

MINUTES OF POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON

27 November 2008

7.30pm-8.49pm

PRESENT

COUNCILLORS

Simon Carter (Chairman)

Manny Doku
Chris Millington

Andrew Johnson
Russell Perrin
Mark Wilkinson

Eddie Johnson
Clive Souter

ALSO PRESENT

Linda Pailing (for item 13 only)

73. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Andrew Johnson, Eddie Johnson, Chris Millington and Mark Wilkinson each declared a personal interest in agenda items 21 (GAFF 11 Projects) and 22 (Town Centre North – Next Steps) as they were Council representatives on Harlow Renaissance Ltd.

74. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 25 September 2008 and 14 October 2008 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

75. **MATTERS ARISING**

None.

76. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

Two questions received from Mr D Thomas, together with their replies are at Appendix A of these minutes.

77. **NON-CONTENTIOUS BUSINESS**

RESOLVED that the following items be taken as non-contentious business:

- 7 Committee Work Plan.
- 8 Review of Human Resources Policy.
- 12 Local Authority Business Growth Initiative.
- 14 Cavity Wall and Loft Insulation.
- 18 References from Other Committees.

78. **COMMITTEE WORK PLAN**

RESOLVED that the Work Plan be noted.

79. **REVIEW OF COUNCIL HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY**

The Committee received a report proposing a review of the Council's Human Resources policies.

It was envisaged that drafts of priority policies would be in place by 31 December 2008, with a view to implementation by 31 March 2008.

RESOLVED that the steps being taken be noted.

80. **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION – MODEL PUBLICATION SCHEME**

The Committee received a report proposing the adoption of the Model Publication Scheme, which had been issued and approved by the Information Commissioner.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the Model Publication Scheme be adopted with effect from 1 January 2009;
- (b) the Council's website, Contact Harlow notice board, Harlow Times and other publications (at no additional cost) be used to publicise the Publication Scheme and provide information under the Scheme as far as reasonably practicable.

81. **DISPOSAL OF RESIDENTIAL LAND**

The Committee received a report proposing the disposal of specified residential land for use as garden land, with the Council retaining covenant for any future development.

A note was tabled which gave advice to those Members who were members of both this and the Planning Committee. The advice was to help them to decide if they should debate and vote on this issue at both

this Committee and the Planning Committee (when the planning application on this issue was considered).

Councillor Russell Perrin declared that he would participate in the debate and vote on this issue at this meeting, but would absent himself from any subsequent Planning Committee considering this item.

Councillor Chris Millington declared that he would take no part in the proceedings on this issue at this meeting and that, in so doing, would preserve his right to debate and vote on the issue at any subsequent Planning Committee.

RESOLVED that the disposal of land for the reasons outlined in the report be approved 'subject to formal contract' and officers be authorised to complete all legal formalities required to effect the disposal.

82. **PROPOSED CORPORATE PLAN**

The Committee received a report on the consultation process and development of the Council's corporate priorities for 2009/10-2012/13.

RESOLVED that the proposed Corporate Priorities (at Appendix 1 of the report) be endorsed and recommended to Full Council on 11 December 2008 for ratification.

83. **LOCAL AUTHORITY BUSINESS GROWTH INITIATIVE**

The Committee received a report proposing key points to be included in the Council's submission to the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) Consultation on reforming the Local Authority Business Growth Incentives (LABGI) scheme.

RESOLVED that the key points of response to the CLG consultation 'Reforming the Local Authority Business Growth Incentives (LABGI) scheme, be endorsed.

84. **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE SUPPORT**

The Committee received a report on the resource implications of the legislation which extended the Council's scrutiny role.

The new legislation extended the scrutiny role by making provision for crime and disorder matters and for issues raised by constituents (via their Ward Councillors) to be scrutinised.

Members raised their concerns that central government had not allocated any resources to local authorities, to cover the additional costs imposed on them by this new legislation.

RESOLVED that

- (a) support for the scrutiny functions should include support for Audit & Improvement Committee;
- (b) the work of the Scrutiny and Audit & Improvement Committees be supported by a part-time officer employed permanently within the committee support section;
- (c) the approach to funding this post be supported;
- (d) the Government be lobbied, via the Harlow MP and the Local Government Association, to secure additional funding for the extra work required and the resource implications of this legislation.

85. **CAVITY WALL AND LOFT INSULATION**
PROJECT NO: K08/034

The Committee received a report proposing the acceptance of a tender for cavity wall and loft insulation to domestic properties.

RESOLVED that the tender submitted by Contractor A be accepted as the most economically advantageous, in the revised sum of £655,297.87 'subject to contract'.

86. **ENERGY CARE SCHEME**
CAVITY WALL AND LOFT INSULATION
PROJECT NO: 08/050

The Committee received a report proposing that the Council works in partnership with two regional insulation companies and national funding providers, to enable Council owned property to have cavity wall and loft insulation installed at no cost to the Council.

RESOLVED that the Council enters into funding agreements with one or more of the national funding providers to extend the current arrangements in order to facilitate further installations of cavity wall and loft insulation, as detailed in the report for the period up to and including 31 March 2010.

