12. QUESTION TIME

No questions were submitted in writing.

A leaseholder in attendance in the public gallery asked:

“What long term strategy is in place for the redecoration and upkeep of the communal and external parts of Council properties?”

Darren Welsh, Head of Housing replied that:

“The Council has acknowledged over the years that there have been significant funding issues impacting upon the Council’s ability to invest in strong and effective asset management on it’s estates and as a result of that some of it’s historic programmes have been scaled back to quite a low level so I can understand the comments and concerns that residents are raising.

The new financial regime has enabled the Council to put in place both the Better Homes Programme (BHP), which is a five year programme looking at internal and external improvements, but also planned and cyclical programmes which are making sure that we have regular programmes of communal painting in order to ensure that we are maintaining our assets in good order.
13. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2013 are confirmed as a correct record subject to the correction of the first sentence of the second paragraph of item 5 so that it reads:

“The two places will be restricted to Council tenants and leaseholders only to ensure that the key aim of strengthening resident engagement is achieved.”

14. STRATEGIC HOUSING PROGRAMME - OLDER & VULNERABLE PEOPLES HOUSING STRATEGY - Paul Kingsley

Paul Kingsley (PK), Project Manager, delivered a presentation on the Older & Vulnerable People’s Housing Strategic Review. The Older & Vulnerable People’s Housing Review is part of One Kingston Project 5 which is working on changing the way the Council’s assets are utilised and creating more effective and appropriate long term benefits for the Borough. The aim of the project is to: address the sheltered ‘problem’ of over-supply & shared facilities; to understand older & vulnerable people’s needs and aspirations; to understand older & vulnerable people’s housing supply and to plan effective and appropriate provision through to 2020. The project board is made up of officers from across departments and from external partner organisations.

This strategic review will look at sheltered housing, it also look at the housing needs and aspirations of older people generally, adults with learning difficulties and/or mental health disorders as well as young people with learning difficulties, physical disabilities and those in care approaching independence. The project will look at national and local demographics and will then consult with a wide range of local people in order to ascertain their needs and aspirations. Once this work has been completed the project will develop an action plan which will be carried forward into next year’s planning cycle by the various departments involved. A robust plan with clear delivery deadlines has been put in place. The project is looking for an end result which creates safer, happier and healthier residents.

Councillor Bamford noted that there was great deal of detail contained within the presentation and asked for copies to be circulated to members of the Committee.

Richard Grosvenor (RG) stated that the Kingston Federation of Residents (KFoR) welcomed this review as it had long held the view that much of the present sheltered accommodation is not fit for purpose. The KFoR’s main concern is how any meaningful progress can be made given the shortage of funding, and land to develop. RG added that the federation are hoping to see the Council move towards partnerships with the private sector and other third parties in order to develop such schemes.

PK replied that there are a number of such partnerships that could be explored. Projects could be developed with Clinical Commissioning Groups and schemes, such as one that assists young people with learning difficulties into home ownership by working with specialist third party mortgage providers, could also potentially be developed.
15. REFRESH OF THE HRA BUSINESS PLAN - Darren Richards

Darren Welsh (DW), Head of Housing, and Simon Smith (SS) from the Chartered Institute of Housing Consultancy Team (CIoHCT) gave a presentation on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan refresh.

All Councils that own and manage council housing are required to produce a HRA business plan annually. This is done as part of the budget setting process and is a long term financial plan that provides projections for housing over a 30 year period subject to regular updates and every year a refresh takes place. When faced with increased challenges or risks a more comprehensive review of the HRA will take place. This year there will be a more thorough, root and branch, refresh of the plan in order to address arising key risks such as the changes to welfare reform.

The Council are producing a new business plan, a draft of which will be shared with the Committee for their comments. The plan will look at investment programmes, contingency planning, the appropriate level of reserves, savings, efficiency opportunities and the possibility of using any potential surpluses for new builds and/or the reduction of outstanding debt. The role of the CIoHCT is to provide external validation of that plan and to also quality test that plan in order to ensure that it is resilient enough to face the challenges that all housing landlords are facing as a result of the changes to welfare reform.

