

**BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK**

**CABINET SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet Scrutiny Committee  
held on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2011 at 6.00pm  
in the Committee Suite, King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn.**

**PRESENT:** Councillors I Gourlay (Chairman)  
I Mack (Vice-Chairman), B Ayres, J Collop, G Howman,  
A Lovett, T Manley, G Sandell and M Tilbury.

Other Member Present:  
Councillor A Beales, Portfolio Holder, Regeneration and Commercial Services.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors N Daubney and B Long.

**CSC1: APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor I Gourlay be appointed Chairman of the Committee for the following year.

**CSC2: APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor I Mack be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the following year.

**CSC3: MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> February 2011 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**CSC4: URGENT BUSINESS UNDER STANDING ORDER 7**

There was none.

**CSC6: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There was none.

**CSC7: MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34**

Councillor Collis – Item CSC8: Chairman's Correspondence.

**CSC8: CHAIRMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE**

Councillor Collis questioned whether any arrangements had been made for the Committee to receive scrutiny training, particularly as there had

been a number of new members appointed to the Committee. He stated that it was vital for Members to receive training at the earliest opportunity. The importance of such training was acknowledged and the Vice-Chairman, undertook along with the Chairman, to liaise with officers to ensure appropriate training was scheduled as soon as possible.

CSC9: **RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were none.

CSC10: **MATTERS CALLED-IN PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 12**

There was none.

CSC11: **CHANGES TO PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING INVESTMENT POLICY AND WORK WITH THE HOME IMPROVEMENT TRUST**

The Vice-Chairman informed the Committee that previously the Leader of the Council had been keen that any decisions that had been selected for scrutiny were responded to by the relevant Cabinet Member as opposed to officers. He explained that the Committee had the option to propose alternative recommendations than that proposed or determined by Cabinet to Council.

In reference to the report, the Vice-Chairman explained that the recommendations proposed a change in policy in relation to how repairs/adaptations were funded and how assistance was offered to vulnerable households who had serious housing issues. Currently the Council had a fund of £200k to assist housing conditions termed category 1 hazards that had been identified but it was proposed that the Council would, in future, assist these households and other eligible households to access external funding sources. The scheme offered guarantees that no repossession or monies would be payable until the client moved or on the result of death.

The Vice-Chairman questioned whether the Cabinet had given consideration to the number of category 1 hazards the Council had assisted with historically. In response, Councillor Beales drew Members' attention to the recommendations proposed in the report, namely to assist vulnerable people with essential repairs by helping them access external private sources of funding and to cover some minor changes to the Council's approach to delivering the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). The proposed policy would enable the Council in future to help address both category 1 and category 2 hazards and the changes to the DFG would effectively give greater flexibility to assist with funding equipment, which would enable clients to remain in their own home.

The Strategic Housing & Community Safety Manager, explained the Council's current policy from 2009 had been to provide loan assistance to vulnerable households subject to available resources, as at this time it

had been recognised that due to a likelihood of significant increase in future demand given an ageing population, the prevailing policy was unsustainable. In 2002/03, 89 households had been assisted under the DFG programme, this increased to 188 in 2006/07. The proposed changes to the policy enabled the Council to ensure the best use of resources and assist the most vulnerable households. The Council's performance under the DFG programme, had improved considerably over recent years, as resources were now focussed on ensuring these statutory works are prioritised.

The Strategic Housing & Community Safety Manager informed the Committee of the number of housing repair and improvement cases including category 1 hazards and urgent works alongside subsequent associated costs (approximate) that had been addressed over recent years:

2008/09	124 category 1 hazards and other urgent works – cost £400k
2009/10	75 category 1 hazards and other urgent works – cost £300k
2010/11	28 category 1 hazards and other urgent works

The Strategic Housing & Community Safety Manager stated that the change in policy in 2009 had resulted in a reduction in the number of cases where the Council had provided loan or grant assistance. This reflected that assistance was being limited to those with the most acute repair issues affecting the most vulnerable households. This policy amendment and the use of the House-proud scheme will create opportunities to help many more households address repair and improvement issues. He explained the proposals were in line with Government policy and referred to a report published by the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2011, which stated that “The Home Improvement trust set up in 1997 provides advice and support on repairs and funding options including no risk equity loans across the country. Research on accessing loan finance to improve housing conditions including barriers to private finance was also published by the Department in 2007, and there are no plans to issue further guidance on this issue”.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Sandell, The Strategic Housing & Community Safety Manager confirmed that assessments were carried out to establish whether properties were suitable or constraints existed to adapt them to the clients needs but in some cases, it may be more appropriate to offer the client the option to move to a more suitable property.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Howman, The Strategic Housing & Community Safety Manager acknowledged that there would be an increase in the workload for the Care & Repair team but the scheme was designed to allow the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) to charge fees, which could be up to 15% of their costs, associated with the

loan product. The HIA did not, itself, offer financial advice, but referred clients to an appropriate independent financial advisor.

