

AGENDA ITEM No. 11 (9)

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNCIL OFFICES, WIGSTON, ON TUESDAY, 10 MARCH 2009, COMMENCING AT 7.00 P.M.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor G A Boulter – Chair
 Councillor L A Bentley – Vice Chair
 Councillors T S Biring, J W Boyce, K M A Brown, M O Carrara, Mrs E Connell, C S Gore, P A Hings, K J Loydall, Mrs S B Morris and Mrs R I Sylvester

Officers in Attendance: M Hall, Mrs A Court, R Harbour, P Loveday, S Bruce, S Folwell, Mrs C E Sharp, Mrs T Gaskin and A Wood

An Apology for Absence was received from: Councillor J Vickerstaff

Minute Ref.	Narrative	Officer Responsible
22. Chairman's Announcements	Prior to the commencement of the proceedings the Chair called for a minute's silence to be held in memory of Mrs Lynn Brown the Council's Homelessness Officer who regrettably died at the weekend.	
23. Minutes of Last Meeting	RESOLVED: That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 January 2009 be signed and confirmed as a true record.	
24. Presentation Regarding the Council's Approach to Domestic Violence	<p>The Chairman introduced Mr Folwell and Mrs Gaskin who undertook a presentation involving a laptop projection of a power point presentation to Members for about 10 minutes.</p> <p>Mr Folwell informed Members that this presentation was in response to an item appearing in the local press which implied that Councils were failing victims of domestic violence, and this authority was named as one of those. A report which was the basis of this article looked into types of violence and support available, but focused on a number of problems which did not materialise within the Borough, therefore the authority was unable to "tick all the boxes". An example was given of the city of Glasgow which suffered many problems and thus was able to tick all the boxes and be rated "higher" in this report than</p>	

	<p>Oadby and Wigston.</p> <p>The purpose of this presentation was therefore to provide Members with a review of the actual situation prevailing within the Borough.</p> <p>Firstly, there had been a 9% increase in domestic violence crimes within the County up to the 12 month period December 2008 but this merely reflected an increase in domestic violence awareness leading to increased reporting of such crimes. The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership had a 3 year Community Safety Plan in place, within which domestic violence was a priority. The organisations contributing to this included the Domestic Violence Forum, Women's Aid, The Freedom Scheme, The Confederated Building Programme and the House Safe Programme, all of which sought to raise awareness but also provide suitable schemes and premises for the victims of Domestic Violence.</p> <p>A joint Domestic Violence Co-ordinator Post with Harborough District Council had been funded by the Local Area Agreement.</p> <p>With Oadby and Wigston, there was no evidence that Domestic Violence caused homelessness but rather the Domestic Violence Co-ordinator worked within the Council's tenants' policies and did not foresee any significant rise in the numbers reported.</p> <p>During the ensuing decision, it was confirmed that the current Housing Services Policy does recognise the separation between Policies and Procedures but that more details were required and a further report would be brought back to Committee after consulting with Partners. It was also confirmed that every view of the policies applicable had been requested by the Policy Committee and a report setting these out would be brought before a future meeting of that Committee.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the report be noted.</p>	SF
25 Reports of the Interim Section 151 Officer	<p>Members considered the report of the Interim Section 151 Officer as contained within report pages 280 – 289 which should be read in conjunction with these minutes as a composite document.</p> <p>a) Progress on Service Plans Targets</p> <p>During the discussion on this report, it was confirmed that a revised scheme for reporting would be</p>	

