

CABINET

2 FEBRUARY 2015

Present: Councillors Birch (Chair), Chowney (Vice-Chair), Cartwright, Forward, Hodges, Poole, Atkins and Pragnell

Apologies for absence were notes for Councillor

60. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Councillors declared an interest in the minutes:

Councillor	Minute Number	Interest
Chowney	62 – Social Lettings Agency Update	Prejudicial – he owns a second property, in addition to his main residence
Forward	62 – Social Lettings Agency Update	Prejudicial – she owns a second property, in addition to her main residence

61. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 JANUARY 2015

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2015 be approved and signed by the chair as a correct record.

MATTERS FOR CABINET DECISION

62. SOCIAL LETTINGS AGENCY UPDATE

Councillors Chowney and Forward, having declared a prejudicial interest in this item, left the chamber while the matter was discussed.

The Head of Housing and Development presented a report which advised of the results of a feasibility study carried out into the establishment of a social lettings agency in the town, and recommended the piloting of a private sector accommodation leasing scheme as the first stage of the council's plans.

Hastings had a comparatively high proportion of housing stock in the private rented sector. Changes to the local housing market over recent years had resulted in a significant shortfall in the supply of accommodation available to meet local housing need at an affordable price. The purpose of an accommodation leasing scheme would be to improve access to good quality accommodation, particularly for low income households.

The council currently operated a Letstart scheme, to assist local households who were at risk of becoming homeless, and Shelter had been commissioned by the council to assess the feasibility of developing this provision to provide a social letting agency in

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Hastings. Consideration was also given to examples of best practice from other authorities, who had implemented similar schemes.

As part of the feasibility study, Shelter had consulted with a variety of stakeholders including, landlords, letting agents and tenants. The results of the study indicated that it would be feasible to introduce a social letting agency in Hastings, and there was likely to be a significant demand for affordable, accessible housing solutions from local people.

The report recommended piloting an accommodation licencing scheme, with between 60 and 100 units of accommodation. A second phase, which would involve the council managing accommodation on behalf of private landlords, could then be introduced if the first phase was a success.

Councillor Birch moved approval of the recommendations to the report, which was seconded by Councillor Hodges.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that Cabinet approve a pilot of a private sector leasing scheme in 2015/16 as part of the establishment of a social lettings agency

The reason for this decision was:

Private sector accommodation in Hastings is becoming increasingly difficult to access for local people in housing need. Many low income households report problems securing accommodation due to the level of fees and deposits charged by letting agents and landlords and a reluctance by some to let to those in receipt of housing benefit.

Current levels of financial assistance available to support local people into accommodation, such as that provided through the East Sussex Discretionary Support Scheme and the Welfare Reform service (funded by East Sussex County Council), may continue but reduce from April 2015 exacerbating the problem.

At the same time the council continues to receive reports concerning the poor quality of accommodation or the standard of housing management offered to some of those who have managed to find housing.

The council had therefore been exploring other options to enable households to access accommodation that is affordable and of good quality.

A feasibility study was commissioned to consider the council developing a social lettings agency with the aim of reducing tenancy start-up costs and improving accommodation and housing management standards. The report sets out the main findings of the study and recommends that consideration is given to the establishment of a pilot leasing programme in 2015/16 as part of the development of a social lettings agency to assist the council to meet housing need in Hastings (the full feasibility report is available on request).

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63. DISCRETIONARY COUNCIL TAX RELIEF - SECTION 13A 1C

The Head of Finance presented a report for the council to consider a countywide discretionary reduction in liability policy.

Under section 13A 1c of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the council was provided with additional discretionary powers to provide assistance to taxpayers in instances when existing legislation does not provide a discount or the council feels the level of discount given is insufficient given the circumstances.

Following a recent council tax reduction tribunal, local authorities had been advised to adopt a policy which set out their guidelines and procedure in respect of section 13a 1c. All five East Sussex authorities had developed a consistent policy, a draft of which was appended to the Head of Finance's report.

The chair proposed an additional recommendation, set out in the resolution below, regarding the reduced budget allocated for Discretionary Housing Payments in 2015/16. The additional recommendation was supported by the remaining members of Cabinet.

Councillor Birch moved approval of the recommendations, set out in the resolution below, which was seconded by Councillor Cartwright.

RESOLVED (unanimously):-

- 1) To agree, in principle, to adopting the proposed discretionary reduction in liability policy at appendix 1 to the Head of Finance's report**
- 2) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Finance to finalise the policy in conjunction with the other East Sussex authorities and to make minor amendments in future years to ensure that the policy remains fit for purpose**
- 3) To call on the local Member of Parliament to take up the issue of a reduced budget for allocation as Discretionary Housing Payments in 2015/16**

The reason for this decision was:

We have no policy at present and by the adoption of such a policy will make us compliant with statutory regulation.

MATTERS FOR COUNCIL DECISION

64. 2015/16 PAY POLICY

The Executive Manager of People and Organisational Development presented a report on the pay policy statement for 2015/16.

Under the Localism Act 2011, the council was required to prepare and publish a pay policy statement each financial year. The statement provided information on issues related to the pay of the council's workforce, and complied with guidance issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government. The council would also look

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to ensure that the ratio of pay at the top to pay at the median did not exceed the national average for the public sector.

The statement would require approval by Full Council, prior to publication.

RESOLVED (unanimously) that Cabinet recommends the pay policy to Full Council for approval

The reason for this decision was:

The Localism Act 2011 requires Hastings Borough Council to prepare and publish an annual pay policy statement. The purpose of such a statement is to provide information about council policies on a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce, particularly its senior staff and its lowest paid employees. A pay policy must be prepared for each financial year and must be approved by Full Council, and published.

Please note: the pay structure has been updated to reflect the increase which took effect from 1 January 2015.

65. MINUTES OF THE MUSEUMS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2015

The minutes of the meeting of Museums Committee held on 12 January 2015 were submitted.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the Museums Committee meeting held on 12 January 2015 be received

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 6.34 pm)