Councillor Tilbury stated that it was likely that those in need of assistance would turn to their local Ward Councillor for advice and also raised concern that when clients' existing properties were not suitable for adaptation, they would be forced to move to a property that could be, or already had been adapted. In response, the Strategic Housing & Community Safety Manager explained that the client was under no compulsion to move but funding could be made available to help assist with any move when dealing with complex adaptations to properties.

In response to a further question from Councillor Tilbury, Councillor Beales undertook to keep Members informed about the scheme which would be carefully monitored.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Strategic Housing & Community Safety Manager explained that the House-proud scheme facilitated advice on private funding to assist households and that the "lender" could change according to the clients circumstances. Currently referrals were being made to the Dudley Building Society with interest rates at 5% to 6%. The types of loan that were offered were outlined but it was reiterated that no property would be repossessed as long as the original borrower remained in the home.

Councillor Beales explained that the scheme was designed to help more people and not simply aimed at saving money. He referred to point 6.2 in the report that stated that there would be no reduction in the capital budget for grants/loans, but it would provide for more cases to be dealt with within the existing budget and make the best use of available resources.

The Vice-Chairman referred to the House-proud scheme which charged an arrangement fee of £500 plus on costs and also explained that it did stipulate a minimum loan, and questioned whether consideration had been given to alternative schemes, such as Credit Unions. Councillor Lovett explained as a previous member of the Community & Culture Panel he had previously had an opportunity to consider the proposals and suggested that Credit Unions did not offer the same security.

In response, Councillor Beales explained that each case was different and one product "did not fit all" and referrals to Credit Unions could be considered.

The Strategic Housing & Community Safety Manager also confirmed that the policy did allow for referrals to other alternative sources of funding, such as the Norfolk Credit Union.

CSC12: **THE NORFOLK WASTE PARTNERSHIP AND THE JOINT MUNICIPAL WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR NORFOLK**

The Chairman explained that he had requested that the item be put on the Agenda for the meeting because he was concerned about the lack of information as to what the Joint Norfolk Waste Strategy was and the relationship between the actual strategy and the Norfolk Waste Partnership. He also raised concern about the lack of questions raised at the Cabinet meeting itself and the lateness of the actual report. He also stated that the report gave no explanation that if the Council withdrew from the strategy, how it would affect the rest of Norfolk.

Councillor Beales explained the proposals were for the Council to withdraw from the Joint Municipal Waste Strategy but remain within the Norfolk Waste Partnership. The Strategy was no longer fit for purpose and was out of date and withdrawing from it would allow the Council to take control for the future direction of dealing with waste in West Norfolk. The Council had previously requested that the strategy was reviewed and updated but these requests had been unsuccessful. The County Council would remain responsible for the disposal of waste and the Borough would retain responsibility for the collection of waste.

Councillor Tilbury referred to the lateness of the report which was circulated literally just before the actual Cabinet meeting and raised concern that such an important decision was being rushed through. He referred to the Special Council meeting that had been held on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2011, which had seen cross party support on the issue of the proposed waste incinerator in West Norfolk and that he did not want to see any threat to undermine the support going forward.

Councillor Beales reminded Members that they were all welcome to attend Cabinet meetings under Standing Order 34 and that the decision could also be debated at Full Council on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011. The administration had also made no assumptions on the outcome of the recent election in regards to the timing of the report.

The Chief Executive explained the background to and the reasoning behind the timing of the report whilst acknowledging the lateness of the report. He also reiterated that the strategy was out of date and requests to review it had been unsuccessful.

Councillor Collop raised concern that many Councillors, particularly newly appointed ones, would not understand the context of the report as there was a lack of explanation as to the various bodies involved. He also questioned whether there had been any reaction to the proposals from the other district councils across Norfolk. In response Councillor Beales acknowledged that it would be beneficial to new Councillors to receive a fuller explanation on the proposals and it was agreed that a briefing note would be circulated prior to the Full Council meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011. He also confirmed that as yet, no feedback had been received but the

Council still retained a vested interest in working with the other district Councils. Councillor Lovett welcomed the proposals but concurred with the view that more information should be provided on the proposals.

Councillor Beales explained that proposals were in place to set up a cross party proportional task group to look at waste disposal. A report would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2011.

CSC13: **ANNUAL TREASURY REPORT 2010/2011**

This item was withdrawn from the Agenda.

CSC14: **CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND RESOURCES 2010/2014**

This item was withdrawn from the Agenda.

CSC15: **REVENUE OUTTURN 2010/2011**

This item was withdrawn from the Agenda.

CSC16: **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2010/2011**

This item was withdrawn from the Agenda.

CSC17: **PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' DECISIONS MADE UNDER DELEGATED POWERS**

There was none.

CSC18: **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to be held on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2011 at 6pm.

**Meeting closed at 7.02pm**