



Lewes District Council

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Scrutiny Panel – Call-in

Minutes of a meeting of a **Scrutiny Panel – Call-in** held in the **Telscombe Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes** on **Wednesday 16 October 2013** at **4.00pm**

Present:

Councillors S J Osborne (Chair on election), J M Harrison-Hicks and E C Merry

Officers Present:

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer

A Chequers, Corporate Head – Housing Services

T Johnson, Head of Housing Repairs and Improvements

Minutes

Action

1 Election of Chair

Resolved:

1.1 That Councillor S J Osborne be elected Chair for the meeting.

2 Call-In – Cabinet, 30 September 2013, Resolution 45.1 – Introduction of Test of Resources for Lewes District Council Housing Tenants Requiring Disabled Adaptations

The Panel considered Report No 174/13 which provided background information to support the call-in procedure.

At the request of the Chair, the Scrutiny and Committee Officer outlined the procedure as defined in Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16 (Appendix A to the Report). The Panel considered the Report presented to Cabinet on 30 September 2013 (Appendix B) and Resolution 45.1 (within Minute 45 on page 14 as set out at Appendix C), the subject of the call-in. It further considered in detail the reasons for the request for a call-in (Appendix D).

On 30 September 2013 Cabinet had considered Report No 156/13 relating to the proposed introduction of a test of resources for the Council's housing tenants who required disabled adaptations to be made to their homes.

The Cabinet resolved that a test of resources for Lewes District Council tenants requiring disabled adaptation works of a value of £1000 or more be

introduced in order to improve equality in the area.

The call-in raised the following points:

- The officer report recommended the introduction of a test of resources for Lewes District Council housing tenants that required disabled adaptation works of a value of £1000 or more. Cabinet had agreed the officer recommendation.
- Cabinet members were minded to follow the officer recommendation as it was based on the findings of a Scrutiny Committee Report dating from 2010. Cabinet members were also influenced by the fact that the Council's tenant representative group (TOLD) supported the introduction of a test of resources.
- In light of the debate at Cabinet, and the summary of relevant issues as set out by the Chief Executive, this issue required re-assessment, and in particular whether this was an equality matter.
- It was noted that there was no impediment to the Council continuing its current practice of supporting its tenants. The legal implications in the Report made it clear that the Council was properly able to make funding available for this purpose. It was also noted that in real terms, the financial impact of choosing to assist tenants was modest in that, as was confirmed by TOLD at the Cabinet meeting, many would be in receipt of benefits and therefore entitled to grant assistance under any test of resources.

The Chair of the Panel advised that the call-in had been well supported by members of the Scrutiny Committee, and that she did not feel that this was an equality issue as tenants were already treated according to their circumstances. The Corporate Head – Housing Services advised that debate at Cabinet and subsequent discussions had made officers mindful to return to the old system and not introduce means testing at this time. He added that the proposed new system would affect a minimal amount of tenants.

The Chair of the Panel advised Councillors that discussions with the Council's auditors had highlighted that adaptations to properties could add value to the property concerned and therefore more accurately reflect the asset value of the property. She further advised that this was not currently taken into account, and that valuation of properties after disabled adaptations had taken place could be of benefit to the Council.

Councillors noted that the background to the Report considered at Cabinet on 30 September 2013 was a Scrutiny Committee Report dated June 2010 and questioned whether decisions should be made on information that was older than two years as the membership of the Committee may have changed, and the Report may not reflect the current views of Scrutiny

Committee members.

The Chair wished it to be noted that the deliberations of this call-in were not a criticism to officers of the Council, rather the Scrutiny Committee acting in their capacity as a “critical friend” to the Cabinet.

Recommended:

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| <p>2.1 That the matter relating to the proposed introduction of a test of resources for the Council’s housing tenants who required disabled adaptations undertaken to their homes be referred back to Cabinet for further consideration;</p> | <p>S&CO</p> |
| <p>2.2 That Cabinet be requested to consider at its meeting in September 2014 the number of properties where a disabled adaptation would add over £1000 to the value of the property, and whether these should be officially re-valued for the purposes of the Council’s accounts; and</p> | <p>S&CO</p> |
| <p>2.3 That Cabinet be requested to consider whether Scrutiny Committee Reports more than two years old should be referred back to Scrutiny Committee to ensure they reflect the views and appropriate of the current membership of the Scrutiny Committee.</p> | <p>S&CO</p> |

The meeting ended at 4.15pm

S J Osborne
Chair