

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee

held on Tuesday, 24th April, 2012 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor L Gilbert (Chairman)
Councillor G M Walton (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors P Butterill, K Edwards, R Fletcher, P Hayes, S Hogben, H Murray
and G Baxendale

Apologies

Councillors A Barratt, H Davenport, P Hoyland and A Thwaite

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor R Menlove – Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services
Councillor P Raynes – Cabinet Support Member for Environmental Services

OFFICERS PRESENT

Chris Williams – Transport Manager
Karen Carsberg – Strategic Housing Manager
Nic Abbott – Cheshire Homeshoice Team Leader
Mark Nedderman – Senior Scrutiny Officer
James Morley – Scrutiny Officer

1 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2012 be approved as a correct record.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/WHIPPING DECLARATIONS

Councillor Les Gilbert declared a personal interest in Item 6 as he is a Member of the Wulvern Housing Association's Board.

3 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/ OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public who wished to speak.

4 TRANSPORT UPDATE

The Committee received a report on the current status of the Transport Policy from the Transport Manager. The report summarised the likely changes to

transport that had been either agreed or were to be considered over the coming months.

The Council's adopted business plan for the period 2012-2015 contained a number of changes pertaining to transport support. There were reductions in budgets for home to school transport, public transport, flexible/community transport and management and administration of transport. This required substantial changes to transport provided by Cheshire East.

Consultation on the changes required to be made would be carried out in June 2012 and would be reported back to this Committee before recommending changes to Cabinet in August 2012.

Savings would be made through reductions in subsidising public transport, and removal of free transport provision for children attending denominational schools through parental choice. Efforts would be made to mitigate impacts of withdrawal of support for public transport and affected schools would be given one-off funding to support students in finding alternative travel options.

The Committee expressed concern about the removal for current recipients of free transport for children attending denominational schools through parental choice on the grounds of religion/faith. It was suggested that, although savings were necessary, current recipients should continue to receive support until the end of school years as some parents would have made choices about which school their children would attend based on the receipt of free transport.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be received and the Committee note with concern the impact of the budget restrictions.
- (b) That the Committee express reservations regarding the home to school transport proposals contained within the report.
- (c) That, given the importance of the subject matter, the Transport Manager be requested to return to the Committee with a further update after the consultation period at the 24 July 2012 meeting.

5 DRAFT TENANCY STRATEGY

The Committee received a report from the Strategic Housing Manager on the Council's draft Tenancy Strategy. The Strategy was currently under going a 12 week period of consultation and a final decision on the Tenancy Strategy would be made by Cabinet once consultation had been completed.

The Localism Act 2011 placed a requirement on all local authorities to produce a Tenancy Strategy which outlined the Council's approach to flexible tenancies and enabled Registered Providers (RPs) of social housing to formulate their own tenancy policies. RPs in Cheshire East needed to have due regard to the Council's Tenancy Strategy when formulating their policies on flexible tenancies but did not have to adhere to the strategy and did not have to follow the guidance of the Council. The Council tried to mitigate against RPs not following the Tenancy Strategy by working with the three main RPs when producing the strategy to ensure that the content was workable for them.

The draft Tenancy Strategy contained a vision for what RPs should consider when determining tenancy terms (e.g. make the best use of housing stock and reduce levels of under occupation and overcrowding). The Strategy also outlined the type of tenancies available to RPs and the circumstances in which tenancies would not be granted or renewed.

Flexible tenancies were a way of making the best use of housing stock as well as offering people some stability without committing RPs to life time tenancies. Existing tenancies would not be affected and RPs would still be able to offer life time tenancies.

The Committee was concerned that RPs were only under a duty to have regard to the Council's Tenancy Strategy but were pleased that the best efforts had been made to work with RPs to ensure that they adhere to the Council's position.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the Strategy be endorsed by the Committee.

6 CHESHIRE HOMECHOICE COMMON HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY REVIEW

The Committee received a report from the Strategic Housing Manager on the Cheshire Homechoice Common Allocations Policy Review. The report provided an update on the proposed changes to the Policy. The revised policy was currently going through a 12 week period of consultation.

A review had been started in June 2011. The policy had been working well for the first 12 months however there were some areas of the policy that needed improving or reviewing in the light of lessons learnt and proposed changes in the Localism Bill which became the Localism Act 2011 in November.

In relation to priority it was proposed to change from a star awarded system to a banding assessment based on housing need. Housing need would be the determining factor and those with multiple issues would no longer be assessed on a cumulative basis but their single most important need in relation to a need for re-housing. All current housing register applicants would be reassessed under the new "need" assessment.

The Housing register would be open to all households with a housing related issue however some would be ineligible due to immigration status, those with serious rent arrears or committed acts of serious antisocial behaviour.

Households with no connection to an area would be given the lowest priority and local authorities did not have a responsibility to households from outside of their borough. If a person or household had lived in the area 3 out of the last 5 years or 6 out of the last 12 months or has immediate family residing in a parish for 5 years they would qualify to have a local connection to an area. Housing in rural parishes would only be granted to households with a community connection and would be kept unavailable to those without a community connection.

RESOLVED – That the Committee endorse the changes to the policy.

7 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its Work Programme for future meetings.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme be noted.

8 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee considered the Forward Plan from May 2011 to August 2011 for possible items to review before Key Decisions were made.

RESOLVED – That the Forward Plan be noted.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.30 pm

Councillor L Gilbert (Chairman)