

DRAFT MINUTES of the extraordinary meeting of the Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 21 December 2011 at 6.00pm.

Present: Councillors Wendy Herd (Chair), Councillor Sue Gray (Vice Chair), Martin Healy, Tunde Ojetola and Amanda Prevost.

Apologies: Councillor Victoria Holloway

In attendance: Linda Sinclair – Interim Head of Housing
Janice White – Service Manager, Housing Strategy & Renewal
Mike Jones – Management Accountant
John Dawe – Democratic Services

28. Declarations of Interest

None received

29. Budget 2012/13 – Growth and Savings Proposals

As a consequence of the workshop sessions held on 22 November 2011 a number of issues arose associated with a range of the budget growth and savings proposals upon which further information and explanations were sought. In that respect this extraordinary meeting was convened to consider the following:

HWBG3- Additional demands on Homeless Service

The Service Manager, Housing Strategy and Renewal explained the context for seeking an additional £250K funding for the service. It was recognised that homelessness in Thurrock is now approaching a 50% increase on last year which is almost 3 times the national average reflecting recently statistics from Shelter which places Thurrock 37th out of 344 local authorities for the highest number of homelessness per head of population.

The existing staff complement is relatively small and in recent months due to staff turnover/changes it has become increasingly difficult to manage the service. As a result the growth bid will be used to support a new approach akin to a triage service.

Taking into account the existing statutory duties placed on the homelessness service as well as the changes brought about by the

Localism Act, it is being proposed to use the additional funding of the order of £140K to expand the provision of available temporary accommodation, thus reduce reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation, a variable allocation to provide rental deposits for individual persons where necessary, an additional 3 FTE staff dealing mainly with preventative work alongside a programme of increased training to increase the overall capacity of the service.

In response to members questions it was explained that the current contract with the CRB around preventing homelessness would continue although it is hoped by combining the prevention and direct homelessness aspects the service will be more effective and move towards avoiding year on year overspendings.

It was confirmed that the reference in the budget figures to a £97k income stream was that amount recharged to the HRA to reflect the cost of the service directly attributable to housing tenants. This is the maximum that can be legitimately charged to the HRA.

Finally in response to issues of value for money and in particular concerns that registered landlords would seek to exploit the authority in relation to rent levels officers reassured the members that rents are set in accordance with a nationwide scheme, and the level of bond which the local authority pays is in accordance and comparable with tenants who are renting privately.

HWBG4- Private Sector Housing Duties

Thurrock's spend in this service is relatively low based on comparisons with sub regional partners and CIPFA benchmarking. As a result the growth bid of £125K will be used to meet the cost of additional FTE staff. In order to maximise the capacity of the team a number of options are being looked at including a partnership arrangement with Southend who are a leader in the private sector housing field.

One of the main objectives of the service will be to begin to address the growing problem of empty private sector housing as well as meeting the Authority's statutory responsibilities for improving the conditions of housing in multiple occupation through appropriate licensing.

Recognising the importance of this work and the value of working in partnership it was noted that although no formal contract had yet been drawn up with Southend the intention is to move towards setting up a shared service agreement based on the model used with a number of other council services.

RESOLVED:

That, having considered the additional information and the responses of officers, the growth proposals as presented be noted.

The meeting finished at 6.41 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services, telephone (01375) 652082**