

# Minutes

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## Housing and Health Committee Wednesday, 11th March, 2015

### Attendance

Cllr Carter (Chair)	Cllr Parker
Cllr Mrs Davies (Vice-Chair)	Cllr Tee
Cllr Mrs Hones	
Cllr Mrs Hubbard	
Cllr McCheyne	

### Apologies

### Substitute Present

Cllr Morrissey (substituting for Cllr Le-Surf, who arrived at the latter part of the meeting)  
Cllr Reed (substituting for Cllr Mrs Henwood)  
Cllr Lloyd (substituting for Cllr Baker)

### Also Present

Maureen Montgomery	Co-Optee (Tenants Talkback Representative)
Linda Skinner	Co-Optee (Tenants Talkback Representative)

### Officers Present

Helen Gregory	Interim Head of Housing
Claire Hayden	Governance and Member Support Officer
Chris Potter	Monitoring Officer & Head of Support Services
Angela Williams	Principal Officer (Housing Needs)

## 492. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absences were received by Cllr Mrs Henwood, Cllr Reed was in attendance as substitute. Cllr Le-Surf, Cllr Morrissey was in attendance as substitute and Cllr Baker, Cllr Lloyd was in attendance as substitute.

#### **493. Minutes of the previous meeting**

The Minutes of the Housing and Health Committee held on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2015 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Cllr Mrs Hones asked if the decision under Min 372 referring to the Resource Room at Hutton Community Centre was still relevant, in view of the recent outcome of the Asset and Enterprise Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> February and Audit and Scrutiny Committee 16<sup>th</sup> March.

Cllr McCheyne asked for an update on the Garage sites. Planning permission will be submitted at the end of March. Full update will be given at the next Affordable Workshop meeting.

#### **494. Housing Performance Report**

The report updated Members on performance and progress of the 'Getting our House in Order' modernisation programme.

Performance continues to improve overall; which is reflected in the results of the KPIs. The only exception is the number of homeless households living in temporary accommodation KPI; which continues to increase, reflecting the national trend.

Members thanked officers of Appendix A - People living in temporary accommodation, which they found very informative.

A motion was MOVED by Cllr Carter and SECONDED by Cllr Mrs Davies to receive the recommendations set out in the report.

**RESOLVED UNANIMIOUSLY to:-**

- 1. The Committee is asked to monitor the performance information submitted within the report and the direction of travel of the 'getting our house in order' modernisation programme.**
- 2. The Committee is asked to approve £3,000 to be reserved from the Homeless Prevention grant for the use of an external mediation service to help prevent family evictions and reduce homelessness.**

## **REASONS FOR DECISION**

To keep members informed of the key performance levels within the Housing service to enable Members to monitor our performance.

The service improvements proposed in the 'Getting our house in order initiative' will improve service and value for money for residents and stakeholders.

### **495. Preparing for Universal Credit**

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 has introduced the biggest overhaul to the benefit system in 60 years; with a number of changes introduced to the benefit system to make it easier for claimants to move back into or change employment. The notable changes are the introduction of the spare room subsidy charge and the emulation of all benefits into a single benefit called Universal Credit.

There is a need to gear up for the roll out of Universal Credit. There will be a fundamental change in the way that tenants receive benefits and we need to have robust systems to ensure that we intervene early and provide support to people. The first tranche of the roll out is February/March 2015 for new single person claimants. The big shift is benefits being paid direct and monthly to claimants; as opposed to the rent being paid to the Landlord. There are approximately 60% of our tenants in receipt of full or partial housing benefit.

The need for tenants to budget and ensure that their rent is paid is essential. The new processes will hopefully help to mitigate the possibility of an increase in arrears by early intervention.

Housing Officers have undertaken a review of processes and systems and set up an Income Management Project Team with colleagues from different departments in the Council. A new streamlined process that provides for earlier intervention and personal contact with tenants who fall into arrears has been devised.

A new Income Management policy has also been written to reflect new approach to income collection and tenancy sustainment.

An amendment to the Induction in the Income Management Policy (Appendix A) by the Monitoring Officer to state:-

*This policy explains Brentwood Borough Council's usual approach to collecting rent and charges from its housing stock and reflects national best practice. Each case will be dealt on its merits.*

A motion was **MOVED** by Cllr Carter and **SECONDED** by Cllr Mrs Davies to receive the recommendations set out in the report.

During the debate, an additional recommendation was **MOVED** by Cllr Lloyd and **SECONDED** by Cllr Mrs Hubbard, which was accepted by the Chair.

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY to:-**

- 1. Committee is asked to recognise the staff driven improvements to the way we manage income management.**
- 2. Committee is asked to approve the new Income Management Policy.**
- 3. That delegated authority is granted to the Head of Housing Service to depart from the policy in consultation with the Chair of the Committee.**

#### **REASONS FOR DECISION**

The Committee is asked to note the work of the project team and their commitment to maximising income and improved tenancy sustainment.

The Committee is asked to approve a new Income Management Policy in line with best practice and to assist in our preparations for universal credit and minimise the risk to our income stream.

This income project forms part of Housing's 'Getting our House in Order' Modernisation Programme.

#### **496. Urgent Business**

There were no items of Urgent Business.