

MINUTES OF CABINET MEMBER SIGNING MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 9 MAY 2024, 11:30AM - 11:45AM.

PRESENT: Councillor Sarah Williams, Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Private Renters and Planning

In attendance: Denise Gandy, Assistant Director Housing Demand, Martin Gulliver, Housing Strategy & Policy Officer, Max Tolley, Housing Strategy & Policy Officer, Linmora Blair, Head of TA, Cleo Andronikou, Housing Demand Service Development Manager and Nazyer Choudhury, Principal Committee Co-Ordinator

1. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred to the notice of filming at meetings and this information was noted.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

4. DEPUTATIONS / PETITIONS / QUESTIONS

There were none.

5. OMBUDSMAN DECISION

The report updated the Cabinet Member for Housing Services, Private Renters and Planning on a recent Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman decision and the outcome of a review into how the Council took account of its Equality Act 2010 duties when considering the suitability of temporary accommodation for homeless families.

The report also recommended steps which could be taken to ensure Equality Act duties are properly considered in future.

The Cabinet Member RESOLVED

1. To note the Ombudsman's decision letter (appendix A) of the report
2. To note the summary of the current TA Placement Policy and its EQIA (paras 6.5 - 6.9 of the report)
3. To note the review of how the policy was used in practice (paras 6.10-6.19 of the report).

4. Approve the amendment of the Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy to include the Priority for Accommodation Type as set out in Appendix C of the report.

Reasons for decision

The current Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy did not include guidance on the use of hotels and bed and breakfasts.

Although the Council had a requirement to follow the Homelessness Code of Guidance and the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003, adding the proposed additional text to the TA Placement Policy as recommended at 3.2 would confirm the Council's commitment to keeping to the Guidance.

Alternative options considered

The Council could continue with its current practice/policy.

This option was rejected as this did not reassure the public that the Council was committed to the application of the Homelessness Code of Guidance and the Suitability of Accommodation Order

6. CONTINUED USE OF HOTEL ACCOMMODATION TO MEET HOMELESSNESS NEED

Homelessness Prevention Grant to cover increased budget pressures resulting from the need to use hotels to provide accommodation due to the shortage of alternative accommodation.

Due to the ongoing shortage of alternative accommodation, Housing Demand Services has been forced to extend the use of hotels beyond the originally anticipated period of 31 December 2023.

As a result, there had been an additional overspend of £1.6 million on the Housing Demand Budget, with £1,009,515 specifically attributed to hotel costs incurred between January 2024 and March 2024.

The Housing Demand MTFs growth of £2.9 million in 24/25 assumes no continued use of hotels (bed and breakfast). However, the lack of alternative supply continues to be a challenge and so we have entered the new financial year with households still living in hotels. The Council forecast that this would result in a need to extend the use of hotel cost of £1,511,990 for the period April 2024 to July 2024.

The Housing Demand and Strategic Procurement teams are working together to create a hotelier framework. Initially, it was projected to be completed by March 31, 2024. However, due to resource constraints, the expected completion date is now July 2024.

The Cabinet Member RESOLVED

1. To note the continued pressures and reliance on the use of hotel accommodation to meet our statutory homelessness responsibilities, including the block-booked arrangements that the Council have entered into.
2. To note the additional overspend of £1.6m in the 2023/24 Housing Demand budget and the continued risk to the 2024/25 budget position.
3. To note the correction of the error within the previous Cabinet report dated October 2023 as set out in the exempt part of the report where the incorrect value was attached to the hotels.
4. To agree the extension of the current contracts to include additional spend given the continued use of hotels and the delay in the delivery of the Hotel framework, as detailed in the exempt report.
5. To note that the delay in the procurement of the Hotel Framework and the revised delivery date.

Reasons for decision

To correct the error within the previous Cabinet report dated October 2023 where the incorrect value was attached to the hotels and to approve the contract extensions to ensure compliance with regulations.

It was a legal requirement to provide interim accommodation to households who approach the Council for homelessness assistance if the Council had reason to believe they were homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need, and to provide temporary accommodation to households once the Council had accepted a housing duty.

The continued shortage of supply had meant that the Council was unable to source enough self-contained accommodation and has thus needed to continue using hotels to meet its statutory duties.

Alternative options considered

The option of doing nothing was not feasible as it was unlawful to leave families who are owed a duty without accommodation.

A series of mitigating actions were planned to reduce the use of hotel accommodation throughout the year but at this stage the Council have a continued need to use hotel accommodation to meet our statutory responsibilities.

7. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Item 8 was subject to a motion to exclude the press and public be from the meeting as they contain exempt information as defined in Section 100a of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by Section 12A of the Local Government Act 1985); paras 3 and 5, namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

8. EXEMPT - CONTINUED USE OF HOTEL ACCOMMODATION TO MEET HOMELESSNESS NEED

The Cabinet Member considered the exempt information.

CABINET MEMBER: Councillor Sarah Williams

Signed by Cabinet Member.....

Date9 May 2024.....