

Minutes



Meeting name	Cabinet
Date	Wednesday, 12 January 2022
Start time	4.00 pm
Venue	Parkside, Station Approach, Burton Street, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. LE13 1GH

Present:

Chair Councillor J. Orson (Chair)

Councillors M. Graham MBE (Vice-Chair) R. Bindloss
R. Browne A. Freer

Officers Chief Executive
Director for Corporate Services
Director for Housing and Communities (Deputy Chief Executive)
Director for Growth and Regeneration
Assistant Director for Housing Management
Assistant Director for Governance & Democracy
Democratic Services Officer (HA)
Democratic Services Officer (CR)

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222	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE Apologies for absence were received from Councillor de Burle.</p>
223	<p>MINUTES The minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2021 were confirmed.</p>
224	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST Councillor Orson declared an interest in any items relating to Leicestershire County Council, due to his role as a County Councillor.</p>
225	<p>MATTERS REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE IN ACCORDANCE WITH SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULES No items had been referred from the Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules.</p>
226	<p>LIFELINE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PLAN Michelle Howard, Director for Housing and Communities introduced the report, the purpose of which was to seek Cabinet approval to enter into a shared partnership arrangement with Harborough District Council (HDC) for the provision of private lifeline services and to progress work to develop options for a single assistive technology offer across Melton.</p> <p>Mrs. Howard advised that the Council’s lifeline services supported residents to remain safely and independently at home. Currently, there were 3 separate lifeline offers delivered by the Council (private lifeline, time sage and links to properties via hardwired units). This lead to a lack of clarity for customers and the equipment used to deliver the service needed to be upgraded and digitally enabled. The Council currently worked in partnership with Harborough District Council (HDC) who were responsible for the associated customer call centre. The Council needed to review this contractual arrangement to achieve greater value for money and efficiency.</p> <p>Mrs. Howard highlighted that the proposals before Members would help to build on a number of changes and improvements which had already been made to the service. Initial action would ensure that the current service was effective, delivered an immediate saving and was ready to be digitally enabled. This would be best facilitated through the partnership with HDC and there were budget proposals to include a Capital allocation to enable the transition to digital equipment. Over the next year, as part of a wider review of lifeline services, the Council would take a comprehensive and inclusive assessment of its approach to providing assistive technology, looking at the viability of establishing a single customer focused, commercially viable offer across Melton (including engagement with Scrutiny</p>

Committee).

Mrs. Howard advised that in relation to historic debt, processes were in place to ensure that the Council received monies due for services provided and there was a separate programme to address historic debt.

Councillor Malise Graham, Portfolio Holder for People and Communities (Deputy Leader) advised that the Council wanted to update its lifeline offer and set out a plan for a longer term review. Lifeline was a vital service for the Council's most vulnerable residents, supporting them to remain safely at home, helping them to live independently and reducing pressure on hospitals and social care. The new technology had an important role to play and had many advantages.

Councillor Graham highlighted that the Council's Lifeline service needed to be efficient and cost effective. There were a number of considerations and questions which needed to form part of the wider review, which Members were encouraged to engage with and contribute to.

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- 1) **APPROVED** the continued provision of private lifeline services with Harborough District Council (HDC), subject to legal approval of contractual arrangements;
- 2) **DELEGATED** authority to the Director for Housing and Communities (in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for People and Communities) to negotiate, finalise and sign any required legal documentation;
- 3) **ENDORSED** the 2-stage approach and **NOTED** that Cabinet will receive a further report on the wider review on the feasibility of establishing a single Lifeline offer for the Borough of Melton;
- 4) **NOTED** that a capital allocation to support the compatibility of Lifeline Units, as part of the Digital Switchover had been incorporated in the Budget proposals for 2022/23 and this would be progressed alongside the wider review of this service.

Reason for the recommendations:

The Council's Lifeline and Assistive Technology services provide a valuable support to tenants and residents to live independently in their homes. The current provision is though disjointed and the equipment used to support the service needs to be upgraded and digitally enabled. A shared service arrangement with Harborough District Council will allow the Council to achieve greater efficiencies through economies of scale and a consistent service offer.

The two stage process will allow the Council to realise contract and partnership savings and efficiencies now, as well as assist in managing the complexities

associated with meeting our obligations as part of the digital switchover (stage 1). It will then also allow time to undertake a wider review, with a view towards establishing a single Lifeline offer for Melton which will be customer focused and provide ongoing commercial viability for the future (stage 2).

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TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Michelle Howard, Director for Housing and Communities introduced the report, the purpose of which was seek Cabinet approval for the Councils new Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Framework.

Mrs. Howard highlighted that the framework would build on the Council's many years of excellent work. Tenant engagement was a high priority and a vital aspect of the Council's role as a landlord (being held to account, working with residents to improve services etc.) It would ensure focus on continuous improvements, open, inclusive and meaningful engagement and a range of opportunities for the sharing of views, concerns and complaints.

Mrs. Howard advised that the significance and profile of tenant engagement had increased since the introduction of the Charter for Social Housing Residents (the Charter's 7 core values were detailed at paragraph 4.3 of the report). The Council had undertaken positive engagement with tenants but there was much work to be done and a refresh and refocus of this area of work was opportune (as detailed at paragraph 5.1 of the report). The Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Framework set out a proposed approach for the next five years with a detailed delivery plan to be developed. Subject to approval, officers would begin to implement the 'next steps' detailed at paragraph 8.1 of the report. The Council would engage with residents directly and through a programme of service improvement groups (repairs and maintenance, communication and neighbourhood management) and group meetings would be held later in the week. It was important to ensure Members were informed of the progress made and it was proposed to submit an annual update to Cabinet.

