

EXTRAORDINARY CABINET

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 17 February 2020 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Rick Everitt (Chairman); Councillors Albon and Yates

In Attendance: Councillors R Bayford, Dexter, Cllr Game, Hart, Pat Moore, Ovenden, Rattigan, Rogers, Rusiecki and Wright

640. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Duckworth and Councillor Whitehead.

641. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

642. HOUSING MANAGEMENT OPTIONS APPRAISAL; OUTCOME OF FORMAL CONSULTATION

Members considered the housing management options appraisal report. The meeting was advised that after a number of concerns had been raised by Members regarding the management of the council's housing stock by East Kent Housing, Cabinet considered about specific failures of service delivery and poor performance. On 25 July 2019, Cabinet then agreed to further consider an options report on the future management of the council's housing stock.

On 17 October 2019 Cabinet approved the preferred option which was to withdraw from East Kent Housing (EKH) and return the housing management services back in-house under direct management of the council. This was subject to formal consultation with all council tenants. The formal consultation ran from Tuesday 22 October to Friday 20 December 2019.

The meeting was further advised that across East Kent 2,603 responses were submitted, with 427 of these relating specifically to Thanet. Of the Thanet responses, 81% strongly agreed (60%) or tended to agree (21%) with the preferred option to return the service in-house. Only 10% disagreed. This was a strong signal of support for the proposals from the council's tenants and leaseholders.

Cabinet acknowledged that the process of bringing the management of council housing stock in-house was complex. Cost benefit analysis and risk analysis reports had been produced as was required by government guidance when winding up a Housing ALMO (Arms Length Management Company). Cabinet confirmed its commitment to fully engage tenants and leaseholders, both through the transition process and into the future in order to provide an improved housing service.

Cabinet further acknowledged the uncertainty and anxiety that these changes may cause to EKH staff. Members reiterated that staff were very much valued and would be needed to continue to provide the service, once management had passed back to the council. Cabinet was also committed to ensuring that the transition was as smooth as possible, minimising any stress and anxiety for the affected staff whilst aiming to achieve the overall objective of improving the housing management service in a more transparent and accountable manner.

The following Members spoke under Council Procedure Rule 20.1:

Councillor Game;

Councillor Rogers;
Councillor Dexter;
Councillor Hart.

Councillor Everitt proposed, Councillor Albon seconded and Members agreed the following:

1. That having noted the results of the tenant and leaseholder consultation, the cost/benefit analysis and the risk analysis, it is agreed that the management of the council's housing stock be brought back in-house;
2. That the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods be authorised to terminate the management agreement with EKH as soon as practicable;
3. That the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods be authorised to take such decisions as may be necessary to facilitate the process of bringing the housing service in-house, including the use of Housing Revenue Account balances as required for any one off transition costs incurred;
4. To delegate authorisation to the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer for the use of up to £250k of HRA Reserves for transitional costs.

643. ASSET MANAGEMENT - SURPLUS PROPERTY AND LAND

The purpose-built Community Hall was constructed around 1975. The centre has been run by Newington Community Association since 2007. The area under consideration was identified as suitable for transfer to the Newington Community Association or another qualifying community organisation using the council's Community Asset Transfer policy and process.

This approach would ensure that the asset would remain open for public use. Following discussions with Newington Community Association, it was recommended to scale down the size of land offered for disposal.

Councillor Yates proposed, Councillor Everitt seconded and Cabinet approved the reduction in size of the land proposed for Community Asset Transfer to Newington Community Association, as indicated on plans in Annexe 1 (to the Cabinet report).

Meeting concluded: 7.15 pm