

HOUSING AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes of meeting held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Almada Street, Hamilton on 5 May 2010

Chair:

Councillor Alex McInnes

Councillors Present:

John Anderson, David Baillie (Depute), Walter Brogan, Jackie Burns, Andy Carmichael, Maureen Devlin, Jim Docherty, Douglas Edwards, Ian Gray, Bobby Lawson, Brian McCaig, Jean McKeown, John Murray, Patrick Ross-Taylor, David Shearer, Bert Thomson, Richard Tullett

Councillors' Apologies:

Barry Douglas, Beith Forrest, Anne Higgins, Graeme Horne, Edward McAvoy, Brian McKenna

Attending:**Corporate Resources**

G Cochran, Administration Assistant; C Lyon, Administration Officer

Finance and Information Technology Resources

L Crosby, Accountant (Research)

Housing and Technical Resources

L Freeland, Executive Director; P Murphy, Head of Support Services; J Stobie, Head of Property Services

Chair's Remarks

The Chair, on behalf of the members of the Committee, congratulated L Freeland on his appointment as Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) and wished him well in his new post.

1 Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

2 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing and Technical Resources Committee held on 17 February 2010 were submitted for approval as a correct record.

The Committee decided: that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

3 Capital Budget Monitoring 2009/2010 - Housing and Technical Resources (HRA)

A joint report dated 30 March 2010 by the Executive Directors (Finance and Information Technology Resources) and (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted advising of progress on the capital programme for Housing and Technical Resources (HRA) for the period 1 April 2009 to 19 March 2010.

The Committee decided: that the Housing and Technical Resources' capital programme of £40.441 million and expenditure to date of £34.031 million be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 17 February 2010 (Paragraph 3)]

4 Capital Budget Monitoring 2009/2010 - Housing and Technical Resources (excl HRA)

A joint report dated 30 March 2010 by the Executive Directors (Finance and Information Technology Resources) and (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted advising of progress on the capital programme for Housing and Technical Resources (excl HRA) for the period 1 April 2009 to 19 March 2010.

The Committee decided: that the Housing and Technical Resources' capital programme (excl HRA) of £7.020 million and expenditure to date of £5.090 million be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 17 February 2010 (Paragraph 4)]

5 Revenue Budget Monitoring 2009/2010 - Housing and Technical Resources (HRA)

A joint report dated 30 March 2010 by the Executive Directors (Finance and Information Technology Resources) and (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted comparing actual expenditure at 19 March 2010 against budgeted expenditure for Housing and Technical Resources' revenue budget (HRA), together with a forecast for the year to 31 March 2010.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the breakeven position on the Housing and Technical Resources' revenue budget (HRA), as detailed in Appendix A to the report, be noted; and
- (2) that the forecast to 31 March 2010 of a breakeven position be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 17 February 2010 (Paragraph 5)]

6 Revenue Budget Monitoring 2009/2010 - Housing and Technical Resources (Excl HRA)

A joint report dated 30 March 2010 by the Executive Directors (Finance and Information Technology Resources) and (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted comparing actual expenditure at 19 March 2010 against budgeted expenditure for Housing and Technical Resources' revenue budget (excl HRA), together with a forecast for the year to 31 March 2010.

Details were provided on proposed budget virements to realign budgets.

The Committee decided:

- (1) that the underspend on the Housing and Technical Resources' revenue budget (excl HRA) of £0.039 million, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, be noted;
- (2) that the forecast to 31 March 2010 of an underspend of £0.178 million be noted; and
- (3) that the budget virements, as detailed in Appendices B, D and E to the report, be approved.

[Reference: Minutes of 17 February 2010 (Paragraph 6)]

7 Property Services Performance Review

A report dated 1 April 2010 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on:-

- ◆ the trading position of the Property Services Trading Division which had achieved an operating surplus of £3.501 million at 19 February 2010
- ◆ personnel issues including maximising attendance
- ◆ contract/statutory performance indicators at 19 February 2010
- ◆ the Housing Investment Programme
- ◆ customer complaints and enquiries recorded during the period 25 January to 19 February 2010
- ◆ customer satisfaction levels

The Property Trading Service was marginally behind its projected surplus target and changes to reflect the Craft and Manual pay review and workload projections for 2009/2010 would further reduce the year end surplus. Updates on the position would be provided in future reports to this Committee.

