sell the land adjacent 70 Balsham Road, Linton on the open market, subject to planning permission for the development of one dwelling.

Options Considered:

1. Option One - Offer the land adjacent 70 Balsham Road for sale on the open market, subject to planning permission for one dwelling. Consider the provision of a new hardstanding and dropped kerb for the existing property.
2. Option Two - Retain the land in Council ownership as part of 70 Balsham Road.

Reason For Decision: The tenant of 70 Balsham Road is unable to maintain this part of his garden and wishes to surrender the area from his tenancy. The area has potential for the development of one new dwelling and the receipt from an open market sale could contribute towards other property refurbishment or new build.

2. **DESIGN GUIDE FOR NEW BUILD COUNCIL PROPERTIES**

The Housing Portfolio Holder approved the content of the Design Guide, subject to minor modification, enabling officers to introduce a consistent approach to the standards in new build Council properties

Options Considered:

1. The Housing Portfolio Holder has the option to approve the Design Guide in its current form.
2. The Housing Portfolio Holder alternatively, may wish to seek amendments to the current draft and request that the Director of Housing ensures that these amendments are made.

Reason For Decision: The guidance is necessary to ensure that the Council is able to adopt a consistent approach to the design standards we expect in our new homes.

3. **HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2013-2018**

The Housing Portfolio Holder:

- Approved the Homeless Strategy and action plan for 2013-18 Appendix A and B
- Approved the Discharging Duty Policy Appendix C
- Approved the Reconnections Policy Appendix D as amended.

Options Considered:

1. The Portfolio Holder has the option to approve the Homeless Strategy, action plan and linked policies regarding discharge of duty and reconnections.
2. The Portfolio Holder may choose to recommend amendments to the strategy and policies attached.
3. The Council will risk being in breach of its statutory obligations to have an active Homeless Strategy if no strategy is approved.

Reason For Decision: The proposed strategy and action plan represents a number of actions to help address the anticipated challenges faced by the housing advice and options service. These are expected to include:

- An increase in applications and people seeking assistance.
- The impact of the Welfare Reforms.
- Increased difficulty in accessing affordable housing options, including the private rented sector.

4. USE OF COUNCIL HOUSING AS TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

The Housing Portfolio Holder approved the Policy on the use of Council housing as temporary accommodation at Appendix 1, and more specifically:

- a) The use of Licence Agreements pursuant to the Housing Act 1996 S188 (pending a homeless decision) and S190(2) (intentionally homeless).
- b) The use of a Non Secure Temporary Tenancy pursuant to S193 of the Housing Act 1996 where the Council has a duty to house until such time that suitable alternative accommodation can be found.
- c) The use of a Non Secure Temporary Tenancy where a former tenant has died or moved away and the remaining household has been given discretionary agreement to stay temporarily until more suitable accommodation can be found.

The Housing Portfolio Holder gave delegated authority to the Director of Housing to amend the Tenancy Policy to specify the inclusion for the use of Licences and Non Secure Temporary Tenancies, as defined in the Policy at Appendix 1.

Options Considered: An alternative to the use of a Licence Agreement would be the option to grant only a Non Secure Temporary Tenancy Agreement. This would give the applicant greater rights than those placed in bed & breakfast or hostel accommodation and would mean that regardless of their circumstances, court proceedings would need to be instigated for possession where the applicant refused to move out. This option is not considered preferable as it reduces the available supply of temporary accommodation and goes against the principles of interim accommodation, that the occupier should be entitled to four weeks' notice and then to the benefit of the further inevitable delay while possession is obtained through the courts.

Reason For Decision: This Policy will enable the Council to ensure it is making best use of Council stock, ensuring households are treated equally and fairly, and that we have a readily available supply of temporary accommodation without the need to resort to bed & breakfast accommodation.

5. **AFFORDABLE HOMES DRAFT SERVICE PLAN 2014/15**

The Housing Portfolio Holder endorsed the service plan actions identified in this report and listed below as options, as additions to the on-going projects listed at paragraph 11 of the report, requesting a report to a future meeting on the Housing Foyer.

Options Considered: The Portfolio Holder is requested to consider these proposed actions and to suggest changes or additions where required. Service plan actions carried forward from last year are not listed in the table and include:

- Development of neighbourhood teams and hub offices
- Development of options to best meet the refurbishment needs of the Council's stock including
 - A review of Wilford Furlong and
 - the Robinson Court (Gamlingay) redevelopment
- Continuing to extend and broaden the pool of temporary accommodation including overseeing the completion of the hostel at Robson Court (Waterbeach)
- Establishing a pilot scheme to set up the new Housing Company

Table 1 New Service Plan themes 2014 -2015

	Action	Expected completion	Notes
8	Digital inclusion	March 2016	Project to explore the potential take up of internet based services and to identify the barriers to tenants accessing services using internet technology.
9	Financial inclusion	March 2016	Project to explore the potential use of Credit Unions and other measures to assist those tenants that may not have access to bank accounts. Linked to welfare reform mitigation work.
10	Review of policy changes to adapt to welfare benefit changes, including impact of Universal Credit etc.	March 2015	Some changes may be required within 2014 –review will consider where we have got to & check that everything is working as it should and identify any changes needed.
11	Strategy review of homes of non traditional construction	2016	To pull together a coherent and timed strategy to deliver those elements needed to address the non traditional properties as well as those properties identified for demolition in the HRA business plan.
12	Tenancy fraud	July 2015	Funded CLG project starting in July

			2013.
13	Explore Homelessness Gold Standard	Mar 2015	External accreditation of Council's homelessness service. Dependent upon outcome of peer review taking place in 2013.
14	Delivery of new Older persons housing related support service	Jan 2015	Work needed to roll out new housing related support contract for older people. Dependent upon outcome of procurement process being carried out by County Council in 2013/14.
15	Handyman service	March 2015	Activation of service to offer small jobs to elderly and disabled households. Already part of Mears contract but needs to be implemented.
16	Review of Mears contract	March 2015	Mid term review. If the outcome is that a fresh procurement exercise is needed a decision will need to be taken in early 2015 to allow enough time to complete the work required.
17	Explore Housing Foyer	March 2015	Work with the County Council and a housing association HA partner to develop a feasibility report.
18	Review of disabled adaptations in HRA stock	March 2015	Project to review work completed, policy matters, identified need, contractors performance, HIA links, OT performance etc
19	Estate inspection project	March 2015	Project to review the need for a welfare garden scheme, any patterns in ASB and links to grounds maintenance.

Reason For Decision: The draft service plan actions set out in Table 1 below have been developed with housing officers taking into account the key aims and objectives of the Council, central government direction and the forthcoming priorities for the Affordable Homes Service. These actions will be incorporated within the final form of the Affordable Homes service plan to be brought back to the Housing Portfolio Holder in March 2014.