

# 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.

# Minutes

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## **Environment Committee Wednesday, 18th March, 2015**

### **Attendance**

Cllr Sapwell (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Cloke  
Cllr Faragher  
Cllr Keeble  
Cllr Mrs Murphy

Cllr Mynott  
Cllr Newberry  
Cllr Ms Sanders

### **Substitute Present**

Cllr Hossack (substituting form Cllr Russell)

### **Also Present**

Cllr Baker

### **Officers Present**

Graham Farrant	Chief Executive
Claire Hayden	Member and Governance Support
Roy Ormsby	Head of Street Scene
Stuart Anderson	Service Co-ordinator – Parks, Countryside, Cemeteries and Open Spaces

### **497. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received by Cllr Russell, Cllr Hossack was in attendance as substitute.

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

The minutes of the Environment Committee meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015 were approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

#### **499. Verbal update by the Chair**

##### **Thames Chase**

A meeting has taken place with Thames chase regarding the way forward. This was helpful and it has been agreed that we will jointly put together an action plan, which will look at funding opportunities to deliver the plans that are being presented on the agenda. As a way forward, the developing HLF Landscape Partnership bid could help take some of these actions forward as part of a bigger programme of works across Thames Chase. It is also worth considering whether the Trust could support Brentwood with a specific external funding bid focussed on a particular park or priority area.

##### **Textiles**

The bags will start to be delivered by the end of the month and the service will commence towards the end of April. Promotional material has been issued.

#### **500. West Horndon Parish Council**

The Council has received a request from West Horndon Parish Council for an increase in their grant. This has been requested as a contribution from the Council to manage their park, on land leased to the Parish Council from the Borough Council.

The park was established in 2003, and a lease was signed on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2003 by the then West Horndon Park Association Ltd (WHPA). This was for use as a Doorstep Green initiative, which was under the auspice of the then Countryside Agency for the benefit of the residents of West Horndon.

Doorstep Greens are locally-owned and run public spaces across England, and were first created by the Countryside Agency (CA) in a project started in 2001. The Agency set out to find green spaces which could be organised into relatively small parks and then create a local charitable trust to own, fundraise for, and run each space in perpetuity.

Unfortunately, like many of these projects, the management has now changed, and the West Horndon Park Association Ltd has now ceased. The 80 year lease has been reassigned to the Parish Council, who are now responsible for the maintenance of the park.

On the establishment of the lease to WHPA, the Council agreed to provide £2,300 towards the cost of maintenance, commencing in April 2004, with the final payment in April 2008. This funding was to contribute to the initial start-up cost of the park, and to assist WHPA in developing a sound financial plan for the future.

The funding for the park has been held in an account by the Council, which currently has a balance of £14,099. The Council has also been contributing to this account, and in 2013/14 provided £3,300 to the maintenance of the park. Through this account the Council were paying the invoices for maintenance, which is mainly provided by the Council. This situation means that the Council are funding the maintenance, administering the fund, and repaying itself for the work on the approval of the Parish Council.

A Ward Member spoke on behalf of the Parish Council in support of the increase in funding.

A motion was MOVED by Cllr Lloyd and SECONDED by Cllr Sapwell to receive the recommendation set out within the report. Subject to an amendment to 2.2. to state maintain, not cease.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1. Members agree not to provide additional funding to West Horndon Parish Council for the maintenance of their park.**
- 2. Members agree to provide the £3,300 payment towards the maintenance of the park for 2015/16, but cease all funding from 2016/17.**
- 3. Members agree to grant the remaining funding for the park, currently £14,099 to West Horndon Parish Council towards future maintenance of the park.**

#### **REASON FOR DECISION**

To ensure that grant support for Parish Councils is consistent, and that the maintenance of land not owned, or leased, by the Borough Council does not receive financial support.

#### **501. Parks Management**

The Council is facing an unprecedented set of challenges. The cuts in funding and the need to reduce expenditure increases the need to review the way in which we deliver our services, and how these can be done more efficiently, but still meet customer expectations.

The parks and open spaces within Brentwood are without doubt some of the most highly regarded assets operated by the Council and to ensure they are not only safe to use but also well maintained it is important that there is a focused forward thinking plan in place to direct resources and highlight areas for improvements within them.

The provision of management plans with structured programmes for improvements for the formal open spaces will help Officers to focus and direct resources where they are needed, manage resident expectation with regard to future provision and improvements and also ensure that value for money is obtained with the works undertaken.

Members praised Mr Anderson for his work on the Park Management Plans.

A motion was MOVED by Cllr Lloyd and SECONDED by Cllr Sapwell to receive the recommendations set out in the report.

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY to:**

- 1. That Members approve the management plans, including works programmes, for King George's Playing Fields, Hutton Recreation Ground, Warley Playing Fields and Bishops Hall Park.**
- 2. That Members delegate authority to the Head of Street Scene, Chair of Committee and in consultation with Ward Members to instigate new working practices and efficiency savings in the provision of services for football and bowls in the borough.**

#### **REASON FOR DECISION**

So that a robust and forward planning strategy can be put in place for the management of the parks and open spaces ensuring they are fit for purpose and safe for users.

Ensure that management plans are in place to allow robust and realistic budget setting to take place to ensure resources are allocated when and where they are needed.

To allow for opportunities to be identified to generate additional income or to rationalise the use of the Councils parks estate and the manner in which it is used to ensure maximum income is obtained whilst utilising the available resources i.e. sports turf provision.

#### **502. Recycling Contract**

The current recycling contract with Basildon is due to end in May 2015, and currently provides the Council with an income of approximately £250,000 per annum.



Over the past six months there has been a joint procurement undertaken with Basildon, Rochford and Uttlesford Councils, which offered the best opportunity to secure maximum value, due to the increased tonnage. The Council is now at the final stage of this procurement, which will extend over the next four years, and it is apparent that the market for the sale of the dry recyclate is very depressed.

The final stage of the procurement process is for Member approval, and shows that as opposed to the income the Council currently receives, there will now be a payment to the contractor. The Council also tips their recyclate at the Basildon depot, who will charge a nominal fee of £5.00 per tonne as a gate fee.

The new contract will mean a net increase of over £85.00 per tonne for the Council, and will mean a net loss of approximately £540,000. This will mean a pressure on the 2015/16 budget of £300,000.

Members requested to have a strong vision going forward to encourage ideas cross party to fund the extra financial pressure.

After a decision, a motion was **MOVED** by Cllr Lloyd and **SECONDED** by Cllr Sapwell to receive the recommendation set out in the report.

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY** to:

- 1. That Members approve the introduction of the new recycling contract, which will commence in May 2015.**

#### **REASON FOR DECISION**

This has been through a robust procurement process, and the price outlined in the report is the best price achieved.

#### **503. Urgent Business**

There were no items of Urgent Business.

Cllr Lloyd thanks everyone for their support in his role at Chair of Environment Committee and wish them all the best for the future.