Richard Grosvenor (RG) stated that several of DW’s predecessors had indicated that there would be large amounts of funding at the back end of the Better Homes Programme (BHP) for estates’ environmental and communal improvements. RG asked if the outcome of this study would feed directly into next year’s HRA and at what stage residents will be told the level of funding available for these discretionary elements of the BHP.

DW replied that the purpose of this work is to review the plan so that the Council can make these decisions moving forward. The Council has a strong commitment to it’s BHP and to delivering on the promises that it has made to residents and there is expected to be environment improvement elements in years four and five of the BHP. This will be subject to the HRA refresh and to the tendering process for years three to five of the BHP as until we know the prices that come out of the tendering process the Council won’t be able to confirm the budget. Once these processes have taken place the Council will have discussions with residents about how to utilise any funding. There remains a strong commitment to incorporating these elements into the BHP.

The Chair informed the Committee that the Kingston Federation of Residents has written to the borough’s two Members of Parliament expressing their concerns about the impact of the various welfare reform proposals on the HRA and the tenants that will be affected. The Chair also noted that there was a great deal of information contained within the presentation and asked for the presentation’s slides to be circulated to the members of the Committee and to the Chairs of Resident Associations.
16. RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVES ON THE PLACE & SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE - Jo Williams

To further improve resident participation in decision making and to reinforce the link between the Committee and the Place & Sustainability Committee, the Place & Sustainability Committee, on 9 July 2013, approved the appointment of two non-voting places on the Place & Sustainability Committee for two tenant/leaseholder representatives for all housing related matters. This was ratified by Council on 16 July 2013.

The tenant/leaseholder representatives will be expected to represent the views of the wider tenant and leaseholder community. They will provide regular feedback to the Committee and to the wider tenant and leaseholder community through the Kingston Federation of Residents and other appropriate communication vehicles. A report from the tenant/leaseholder representatives will be added as a standing item for this Committee.

It was decided by the Committee at its meeting on the 27 June 2013 that once appointed the representatives will serve a term of one municipal year and that the Committee’s representatives will be subsequently appointed by the Committee at the start of each municipal year.

RESOLVED that Ray Austin and Sue Harrison are appointed to serve as tenant/leaseholder representatives on the Place & Sustainability Committee.

REASON FOR DECISION
To further improve resident participation in decision making and to reinforce the link between the Committee and the Place & Sustainability Committee.

17. FINAL PROPOSAL FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF KINGSTON RESIDENT’S SCRUTINY PANEL - Jo Williams

The initial proposals for resident scrutiny were considered and approved by the Committee in April. Following significant communications, including a series of workshops with residents and staff, the proposals have now been finalised, in conjunction with representatives from the Kingston Federation of Residents and a draft report has been prepared for the consideration of the Place and Sustainability Committee on 19 September 2013. The proposal has not materially changed from the original as feedback from residents, and from staff, has been very positive and no changes to the proposal were put forward. The Committee’s approval and endorsement of this report (which was attached as ANNEX 1) was sought.

RESOLVED that the Committee approves and endorses the report to the Place & Sustainability Committee (ANNEX 1 of the report) for the introduction of resident scrutiny.

REASON FOR DECISION
To comply with the statutory requirements under the Localism Act 2011 and regulatory requirements from the Homes and Communities Agencies; to provide tenants and leaseholders with a greater say and stake in how their housing services are delivered.
18. HOLISTIC REVIEW OF RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT WITHIN RBK - Jo Williams

It is recognised that whilst there have been some improvements recently, resident involvement within Kingston needs to be strengthened. Project 9 within the strategic housing programme is focused on resident scrutiny and co-regulation. Phase 1 of project 9 has been about the development of a resident scrutiny function for Kingston. This part of the project will conclude successfully and KRiSP will be established from November. Co-regulation is about putting service users at the heart of the housing service so that they are able to have a real say in the way their services are delivered and provided. Phase 2 of project 9 therefore also links very closely to the housing services transformation project, which seeks to challenge and improve the way in which the housing service is provided and delivered overall.

