

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
26 NOVEMBER 2013

Present: Councillor Hacker (Chair);
Councillors Ballsdon, Benson, K Edwards, Gittings, Rynn,
Singh, Terry, Whitham and Williams;

Apologies: Councillors Cumpsty and Davies.

6. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of 17 July 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

7. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

- Community Safety Partnership - 10 July 2013 and 25 September 2013.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received.

8. AFFINITY HOUSING

Ian Mills and Qadeer Kiani, Affinity Housing, gave a presentation to the Committee on the North Whitley PFI Project. Ian Mills explained that the contract had been awarded to Affinity Housing in March 2004 and they currently managed, maintained and refurbished 1371 properties in Reading. Ian stated that Wates carried out all the refurbishment and day-to-day repairs and Nationwide Building Society provided the funding.

Qadeer Kiani reported to the Committee the contractual obligations that were in place and some of the difficulties that had occurred during the first few years of the contract. He also reported that significant progress had been made in the last five years, which had included top quartile performance on a range of key performance indicators, the entire stock had been refurbished nine months ahead of schedule, 166 alleyways had been gated and secured, resident satisfaction had been rated at over 80% and there was now good IT structure in place, including an interactive website.

Qadeer went on to report that the current priorities of Affinity Housing included helping tenants with the changes following the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and a possible trial with Community Savings and Loans Ltd (Reading Credit Union) was being investigated. Other priorities included increasing resident participation, meeting the 'green' agenda, and putting an even greater emphasis on 'people' issues, including employment, education, poverty and social inclusion.

The presentation finished with Ian and Qadeer emphasising the importance of partnership working to deliver excellence in customer services and performance management.

Resolved - That the presentation be noted.

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9. READING FESTIVAL 2013

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that highlighted the outcomes of Reading Festival 2013 which had taken place from Friday 23 August 2013 to Sunday 25 August 2013 and outlined the measures that could be taken to reduce complaints about noise and traffic in future years.

The report stated that good working relationships between council officers, emergency services and Festival Republic had resulted in effective management and monitoring systems being implemented which had addressed both the known hazards associated with the event and the unknown factors associated with the variation to the Licence to extend the geographical size of the arena by 25% without any increase to the number of attendees. The report covered the following topics: food hygiene and safety; touting; arena expansion; under age sales; noise and other complaints; smokefree legislation; after event site clean up; traffic and transport; and crime and arrests.

Marcus Herbert, Licensing and Health and Safety Regulation Manager, reported at the meeting that one of the final acts on the Saturday night had breached the low frequency condition 4.18.7(b) over consecutive 15 minute periods. The results from the off-site monitoring had been fed directly back to Vanguardia and they had acted upon the levels in reducing the 63Hz octave with the intention of reducing the off-site levels. A meeting with Festival Republic and Vanguardia had now taken place and measures had been agreed to ensure such a breach did not occur in future years.

Melvin Benn and Nicky Hodgson, Festival Republic, attended the meeting.

Resolved -

- (1) That the continued effective partnership working between Council officers, the emergency services and Festival Republic to ensure the safety and enjoyment of all who attended the Reading Festival be acknowledged;
- (2) That the proposal by officers to put adequate measures in place, in respect of the breach of the noise limits, to ensure full compliance in future years be endorsed.

10. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the results of the consultation that had been carried out on the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme and the proposed changes to the scheme.

The report stated that it was a legal requirement for every Local Authority to have a published Allocations Scheme and for it to be kept under regular review. The last significant review of Reading Borough Council's Allocations Scheme had been carried out in March 2011. For this review a consultation had been carried out under the 'Let's Talk Housing' banner to consider how it delivered outcomes in line with the overall priority to meet housing need within the Borough in light of the changes that

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had been brought in by the Localism Act 2011. The consultation had been carried out with residents, stakeholders and partners and the results were set out in the report.

The proposed changes to the scheme, which had been informed by the responses to the consultation, were set out in the report along with exceptions that would be incorporated.

The report stated that a new Allocations Scheme would be drafted to incorporate the changes and the revised scheme would be published in January 2014 for a period of six weeks. It was intended that the new scheme would be enacted from 1 April 2014.

Resolved -

- (1) That the findings from the 'Let's Talk Housing' consultation on the Council's Allocation Scheme be noted;
- (2) That the proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme informed by the consultation, as set out below, be agreed:
 - (a) That Reading Borough Council introduce a three-year residency requirement for applicants to the Housing Register, thus requiring applicants to have lived or worked continuously within the Borough boundaries for the previous three years (exceptions would apply as at paragraph 4.11 of the report);
 - (b) That Reading Borough Council prevent applicants from registering for social housing for three years if they had been evicted from a social rented tenancy due to a tenancy management issue, unless there were exceptional circumstances that applied;
 - (c) That Reading Borough Council prevent applicants from accessing the Housing Register who had bid for and subsequently refused three properties over a six-month period, for a period of one year;
 - (d) That 'Band F' within the Allocations Scheme be renamed to 'No priority' to set clearer expectations about applicants' changes of re-housing;
- (3) That officers draft a revised Allocations Scheme for consultation in January 2014, to be enacted from 1 April 2014.

11. CONTRACT EXTENSION FOR HOMELESS SERVICES 2014-2015

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report seeking approval to extend Housing Services contracts for 2014/2015 and beyond in respect of Homeless Services. The report stated that the services the contracts covered were essential to maintain the homeless service capacity and the list of contracts for Homeless Accommodation Services were attached for approval at Appendix I.

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Resolved - That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, the Head of Finance and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, be authorised to extend contracts with the providers as set out in Appendix I.