<p>26. Report of the Director of Community Services</p>	<p>introduced during the next Municipal Year enabling Members to identify items more easily. In addition, there would be a review of the whole of the Performance Management Framework which would hopefully set the situation out a lot clearer.</p> <p>However, some discussion ensued on the meaning of some of the current Indicators.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the report be noted</p> <p>Members considered the reports of the Director of Community Services as contained within report pages 290 – 299 which should be read in conjunction with these minutes as a composite document.</p> <p>a) Landlord Services Improvement Programme - Update</p> <p>The Head of Housing Services introduced his report asking Members to understand that this was a review of the progress made since the Housing Inspection was undertaken, and a summary of the progress made within the Landlord Services Improvement Programme. Mr Folwell referred to the bullet points contained within paragraph 1 which were elaborated upon later in the report. He then went on to inform Members that there would be raising awareness sessions held with regard to tenant involvement and all Members were encouraged to attend these. In this respect, the Chairman confirmed that the date referred to within the report would be changed.</p> <p>The Chief Executive addressed the meeting to reassure Members regarding the concerns that the improvement was not happening quickly enough, by noting that the Audit Commission were comfortable with the progress, ways were bring explored in which the progress could be "ratcheted up" but that capacity was a real issue. A further report regarding significant progress will be brought to the next meeting.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the report be noted.</p> <p>b) Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy 2009/10</p> <p>The Head of Environmental Health explained that this report proposed a new policy for 2009/10 relying upon existing targets and types of grant in the main, but in order to take advantage of proposed increases in funding, essential works grants are made available to</p>	<p>ALL</p> <p>SF</p>
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landlords for works to bring homes that they own up to the decent home standard. A report from the East Midlands Regional Assembly indicated that there were no less than 1400 private rented homes in the Borough not complying with the decent home standard and suggested that this scheme be adopted for the one year only, in order to reduce this number.

In response to questioning, Mr Bruce confirmed that controls were in place to prevent abuse by sale of the property since the Council would take a charge on the property which would be a condition of any grant funding. The only cost to the authority would be that of officer time which is already budgeted for. Mr Bruce added that payment is only made to the contractors, not the landlord and that it is for the authority to decide what work is needed, three separate estimates are sought, and no monies are paid over until a satisfactory survey of the works is conducted.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The Policy for all housing grant activity in the financial year 2009/10 be adopted.
 - 2) The maximum costs for eligible works to meet the decent homes standard be raised to £10,000 per property and
 - 3) In addition to the same eligibility criteria as in the previous year, the 2009/10 policy makes grants available for landlords with the conditions set out in the report, subject to confirmation of the availability of GOEM funding.
- c) Food and Health and Safety at Work Enforcement Plans 2009/10

SB

During discussion on this Policy, concerns were expressed regarding Health and Safety at work enforcement within the authority and what safeguards were in place in-house.

The Head of Environmental Health informed Members that this policy did not cover the Council's internal workings, this was merely the Council's responsibility as the enforcing authority. However, he went on to inform the meeting that the Council does have a Health and Safety Policy which is reviewed annually and responsibility for applying it is devolved to managers.

	<p>Notwithstanding these reassurances, it was</p> <p>RESOLVED That:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The report be noted. 2) The Chief Executive is to consider the current Health and Safety Policy in force and 3) A report be brought before the next meeting of the Policy Committee reviewing the current Health and Safety Policy of the authority. <p>d) Contaminated Land Update</p> <p>Prior to any discussion on this matter, Councillor Mrs E Connell declared a personal interest in this matter and vacated the Chamber at 8.09 pm.</p> <p>The Head of Environmental Health sought to update Members of progress since the last meeting of the Committee on 23 February. Letters had been sent to residents delivered by hand on the 24 February, explaining how the decision had been made and indicating the way forward. This was followed up by the issue of notices of determination which were again delivered by hand to the properties affected together with details of the summary of evidence and an assessment of the contaminants. The covering letter referred to meetings to be held with residents, and Mr Bruce was able to confirm that the first of such meetings had been held the day previously. These will continue until the 31 March. A public register of the contaminated land was being set up and a bid had been made to DEFRA for assistance towards the cost of any remedial works.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the report be noted.</p> <p>Councillor Mrs Connell returned to the meeting at 8.15 p.m.</p> <p>e) Sunflower Radio</p> <p>Prior to any discussion on this matter, the Chairman declared a prejudicial interest in this item and vacated the Chamber at 8.16 pm. Councillor Bentley assumed the Chair of the meeting for this item only.</p> <p>The Head of the Built Environment introduced his report which outlined proposals for a reciprocal arrangement between the Council and Sunflower AM wherein the Brocks Hill Visitors' Centre would host a</p>	<p>MH/SB</p> <p>SB</p>
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studio to broadcast on the AM band with programmes run by Sunflower which would also act as an extension of the Council's communications function, increase activities for visitors at the Visitors' Centre and become an attraction in itself.

