



EXECUTIVE

5.30pm–6.50pm

22 April 2009

Present: Councillors Morphew (Chair), Morrey (Vice Chair), Arthur, Blakeway, Bremner, Brociek-Coulton, Sands and Waters

Also present: Councillor Ramsay

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Councillor Morphew and Councillor Blakeway both declared a prejudicial interest in Item 7 - Grants for the Voluntary and Not for Profit Sectors.)

2. HOUSING IMPROVEMENT UPDATE

The Chief Executive introduced the report and pointed out that this had been brought before members in advance of the imminent publication of Audit Commission's report. The Director of Regeneration and Development explained the context of the Audit Commission's report. He said there had been a planned inspection by the Audit Commission of the Landlord Services and in addition a request from the District Auditor for an audit of the allocation of council homes. The outcome had set incredibly challenging targets and £300,000 had been allocated to support the improvement programme across all areas of the housing service. The Housing Quality Network had been commissioned last year to look at what and how the service was being delivered to tenants.

The Executive Member for Housing and Adult Services said there were areas which were working well. The report had identified significant challenges with very tight deadlines. The Housing Improvement Board would provide experience to help the Council achieve a two star rating by 2011.

The Chair said there were no surprises in the report and that the Council had already taken steps to deal with the issues raised. He said tenants needed to be at the heart of council housing matters and the Council needed to work with them. 2011 was critical and there was a huge amount of work to be done. He said Scrutiny Committee had a crucial role to play by monitoring the implementation of the Housing Improvement Plan. A progress report would be brought back to the next meeting of the Executive.

Councillor Ramsay said that, although he was concerned about the findings of the report, he was however, pleased a progress report would come back to the Executive and stressed the importance of councillors being involved.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) accept the main recommendations arising from the Audit Commission Inspection and Audit as a base for the improvement of the housing service;
- (2) endorse the aim of improving the Housing service to at least a 2 star service by April 2011;
- (3) subject to the agreement of the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, require the Director of Regeneration and Development to report progress on the implementation of the housing improvement plan to each meeting of the scrutiny committee; and
- (4) authorise the Director of Regeneration and Development, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Adult Services and the Head of Finance, to:
 - (a) invest the £300,000 allocated in the HRA 2009/10 budget to finance service improvements, including additional staffing resources; and
 - (b) reallocate existing staff resources within the housing service and approved budgets to meet the key priorities in the housing improvement plan.

3. HOUSING COMMUNAL BINS

(Councillor Ramsay declared a personal interest in this item.)

The Head of Property Services together with the Asset Management Project Surveyor answered a number of questions. The Head of Property Services explained that residents would be consulted site by site, in consultation with ward councillors on the type of bin and location of the bin stores in their area, giving residents an easily accessible improved waste collection and recycling facility. Following concerns raised by ward councillor legal advice had been received, which confirmed the Council would not be required to recover the cost of providing bins or stores from leaseholders, the cost could be met from the Housing Revenue Budget.

The Executive Member for Sustainable City Development said there were several sites which need communal bins and the Council needed to make it as easy as possible for residents to recycle.

RESOLVED that:-

- (1) bin stores classed as Priority 1 be funded by the Housing Revenue Account from the existing communal bin budget: other priorities to be completed as and when funding becomes available;
- (2) the cost of the bins be funded by the General Fund Account and officers investigate how this can be achieved;
- (3) no recharge be made to leaseholders for the costs involved in (1) and (2) above.

4. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2008/09

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the report and explained the biggest impact on the Council's financial position was the shortfall in funding of concessionary fares.

The Chair said that lobbying along with letters had gone to Regional Ministers, Members of Parliament and the Regional Cabinet informing everyone how unhappy Norwich was with the shortfall in funding. The Chief Executive said this shortfall was costing £2m a year.

RESOLVED to note the Revenue Budget Monitoring 2008/09 report.

5. OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF EARLHAM AND ROSARY CEMETERIES

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented his report and said that the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 9 April 2009 had agreed to set up a Task and Finish Group to look at the wider issues relating to future burial provision in Norwich.

During discussion the Head of Legal and Democratic Services said there was a need to maximise the use of remaining plots as burial space in both Earlham and Rosary Cemeteries was very limited. One option was to reduce the exclusive rights from 50 years to 25 years, with an option to renew after 25 years, which would allow any remaining space to be used for 'common graves'. There was an increased demand for the interment of cremated remains at Rosary, two areas had been identified to be developed for this use.

The Executive Member for Residents and Customer Care said although she agreed with three of the recommendations she did not agree with reducing the exclusive right of burial right to 25 years.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said officers were preparing a Management Plan for Earlham and Rosary Cemeteries which would include details of future maintenance and take into account the views of families, councillors and local organisations.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) to maximise the remaining burial space. Plots be only sold in conjunction with a planned funeral;
- (2) plots be sold for a minimum of 4 interments; and;
- (3) two areas be created at Rosary Cemetery for the interment of cremated remain;
- (4) to defer pending comments from Scrutiny Committee the period for exclusive right of burial is reduced to 25 years, which would allow any remaining space in the grave to be used for 'common graves' if the right was not renewed.

6. COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented his report and referred to the proposed protocol for dealing with Councillor Call for Action in Norwich. He explained the Councillor Call for Action was intended to be used as a last resort when other means of resolving issues have proved unsuccessful such as questions to council, motions or petitions.

The Executive Member for Corporate Resources and Governance said from the members' point of view this protocol sets out a more formal way once all other avenues had been exhausted.

RESOLVED that the Councillor Call for Action Protocol be adopted.

7. GRANTS FOR THE VOLUNTARY AND NOT FOR PROFIT SECTORS

(Both Councillors Morphew and Blakeway having declared an interest withdrew from the meeting at this point.)

The Head of Communications and Cultural Services presented the report and pointed out that the grants were discretionary, and if for any reason a grant had to be discontinued, the Council would give the organisation a three month notice period.

RESOLVED to award the following grants for the financial year 2009 / 2010. totalling £166,964:-

- (1) £16,444 to Norfolk Dance and that Norfolk Dance move to a two year funding agreement;
- (2) £42,520 to New Writing Centre and that New Writing Centre move to a two year agreement;
- (3) Upto £75,000 to Visit Norwich and that Visit Norwich move to a two year agreement;
- (4) £5,000 to Community Music East and Community Music East move to a two year funding agreement;
- (5) £18,000 to Britten Sinfonia and that Britten Sinfonia move to a two year funding agreement;
- (6) £5,000 to Norfolk Bio diversity and that Norfolk Bio diversity move to a two year funding agreement;
- (7) £5,000 to Norwich and Norfolk Community Arts and that Norwich and Norfolk Community Arts move to a two year funding agreement.

CHAIR