

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET MEMBER SIGNING HELD ON TUESDAY, 11TH JULY, 2017, 11:30

PRESENT:

Councillor Alan Strickland, Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Planning.

88. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Cabinet Member referred those present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting and asked that those present reviewed and noted the information contained therein.

89. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

90. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

91. REMOVALS AND STORAGE POLICY FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

The Cabinet Member noted the report which sought approval for a new charging policy for the removal, storage and return of the belongings of homeless households.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Planning:

- I. Notes the Equalities Impact Assessment set out at Appendix A.
- II. Notes the financial costs of the current and proposed charging structure set out at Appendix B.
- III. Approves the new charging structure (set out at 6.13-6.25), which can be summarised as:
 - Abolishing existing charges for the collection, storage and return of goods of homeless households.
 - Providing a free storage service from the point a homeless household is placed in emergency temporary accommodation, until one month following either the acceptance of a homelessness duty to that household and the subsequent placement in self-contained accommodation, or a refusal of a homelessness duty.

- Offering to continue to provide this storage service following that date, but on the basis of full cost recovery.
- Introducing this policy for all new users from 24 July 2017.

Approves the approach to the introduction of these new changes for existing users (set out at 6.26-6.28), which can be summarised as.

- Providing a free storage service until a formal notice has been served and expired.
- Offering to continue to provide this storage service following that date, but on the basis of full cost recovery.
- Rolling out this new policy for existing users over a six month period from 24 July.

REASONS FOR DECISION

Applicants who are threatened with homelessness and approach the Council are likely to have limited resources to fund storage, and it is in the Council's interests to maximise the use of these resources to find alternative accommodation.

The proposals also seek to give existing users ample time to make alternative arrangements.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

A number of alternative methods for recharging homeless households were considered:

The do nothing option:

The cost of the removals and storage service for homeless households in 2016/17 was £143,225 against a budget of £50,000. The losses incurred by the current charging policy and the provision of this service are not sustainable or realistic given the budget pressures in the homelessness service.

Fully recharging the cost of storage:

This was rejected because households approaching as homeless have limited resources at the time they are made homeless. Consequently, they would be unlikely to be able to pay the full costs. The Council is also seeking to enable them to use the money they have available to seek alternative accommodation.

The collection rate of the current charges is already very low, so any increased charges would not realistically be collected. Increasing costs in this way would only be likely to result in the Council accruing additional unrecoverable debts.

Charging differential rates:

Charges could be varied according to how long households stay in temporary accommodation, or based on ability to pay. The former was rejected as the highest charges are likely to fall on larger households, who wait longest for settled accommodation. These are generally the least likely to be able to afford the storage charges. The latter was rejected as the additional means testing would be disproportionately onerous to administer.

Using Council garages for storage:

This was rejected because the risk of damage to the households' belongings was considered to be too high. Although this option would be relatively low cost, it is not considered suitable to fulfil the Council's statutory duty to protect the households' belongings.

92. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

N/A

CHAIR:

Signed by Chair

Date