

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING CONSULTATIVE BOARD

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 25 JUNE 2012

Present: Councillor Barned (Chairman), and
Councillors Beerling, Burton, Butler, Ms Griffin,
Mrs Grigg and Parvin

Also Present: Councillors Mrs Joy, Paterson and
Mrs Robertson

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brindle and Mrs Gibson.

2. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following substitutions were noted:-

Councillor Burton for Councillor Mrs Gibson
Councillor Butler for Councillor Brindle

3. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Paterson indicated her wish to speak on Agenda Item 12 – Empty Homes Plan Scoping Report.

Councillors Mrs Joy and Mrs Robertson were in attendance.

4. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor Barned be elected Chairman for the Municipal Year 2012/13.

5. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor Mrs Grigg be elected Vice Chairman for the Municipal Year 2012/13.

6. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

7. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

8. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 January 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed.

9. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING CONSULTATIVE BOARD

The Board considered the report of the Director for Regeneration and Communities regarding reviewing the role and contribution made by this Board.

A Member informed the Board that a governance review was currently being undertaken regarding the future of Overview and Scrutiny Committees which may or may not have an influence on this Board.

The Board felt it would be prudent to take the results of the governance review into consideration at the appropriate time.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO CABINET: That the Housing Consultative Board be retained, giving consideration to the outcome of the Governance review.

10. UPDATE TO THE ALLOCATION SCHEME

The Board considered the report of the Head of Housing and Community Services regarding forming the basis for broad changes to be included in a new Allocation Scheme.

The Head of Housing and Community Services responded to Members queries regarding, inter alia, consultation, transfers and training. A Member felt that providing foster care should be removed under the community contribution category.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES: That the principles contained in the appendix to the report of the Head of Housing and Community Services as forming the basis of a new Allocation Scheme be agreed.

11. REVIEW OF THE HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY

The Board considered the report of the Head of Housing and Community Services regarding the options for reviewing the Council's Housing Assistance Policy to be taken forward in a new policy.

Officers responded to questions raised by Members regarding, inter alia, private landlords, grant limits, suitability of repairs and use of the thermal efficiency study previously carried out.

A Member raised concerns regarding the opportunity to utilise fuel purchasing consortia to bulk buy fuel which Officers noted.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES:

1. That consideration be given to alternative funding arrangements for Golding Homes' tenants' Disabled Facilities Grants ("DFGs") whereby the Council's contribution to these DFGs is agreed collectively based on the Housing Stock Transfer Agreement.
2. That the following changes in approach to the Housing Assistance Programme be investigated:-
 - i) Any loan arrangement could either be for a fixed term, or be fixed to the sale of the property.
 - ii) To consider whether to strengthen the grants offer to landlords to increase the outcomes, or alternatively to cease the assistance to private landlords given the council's ability to enforce standards in the private rented sector
 - iii) To consider assisting residents to improve the thermal performance of the built fabric of the home with renewable energy measures that while not necessarily improving energy efficiency would reduce their direct fuel costs
 - iv) To consider another opportunity within rural off-gas network areas to utilise fuel purchasing consortia to bulk buy fuel, e.g. domestic heating oil to secure larger discounts that can reduce the cost per litre. Assistance could be provided to pump-prime these local schemes and enable residents to benefit in the long-term
 - v) To consider the many innovative schemes that operate across the country to return empty homes back into use, (e.g. the use of local residents seeking employment and training to undertake building work etc who are then able to occupy the home when completed) and one or more scheme could be funded through this programme.

12. EMPTY HOMES PLAN SCOPING REPORT

The Board considered the report of the Head of Housing and Community Services regarding the options for reviewing the Council's Empty Homes Strategy (2007) to be taken forward in a new Empty Homes Plan.

The Board were informed that the Regeneration and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee had recently agreed to undertake a review of Empty Homes as part of their work programme.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES: That the Empty Homes Plan Scoping Report be considered by Overview and Scrutiny before recommendations are made to the Cabinet Member.

13. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.