Mr Harbour conceded there were many unanswered questions but explained that this matter was before the Committee now in view of the urgency. The availability of AM bandwidth licenses is comparatively rare, and as one is currently available to this area, there is the need to move swiftly or risk losing this opportunity altogether. He was therefore suggesting an agreement in principle at this stage, with the other questions to be worked on and brought back to Committee at a future meeting.

During the subsequent discussion a number of concerns were expressed including the need to obtain planning permission in order to construct an office, the potential loss of space within the exhibition hall, the actual sum required to make this bid which required clarification, the use of senior officers' time required to sit on the board of directors, the position of licensee, which of the Council's policies would be met by this project, the revenue costs of the operation and the need to apply to the Council's Contingency Fund to cover the initial cost of the bid for the bandwidth slot and the initial broadcasting licence.

Mr Harbour, and subsequently the Chief Executive endeavoured to address these concerns and reassured Members particularly with regard to the financial commitment although the potential benefits by opening up new areas of publicity were very exciting.

Members were therefore generally in favour of revised recommendations which emerged during the discussion. Upon being put to a vote the motions leading to the resolutions were duly carried and Councillor Mrs Morris being the Chair of the Policy Committee, abstained from voting on this matter.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That Members agree in principle to entering into an agreement with Sunflower Radio Ltd that would permit an application to be made to Ofcom for an AM Long Term Restricted Service Licence on the basis that the Brocks Hill Visitors' Centre

	<p>would become the host facility for the Sunflower Radio Station.</p> <p>2) A report be brought before the next meeting of the Policy Committee requesting the sum of £575.00 be made available from the Council's Contingency Fund to cover the cost of the initial application and licence, such report outlining the overall policy context of this application and what it needed to secure the application.</p> <p>3) A report be brought before a future meeting of this Committee outlining in full, the details of this application in order that Members may be fully informed as a basis to go forward.</p> <p>Councillor Boulter returned to the Chamber at 9.10 pm.</p>	MH/RH
26. Update on Action List from last Meeting	<p>RESOLVED: That the report be noted.</p> <p>.</p>	
27.	<p><u>ITEM ADMITTED TO THE MEETING UNDER SECTION 100B(4)(B) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972</u></p> <p>By reason of special circumstance in that an additional item of business needed to be considered before the next meeting of the Committee, the Chairman was of the opinion that the following item of business should be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgency.</p>	
28. Landlord Services Request for Transfer, Exception to Policy	<p>Mr Folwell introduced his report by outlining the nature of this request which the Magistrates' Court had asked the Council to undertake, and therefore it was before Members as an exception to Policy. Mr Folwell conceded that some details still needed to be worked on, and was therefore seeking authority delegated to the Chair of the Committee and the Director of Community Services to act appropriately.</p> <p>Upon being put to a vote, this motion was carried unanimously.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That authority be delegated to the Chair of the Services Committee in consultation with the Director of Community Services, to consider the most appropriate action in dealing with an exception to Policy on a matter of transfer of tenancy.</p>	SF

29. Chair's Announcement	Councillor Boulter thanked all Members and Officers for their support during the last 12 months and looked forward to the next Municipal Year which promised exciting developments.	
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The Meeting Closed at 9.30 p.m.