The Committee decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 17 February 2010 (Paragraph 7)]

8 Housing and Technical Resources - Workforce Monitoring - January to March 2010

A joint report dated 12 April 2010 by the Executive Directors (Corporate Resources) and (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on the following employee information for Housing and Technical Resources for the period January to March 2010:-

- ◆ attendance statistics
- ◆ occupational health statistics
- ◆ accident/incident statistics
- ◆ disciplinary hearings, grievances and Dignity at Work cases
- ◆ analysis of leavers
- ◆ Joint Staffing Watch as at 12 December 2009

The Committee decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 17 February 2010 (Paragraph 8)]

9 Award of Debt Management Contract

A report dated 6 April 2010 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted advising that the terms of the Council's Invitation to Tender for the Debt Management Contract, previously awarded to bcwgroup plc by this Committee at its meeting on 17 February 2010, had been the subject of a legal challenge.

In light of this information which represented a material change in circumstances, the Chair, in terms of Standing Order No 17, had agreed that further consideration be given to the matter.

To avoid a protracted legal process, it was proposed that the Debt Management Contract covering the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2013 be re-tendered. The existing contract had terminated on 31 March 2010 and, to ensure continued provision of debt management services, a short-term extension had been agreed covering both Debt Collection and Sheriff Officer contracts. An offer to extend for 1 year with a 2 month early termination clause had been accepted for both contracts.

The re-tender would adopt Open Tender Procedure with a view to the contract commencing on or around 1 August 2010.

A further report would be submitted to this Committee in September advising of the outcome of the re-tender process.

The Committee decided: that the Debt Management Contract be re-tendered with a commencement date of on or around 1 August 2010.

[Reference: Minutes of 17 February 2010 (Paragraph 10)]

10 Council House Rent Arrears Policy

A report dated 24 March 2010 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on a review of the Council House Rent Arrears Policy and a number of key areas which would be included in the new Policy.

The key objective of the new Policy was to “maximise rental income to the Council by minimising the level or arrears and number of tenants in arrears, whilst being sympathetic to the individual circumstances of tenants”. The specific aims of the Policy were detailed in the report.

The main changes in the new Policy were:-

- ◆ stronger action on tenants who had recently been through the court process and had again fallen into arrears in an attempt to break the continuous cycle of arrears
- ◆ stronger links to other Council policies and strategies, including helping to promote tenancy, sustainability and preventing homelessness
- ◆ inclusion of former tenant rent arrears within the overall rent arrears recovery policy
- ◆ involving stakeholders, including service users, in the ongoing development of policy and procedures through consultation

During the course of the review, 2 current working practices had been highlighted as areas for improvement, namely:-

- ◆ the requirement to pay rent in advance
- ◆ procedures used to recover housing benefit overpayments

The current lease terms and conditions required new tenants to pay the first rental payment in advance. This clause had never been enforced and it had never been practice to collect rent in advance from new tenants. It was now recommended that, with effect from 1 October 2010, this requirement be adhered to and that all new tenants be required to pay rent in advance prior to moving in to a new tenancy.

The Council currently took a maximum of £5.00 per week direct deduction from ongoing benefit receipts. The Department of Work and Pensions permitted a deduction of £9.90 and £13.20 for routine and fraudulent overpayments respectively. Formal consultation with other councils had established that 15, out of the 18 councils who had responded, applied the maximum allowance. It was proposed that, to bring this Council into line with the majority of councils, that the policy be revised to allow the Council to apply the maximum allowable deduction.

A comprehensive consultation exercise had been undertaken as part of this Policy review, which had included a working group of 5 tenant representatives identified by the Central Liaison Group.

The Committee decided: that the process and actions taken to review the Council House Rent Arrears Policy be noted.

The Committee recommended to the Executive Committee:

- (1) that the maximum deduction for routine benefit receipts be applied to bring South Lanarkshire into line with the majority of other councils; and
- (2) that the new Council House Rent Arrears Policy be approved for implementation with effect from 1 October 2010.

11 Notification of Contracts Awarded - 23 January to 6 April 2010

A report dated 6 April 2010 by the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) was submitted on:-

- ◆ contracts awarded by Housing and Technical Resources in the period 22 January to 6 April 2010
- ◆ contacts awarded under the Primary School Framework Agreement Phase 2

Details of the individual contracts and projects were provided in the appendices to the report.

The Committee decided: that the report be noted.

[Reference: Minutes of 17 February 2010 (Paragraph 12)]

12 Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.