

Minutes of:	THE CABINET
Date of Meeting:	4 November 2015
Present:	Councillor M Connolly (in the Chair) Councillors P Heneghan, A Isherwood J Lewis, R Shori and S Walmsley
Apologies:	Councillor A Simpson
Public attendance:	4 members of the public were in attendance.

CA.428 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Connolly declared a personal interest in any matters relating to the fact that his partner is employed by Persona Care and Support Ltd (Local Authority Trading Company providing a range of adult social care services).

CA.429 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

A period of thirty minutes was allocated for any members of the public present at the meeting to ask questions about the work or performance of the Council or Council services.

Topics: Six Town Housing – Bedroom Tax

Question: Under the 'bedroom tax' legislation, Six Town Housing currently has a property under-occupancy figure of 598 and there are currently 344 properties in rent arrears. Will help be given to those tenants in an under occupied property?

Response: The Council is acutely aware of the problem and wherever possible, help is provided to tenant(s) who want to downsize to a smaller property in order to mitigate the impact of the bedroom tax legislation. The Council is also looking at a range of options to meet the growing demand for smaller properties including working with private sector landlords to provide suitable, good quality rental properties within Bury.

Topic: Six Town Housing – Housing Repairs

Question: Will Six Town Housing be in a position to carry out general repairs on properties as needed, in view of the reducing levels of income it receives?

Response: The Council continues to fund Six Town Housing to meet general repairs and provided extra money in the budget to meet the Bury standard. However, Government plans to cut rent levels will inevitably have an impact on future income. Once the position is known the Council will develop solutions to ensure our houses are properly maintained.

Topic: Six Town Housing – Universal Credit Payments

Question: The payment of Universal Credit, which is paid in arrears, is having an impact on the way tenants are able to manage their payments, can the Council help with this issue?

Response: The arrears position is worsening for tenants paid by this method. The situation is being monitored and we are doing everything we can, with Six Town Housing, to help tenants whilst at the same recovering the money owed.

Topic: Six Town Housing – Allocation Policy

Question: Is it correct that a higher position on the property waiting list will be given to people who state that they have medical needs/issues?

Response: The Council's Allocations Policy employs a range of criteria to ensure housing is given to those in most need which includes, but is not limited to, medical issues.

CA.430 MINUTES

Delegated decision:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2015 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

CA.431 ADOLESCENT SUPPORT UNIT

The Cabinet Member for Children Families and Culture submitted a report seeking approval to the establishment of an Adolescent Support Unit (ASU). The ASU would work to reduce the upward pressure on the children's social care budget by preventing young people from entering care, as well as supporting foster placement stability and improving life chances. The ASU would improve outcomes for some of Bury's most vulnerable young people and their families and over the longer term could deliver an actual reduction in expenditure on Looked-After Children.

The proposed ASU would be based within Bury and will provide four beds for overnight respite. Referrals will be for children and young people who may be on the edge of care, or at risk of placement breakdown with foster carers. The ASU will be open on a 24/7 basis on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday and open on others days between 07:00 and 22:00, though not normally during school hours.

The financial cost of the unit to the Council is £375,000 to establish the ASU in the latter part of 2015/2016 (£75,000) with a contribution to running cost in 2016/2017 (£300,000). In future years the Unit will deliver annual savings.

Delegated decision:

That approval be given to the proposal to establish an Adolescent Support Unit, including the required financial investment of £375,000 (£75,000 in 2015/16 and £300,000 in 2016/17).

Reasons for the decision:

The ASU will help to prevent family breakdown and rebuild family and parenting relationships that are under severe pressure. It will help reduce the admission of children and young people into local authority care as well as supporting foster care stability. There may be a positive impact on educational attainment and performance and a reduction in the number of young people entering the Criminal Justice System.

Other options considered and rejected:

To reject/amend the recommendations.

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CA.432 ALLOCATIONS POLICY – UPDATE

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing submitted a report seeking approval to an updated Allocations Policy for determining the priorities and procedure to be followed in allocating housing accommodation. Cabinet last approved a policy in 2013, but due to changes in legislation, case law and operational practice having taken place, the policy now requires updating.

The 2015 version of the policy has incorporated the required changes and clarifies the Council's position regarding:

- The right to move for work legislation;
- Procurement of properties for homeless households;
- Applications for retirement living from existing tenants;
- Bidding processes including removing the limits on the number of bids eligible and qualifying persons can make each week;
- Suspension and removal from the housing register;
- Occupation of adapted properties;
- Bedroom occupancy and the impact of other welfare reforms.

Delegated decisions:

1. That approval be given to the updated Allocations Policy.
2. That approval be given for the Allocations Policy to come into effect from 1 November 2015, for both current and future applicants.

Reason for the decision:

The Allocation Policy requires amendment to reflect current legal requirements and improve process efficiency. The changes outlined will address these issues by supporting the development of a modern, proactive approach that clearly sets out the criteria and expectations for the allocation and retention of a council house tenancy.

Other option considered and rejected:

To reject / amend the Allocations Policy.

CA.433 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2015-2018

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing submitted a report on the new proposed Homeless Strategy which would provide the Council with a direction of travel for the next three years. This replaces the Council's current strategy which has now come to an end.

The new Strategy maintained the focus on homelessness and was designed to ensure that the resources available to the Council are directed to best effect within the legislative and national policy framework.

The Strategy has been based on five priorities:

- Understanding needs;
- Focus on prevention;

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- Good quality;

- Strong leadership and management;
- Sustainable communities.

Each year the Council deals with hundreds of households presenting themselves as homeless. The reasons usually fall into three causes:

- Arrangements with family and friends coming to an end;
- Relationship breakdowns
- Financial problems.

Delegated decision:

That approval be given to the Homelessness Strategy 2015-2018.

Reasons for the decision:

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires all local authorities to produce a strategy, keep homelessness (and the factors that influence homelessness) under review and take appropriate action.

Other options considered and rejected:

To amend / reject the recommendation.

COUNCILLOR M Connolly
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.15pm.)