As resident involvement is so fundamental to service improvement, the Council has decided to invest in this area by commissioning an external specialist provider to undertake a review. The review will include interviews, research projects, data benchmarking and reviews of existing processes and structures. The review will commence in October and will be completed in January 2014. The review will culminate in a report that will detail a number of appropriate options for the borough. This will enable the development of an improved resident involvement function that meets Council, partners and residents needs and aspirations, as well as a fit for purpose resident involvement strategy that everyone can feel a part of.

RESOLVED that the details and timescales of the review are noted.

REASON FOR DECISION
To improve resident involvement within the borough and to ensure that residents, and particularly members of the Committee and Chairs of Residents Associations, are aware of the review and that they will be asked to participate in the review.

19. BETTER HOMES PROGRAMME UPDATE - Jo Williams

The Council is now in the second year of it's five year Better Homes Programme (BHP) which began in July 2012. The Committee were provided with an update of the programme’s progress.

The value of work being undertaken in the second year is three times greater than that delivered in the first year and unlike the first year it includes work on external elements of properties. Following the successful delivery of the year 1 programme it was decided to retain Mears to continue the delivery of the internal works programme in year 2. As of the 9 August 2013 Mears had completed works to 205 properties. Resident satisfaction remains very high with 90% of residents “very satisfied” with the work undertaken to their homes.

At the beginning of the year the external works were tendered and as a result of this process Mears were awarded this contract and they are now mobilising their resources and plan to begin the works in early September 2013. The GLA have committed grant funding of £4.3m for year 2 of the programme against a target of
completing 427 properties. 209 leasehold properties are included for work in the year 2 programme. All of the leaseholders have received their estimate costs of the works as part of the formal consultation process. A number of ‘leaseholder surgeries’ have been undertaken providing an opportunity for every leaseholder to meet members of the RBK leaseholder and delivery teams.

The OJEU tender process to select contractors and consultants for years 3 – 5 of the programme began in January 2013 and seven contractors and six consultants have been invited to tender. Following a question from the public gallery it was noted that a full list of the BHP’s timetable is available on the Council’s website and has been published in the ‘Home Life’ newsletter and the Kingston Federation of Residents ‘Home Truths’ publication.

The Chair asked how residents were being engaged with the BHP and how residents would be involved in the future. Darren Welsh replied that the main form of engagement is through the Better Homes Delivery Board which meets on a regular basis. The board has been regularly appraised of the programme’s progress and residents from this forum have also been invited to take part in the programme’s evaluation process.

**RESOLVED** that the Better Homes Programme update is noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To update the Committee on the progress of the programme.

20. **NEW LEASEHOLDER FORUM 30 OCTOBER 2013 - Jo Williams**

A new Leaseholders Forum (LF) will be established which will be able to make recommendations to the Committee. The LF will meet twice a year and it’s first meeting is scheduled for 30 October 2013. Before the meeting begins there will be a drop in session where leaseholders will be able to raise individual issues with officers. A letter and a copy of the agenda will be sent to all leaseholders inviting them to the meeting at the start of October.

21. **CHANGES TO CONTACT CENTRE OPERATIONS - Jo Williams Appendix F**

In line with the launch of the new RBK website, Kingston Council’s Information and Advice Centre and it’s Customer Contact Centre will now be open from 0900hrs to 1700hrs Monday to Friday. The new system will see all customer services opening streamlined to the same hours of business meaning residents will be able to contact the Council within average working hours by phone or in person. With more and more customers accessing services online, the change and standardisation of our opening times will help us to use staff time more efficiently and provide the best possible value to our customers.

Councillor Fraser stated that as a regular user of the contact centre he had received some excellent service but that this level of service was not consistent across the board.
Sue Harrison asked if there were any plans, given the reduction in hours, to offer contact centre operation on Saturday mornings.

Darren Welsh replied that he was unaware of any such intentions but that he would pass on these comments to the Contact Centre.

**RESOLVED** that the changes to the contact centre operations are noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION**

To update the committee on the change of opening hours for customer contact.

22. **NEXT MEETING**

The Committee will next meet on 14 November 2013.

Signed………………………………………………………………………..Date……………………..

Chair