

SOCIAL INCLUSION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12th April 2007 at 6.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillors Bullock, M. Hussain and Shaw .

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Franks

12 ELECTION OF CHAIR

Resolved: That in the absence of the Chair (Councillor Hinkley) Councillor Shaw be elected Chair for this meeting only.

13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors Abid, Hinkley and Skepelhorn.

14 CALLED-IN DECISION OF THE EXECUTIVE (12/03/07) – PETITION – HOUSING SERVICES (REF: 8.1)

The Committee was invited to consider the decision taken by the Executive (EX/66/07) on 12th March 2007 in relation to Petition – Housing Services which had been called-in by Councillors Shaw and Simmons.

Councillor Shaw advised that the reasons for the calling-in of Executive Decision No. EX/66/07 in relation to Petition – Housing Services were:

- That the Executive took no notice of the Petition;
- That the Executive denied that Housing Offices were to close;
- The dissatisfaction with the Luton Business Partnership Plan.

Councillor Shaw advised that at the Executive meeting it had been stated that none of the area housing offices were to close but that the Luton Business Partnership Plan contradicted that information. He sought clarification on the issue from the Head of Housing (Landlord).

The Head of Housing (Landlord) stated that the Luton Business Partnership Plan was a 2 prong plan:

- (i) Move around back office staff -
- (ii) Future of area offices for customer access – no decision as yet, tenants to be fully consulted

He advised that the purpose of the Executive report was to make Members aware of the issues around customer services which was about where staff would be based. Any service provision changes would be consulted on and

a full customer audit was being undertaken at the moment .

The following table lists those questions raised and responses given:

QUESTION	RESPONSE
Has consultation been carried out on the reduced opening hours?	Each office will only be shut for a couple of hours to allow training of front line staff.
Was it correct that 80 properties had not had their gas appliances serviced for 2 years?	That was last year and it was due to tenants not admitting technicians into their properties for appliances to be serviced. The Council's Legal Services division had been working on the legal process via the Courts to get access to properties, and that had now improved. Most properties had now been accessed for servicing of their gas appliances.
Is it correct that there are still 40 gas appliances as yet to be serviced?	I do not have that information to hand, but can advise Members following the meeting.
When is the consultation exercise to finish?	Summer 2007.
Why if the computer system is not fully integrated would you make a decision to move staff etc?	There are 3 strands – New IT, Staff Structure and Process – all are interdependent. Building works and central contractor – now work together, Area Surveyors still to move. Co-location of these teams will bring massive service benefits to customers.
What happens in between if the computer system does not allow to match up 2 hour appointment slots?	The new system will from January 2008. When the area teams move to the Depot they will use the current computer system.
Will anyone lose their job?	No - we have held vacant posts – there will be no redundancies.
Why is money ring-fenced to Housing Revenue Account (HRA) being used to contribute to Neighbourhood Wardens in Marsh Farm ?	The Head of Housing (Landlord) agreed to provide a small portion of matched funding that was currently used to pay for static security at Purley Centre. The project will involve co-locating Police, PCSO's, Neighbourhood Wardens etc. onsite and would be a much better use of money.

Shop rent at the Purley Centre went into the HRA. Where is the benefit to the HRA from outside the Purley Centre? Why doesn't the General Fund pay contribution?	The contribution to, Neighbourhood Wardens in Marsh Farm, which brings the added benefit of a local police station, will cost less than we are currently paying for a static security guard. This is better VFM for the HRA and tenants on Marsh Farm. It is a 3 year deal, which will then be reviewed.
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A representative of the Tenants Consultative Committee commented that the consultation exercise being undertaken did not ask any clear questions such as if residents needed a local contact point. He further commented on the responses being calculated in percentages, as this could be misleading if only a small number of forms had been returned.

The Head of Housing Services (Landlord) advised that the consultation on the audit of offices was to get a gauge of opinion.

A Councillor stated that the Neighbourhood Warden issue was that tenants all paid into the fund – Marsh Farm received a better service and Lewsey Farm received no service.

The Head of Housing (Landlord) advised that service charges were complex and with regard to re-organisation of services, charges for existing services had been unpooled and recharged to every tenant. New services if they were to be charged were treated differently under the rules. In this case, the new wardens were not being recharged to Marsh Farm as they were not being treated as a new service charge. He further advised that 3 neighbourhood wardens were working in the Social Behaviour Unit to target problem areas.

Members of the Committee commented that the Executive had not considered the detail of the report and that they had no confidence in the Executive as they had not dealt with the issues in the report.

Councillor Franks, in attendance, advised that he was not surprised at the Members' comments but pointed out that the decision called-in was in response to a petition and nothing to do with service excellence project or the change plan.

Councillor Shaw stated that the reason the petition had been submitted and the change plan were all one issue.

Resolved: That Executive Decision No. EX/66/07 – Petition Housing Services be referred to Full Council for their consideration.

(Note: The meeting ended at 6.43 p.m.)