Councillor Ronan Browne, Portfolio Holder for Council Homes and Landlord Services commented that this was the beginning of a new journey for the Council in relation to tenant engagement. Historically, the Council had engaged well with tenants but there had been added pressures and a lack of government focus on this area. Now prioritised with the help of the Charter for Social Housing Residents, engagement between tenants, officers and Members, facilitated through robust, meaningful discussion and listening to tenants concerns and ideas was vital to progressing in a collective and meaningful way.

The Leader noted the Council's 'next steps', commenting that good work had been undertaken and that he was pleased with the Framework.

Cabinet **APPROVED** the Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement Framework.

Reason for the recommendation:

The Charter for Social Housing Residents is a significant marker of the expectations and requirements of social landlords to engage with, listen to and be accountable to residents.

Engagement forms a key strand of our responsibilities as a landlord. It is not an optional extra. The Council must also be able to demonstrate to the Regulator of Social Housing, that it is engaging in a meaningful way with our tenants and leaseholders.

The proposed framework provides a mechanism to deliver on a commitment to meaningful engagement. Delivery of the commitments contained within the framework will be via an action plan.

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DRAFT HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY - APPROVAL TO LAUNCH CONSULTATION

Michelle Howard, Director for Housing and Communities introduced the report, the purpose of which was to seek Cabinet approval to enter a consultation phase for feedback from stakeholders, residents and current housing waiting list applicants on the proposed new Policy.

Mrs. Howard advised that the Council was required to have a procedure to assess housing need, advertise available social housing and allocate properties (a Housing Allocations Scheme). This provided a robust and transparent framework to determine eligibility and prioritisation for applications to the Housing Register, recognising that social housing was a scarce resource and must be allocated in line with need. The Council's current Housing Allocation Scheme was last updated in 2014. It required a full review in context of local housing need, current partnership arrangements and legislative changes and the draft Policy (Appendix A) had addressed this.

Mrs. Howard highlighted that making changes to the Housing Allocation Scheme required a period of consultation and subject to approval this would begin tomorrow (for 6 weeks). The Council was required to engage other housing providers operating within the borough and it was also important to seek views and feedback from partners, stakeholders, residents and current Housing Register applicants. The engagement and feedback would assist the drafting of a robust equalities impact assessment and enable amendments to be made to the Policy. A further report (detailing outcome, equalities impact assessment, the Policy and a timeline for implementation) would be submitted to Cabinet on 9 March.

Alison Bennett, Assistant Director for Housing Management gave a brief overview of the key changes within the draft Policy, as detailed at paragraphs 5.6 to 5.20.

These concerned:

- Compliance with the Homeless Reduction Act 2017.

- Options to refine the number of eligible applicants on the Housing Register to better match supply and demand. The Council currently had approximately 608 applicants and approximately 200 available properties each year and this needed to be brought into better alignment. It was proposed that there be changes to the local connection criteria for residency and employment.
- Incentivising certain groups on the Housing Register (i.e. Armed Forces personnel), providing there was a housing need.
- Removal of Band 4 (applicants with no housing need but who wish to move). It was unlikely that the Council would be able to offer properties to applicants in this Band and advice and assistance on other housing options should be offered. Those currently in Band 4 seeking older persons accommodation would be moved to Band 3, as there was less demand for these properties.

Mrs. Bennett advised that a Members Briefing would be held to consider the issues in more detail. The draft Policy would be published to the Council's website together with some key survey questions to focus responses and ensure that the consultation was inclusive.

Councillor Ronan Browne, Portfolio Holder for Council Homes and Landlord Services thanked Mrs. Bennett and her team for their work, noting the important collaborative work undertaken between Members and officers. He commented that community engagement was beneficial and the Council's list of consultees was robust. He looked forward to reviewing the consultation feedback and this would greatly assist with drafting the Policy. The Policy would help to ensure an adequate supply of housing for those in need, help to protect the Council and would underpin the Council's development programme for new council housing.

The Leader thanked Mrs Howard, Mrs Bennett and Councillor Browne for their work, commenting that he looked forward to a comprehensive consultation process and to the feedback received.

The Portfolio Holder for Climate, Access and Engagement advised that she looked forward to the development of the equalities impact assessment and would provide any support needed to assist with this.

Cabinet:

- 1) **NOTED** and endorse the contents of the draft Choice Based Letting and Housing Allocations Policy;
- 2) **APPROVED** the commencement of a 6-week period of consultation from 13 January 2022 to 25 February 2022.

Reason for the recommendations:

The revised housing allocations scheme will make changes to the way in which applications for social housing are assessed and prioritised to determine who can join the housing register and the criteria to determine the priority banding of each

application. Making changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme requires a period of consultation.

The Council is legally required to consult with other Housing Providers operating within the Borough, but it is also important to seek views and feedback from other partners, stakeholders, residents and current housing register applicants. The feedback received will enable amendments to be considered for inclusion within the policy ahead of a final version being considered by Cabinet in March 2022. The feedback will also enable the completion of a thorough equalities impact assessment, which will be considered by Cabinet alongside the revised policy.

The meeting closed at: 4.28 pm

Chair