12. FLATS RECYCLING INITIATIVE PROJECT PROGRESS REPORT

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report informing the Committee of the successful bid and award of £515,475 from the Department for Communities and Local Government Weekly Collection Support Scheme Fund to maintain existing weekly residual waste collections and improve recycling at 11,435 households in over 400 blocks of flats with communal bins.

The report stated that the project involved the following activities with the aim of encouraging changes in resident behaviour to increase the amount of waste recycled, reduce levels of contamination found in recycling containers and divert more waste from landfill:

- Implementation of a communications campaign to promote awareness of recycling and waste minimisation;
- Reviewing bin provision at blocks of flats. A site survey had been carried out at all blocks of flats to establish the number of residual waste and recycling bins and bin stores at each site. Ten blocks of flats, which had been identified as having the highest number of residual waste bins, had been selected as trial sites for the communications strategy and follow up activities, which were listed in the report. The first trial sites would begin in December 2013, with the remaining sites starting in January 2014. The trial would last for three months and during this time officers would be reviewing and adapting the approach taken, before rolling it out to the rest of the blocks of flats in the Borough using a phased approach;
- Recruitment of a Waste Minimisation and Recycling Officer dedicated to flats who was promoting recycling and waste minimisation with residents and liaising with managing agents, landlords and housing officers. The successful candidate had been in post since 1 July 2013;
- The procurement and implementation of a Recycling Reward and Incentive Scheme for the whole Borough. This would involve residents receiving points in return for recycling which they would then be able to exchange for a range of rewards. It was anticipated that the reward scheme would commence in Summer 2014.

Resolved - That the progress made with the Flats Recycling Initiative Project to date be noted and the proposed future implementation programme be endorsed.

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13. SECURING THE FUTURE OF READING'S WOODLANDS CONSULTATION - REVIEW

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report seeking approval for the woodland management plans which had been developed and had been the subject of a recent consultation which had been undertaken to establish views of the general public and associated interest groups. A full breakdown of the responses received to the consultation was attached to the report at Appendix A and summary statistics of the consultation responses were attached to the report at Appendix B. Appendices C to M, the management plans, were available on the Council's website.

The report stated that the Council's Biodiversity Action Plan (2005) had identified both the need to develop a tree strategy and the need to undertake active management of broadleaved woodland. The Council's Tree Strategy highlighted the fact that the quality of many of the nation's small woodlands had declined over recent decades. The management of this landscape had changed as a consequence of a fall in demand for home grown woodland products such as timber, charcoal, and firewood. This had greatly decreased the value of these woodlands for biodiversity. The Strategy had identified the lack of active woodland management as the most significant threat to the future of the Borough's woodlands.

The consultation period had run from 26 August 2013 to 11 October 2013 and 74 responses had been received. The majority of responses received through the online consultation had been supportive, with 94% of respondents stating they were in favour of the proposals. The report listed a summary of the comments received in relation to each woodland management plan accompanied by the proposed action to address any issues that had been raised.

Resolved -

- (1) That the content of the report in respect of public comment and officer recommendations to amend the proposed management plans as set out in paragraphs 4.4.1 to 4.4.9 of the report be noted;
- (2) That the woodland management plans be adopted.

14. DELEGATIONS - BIRTHS, MARRIAGES AND DEATHS; CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIA; BERKSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report seeking approval for changes to officer delegations, as part of the implementation of the Reshaping the Council proposals at senior management level, which had been agreed by the Personnel Committee on 18 July 2013 (Minute 6 refers).

The report explained that the Reshaping proposals had included the discontinuation of the Head of Environment & Consumer Services and Head of Culture posts, and that the delegations made to those posts therefore needed to be reallocated. In the majority of cases, the delegations would remain within the Directorate of Environment & Neighbourhood Services (DENS) and could therefore be exercised in the name of the Director on an interim basis. However three services were moving

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out of the DENS directorate to the Head of Customer Services (formerly the Head of Policy, Performance & Community), and the Committee was therefore asked to delegate the relevant functions:

- Registrar Service (from Head of Environment & Consumer Services)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria (from Head of Environment & Consumer Services)
- Berkshire Record Office and County Archive (from Head of Culture)

The report explained that the Head of Customer Services also had responsibility for revenues and benefits services. The delegations for these functions had historically been made to the Head of Finance, and the report recommended that they be transferred formally to the Head of Customer Services, to be exercised in consultation with the Head of Finance as Section 151 Officer when the decision might have significant policy or financial implications.

Resolved -

That with immediate effect, the following functions be delegated to the Head of Customer Services:

Registrar Service

- (a) To exercise the functions of proper officer under the provisions of the Registration Service Act 1953;
- (b) To operate the Reading Registration Scheme as adopted through the Decision Book Issue 411, 11 January 2013;

Cemeteries and Crematoria

- (c) To exercise the functions of the authority under Section 201 of the Local Government Act 1972, and the Local Authorities (Cemeteries) Order 1977;
- (d) Graves - Signature of Grants of Rights - the signature of all grants of rights relating to burial construction and use of vaults and other places of burial and the placing of any tombstone or other memorial;
- (e) Weekend and Bank Holiday Burials - Henley Road Cemetery
 - (i) Authority to licence nominated members of the Reading Muslim Community to carry out burials at weekends and Bank Holidays, in accordance with paragraphs 5(1)(b) of the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977, with the terms of the licence to be agreed by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Head of Environment and Consumer Services;
 - (ii) Authority to renew the Licence to carry out weekend and Bank Holiday burials at Henley Road Cemetery after the first 12

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months on a year-by-year basis terminable on three months' notice by the Council and on such other terms as were agreed in consultation with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services subject to the pilot arrangement being reviewed after one year and deemed successful in consultation with the Lead Councillor;

(Cabinet 15 February 2010, Minute 152 refers).

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 8.13pm).