87. **BUSINESS CASES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS AT THREE HILLS ESTATE (AYLETT'S FIELD, THE BRIARS AND COPSHALL CLOSE)**

The Committee received a report proposing the acceptance of a tender for environmental works at Aylett's Field, The Briars and Copshall Close.

Members noted that the report did not contain a specific date for the contract to commence, only that it would do so early in the New Year.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the contract be awarded to Kier Harlow Ltd ("Kier") in the fixed sum of £306,080.00 'subject to contract' (Project No: K08/034BC);
- (b) Members of the Committee be informed of the date the contract would commence and when it was due to be completed.

88. **BUDGET & PERFORMANCE MONITORING WORKING PARTY**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Budget & Performance Monitoring Working Party meetings held on 15 October 2008 and 12 November 2008 be noted.

89. **REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

(a) Housing Committee
13 November 2008

(i) Former Tenant Write-Offs

The above Committee recommended to the Policy & Resources Committee that the cases listed in Appendix 1 of the report (except for items 1 and 6), a total debt of £10,234.34 be written off.

RESOLVED that the cases listed in Appendix 1 of the report (except for items 1 and 6), a total debt of £10,234.34 be written off.

(ii) Housing Capital Programme (Revised) 2008/09

The above Committee recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee that the Revised Housing Capital

Programme 2008/09 at Appendix A of the report be recommended for adoption by Full Council.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL that the Revised Housing Capital Programme 2008/09 at Appendix A of the report be approved.

- (b) Environment & Community Committee
18 November 2008

Swimming Pool Closure Working Group

The above Committee recommended to the Policy & Resources Committee that the following recommendation of the Swimming Pool Closure Working Group, meeting on 27 March 2008, be approved:-

'The Council's Asset Management Plan should include explicit reference to building life expectancy risks, estimates of investment required to ensure continued use and that the Plan should be regularly reviewed by Members.'

RESOLVED that the Council's Asset Management Plan should include explicit reference to building life expectancy risks, estimates of investment required to ensure continued use and that the Plan should be regularly reviewed by Members.

90. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

91. **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following agenda items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified under Paragraph 3 of Part One of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, if and so long as in all the circumstances of the cases the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Andrew Bramidge and Ostap Paparega from Harlow Renaissance Ltd and Andy Walsh from Boxall Sayer accepted an invitation to remain in the meeting during consideration of agenda item 21.

Ostap Paparega and Andy Walsh then left the meeting, whilst Andrew Bramidge remained for agenda item 22.

92. **GROWTH AREAS FUND ROUND 11 (GAF 11) PROJECTS**

The Committee received a report proposing a clarification period with both bidders, prior to the Council selecting a preferred bidder.

Unfortunately, an incorrect version of this report had been included in the agenda, so the final version of this report was tabled to avoid any confusion.

RESOLVED that the recommendations as detailed in the report be agreed.

93. **TOWN CENTRE NORTH**

The Committee received a report proposing the extension of the Interim Collaboration Agreement.

Members did not want this project delayed by having to wait for Committee decisions at scheduled meetings. As the next meeting of this Committee was not until 29 January 2009, they agreed to hold a special meeting earlier than this, if necessary.

RESOLVED that

- (a) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of this Committee and the Leaders of the three political groups to extend the Interim Collaboration Agreement (ICA) with Stockland as set out in paragraph 8 of the report;
- (b) the appraisal report and recommendations be brought to special meetings of this Committee and Council as soon as is practicable and no later than 31 March 2009.

CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE

APPENDIX A

Question from Mr D Thomas to the Chairman of the Committee

For the financial year 2008-2009, what impact and for what reasons, has Harlow Council's joint venture with Kier had on:-

1. The level of service charges paid by leaseholders and tenants of Harlow Council?
2. The level of Council Tax paid by residents of Harlow to Harlow Council?

Reply from the Chairman of the Committee

Service Charges

The Housing Committee agreed in February 2007 to introduce un-pooled service charges as a means of ensuring that the users of a service only, where practicable, are levied a service charge instead of the cost or a proportion of the cost, being borne by all the leaseholders and/or tenants.

One of the key benefits for the Council on behalf of its residents for entering into a partnership to create Kier Harlow Ltd, was to inject private sector experience to modernise the business. This has achieved, for example, better management and performance information which has enabled the Council to scrutinise costs and levy charges on a fairer and transparent basis.

Irrespective of whether the delivery of the service continued in-house, through the Council's partner Kier Harlow Ltd or another partner, it was inevitable that some service users would experience a rise or fall in their estimated service charges for 2008/09 as a result of the un-pooling.

Level of Council Tax

It is not practicable to identify precisely what impact Kier Harlow Ltd has had on the level of Council Tax, as this would require the reconstruction of the Council's budgets going back to 2006/07 on the basis that the partnership was not in place.

However, the Council expects to benefit from cost savings totalling £12.7 million over the seven year life of the partnership agreement. These savings will accrue to the Council's General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme budgets, benefiting residents, Council Tax payers, tenants and leaseholders.