

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting16th April 2009

1. Title of Item/Report

Review of Concierge Security Service

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report which fed back on the results of a consultation paper regarding the de pooling of the concierge service in the borough. Current Government Policy was that people who received additional housing services should pay the full cost of them directly. This was different from the situation in the past when service charges received by some tenants e.g. concierge costs were pooled. Members considered a report in January 2009 on the de pooling of the concierge service and agreed that a period of consultation would take place with stakeholders.

The Council's concierge security service was first established in 1994 (covering Stockton and Thornaby sites only) and extended to Billingham in 1997, in association with a major programme of refurbishment of the Council's blocks of flats. It provided a 24/7 service to 1,011 tenants and leaseholders living within the following blocks:-

- Anson and Hudson House (Thornaby)
- Hume House and Nolan House (Stockton)
- Elm House, Campbell Court and Walton Court (Stockton)
- Kennedy Gardens (blocks 1 to 3) and Dawson House (Billingham)
- Melsonby Court and Prior Court, Low Grange (Billingham)

The service cost £1,470,890 to run in 2008/09. Costs were divided equally amongst the blocks although there were different numbers of properties in different blocks. The service was financed by a contribution from the overall Housing Revenue Account equating to £792,788 and a weekly service charge to individual residents in receipt of the service of £14.75 (charged over a 48 week period). For those residents who were eligible for housing benefit the service charge cost was met. Approximately 70% of residents in receipt of concierge services were eligible for housing benefit.

Government policy had changed with regard to the pooling of service charges. The current policy was that people should pay directly for the full

cost of the services they receive. This policy was enshrined as part of the Government wider policy on rent reform which was contained in the document 'A guide to social rent reforms in the local authority sector' introduced in 2001 and updated in 2006. This document covered a wider set of rules for setting rent within pre determined constraints set by Government to control rent increases and service charges and bring them into line with other rents in the social sector (such as housing association rents). Within the guidance was an acceptance that the total cost of services would not be de pooled overnight as otherwise they would be unaffordable to service users. De pooling must therefore be planned and often staged.

The issue of de pooling was picked up as part of the Audit Commission inspection of Tristar Homes in 2006 with a specific recommendation that the Council integrate value for money into working practices by agreeing more stretching targets for de pooling. At the point of inspection it was outlined to the Audit Commission that the authority intended to de pool service charges over a six year period (in line with the then rent restructuring timetable). It was outlined that in Stockton de pooling could only be achieved by a mixture of reducing costs via remodelled services and increasing individual service charges. The Audit Commission were unhappy with the timescales for de pooling on the basis that balances on the housing revenue account which could have been available for service improvements were being used to support de pooling.

Members had received a report in January 2009 that requested a stakeholder consultation take place to determine how the concierge service should be remodelled to reduce costs. Previous reports were also considered by Cabinet in November 2006 and February 2007. These reports secured members support for initial de pooling and the level of concierge service was altered between 1.00am and 7.00am to single crewing following a successful pilot and consultation with affected tenants and leaseholders.

Members were informed that there was a current workforce of 34 Concierge Security Officers (pay band D) and four Supervisors (pay band H). The level of cover that was consulted upon was a workforce of 22 Concierge Security Officers (pay band D) and three Supervisors (pay band I). There would be one officer on each site, plus one mobile supporting officer (5 officers in total), two officers on duty at the security centre, to cover Elm / Walton / Campbell and provided mobile back-up to the other 4 sites (relief for breaks and extra cover in the event of any incidents) on a day shift from 8.00am – 8.00pm. The night shift, 8.00pm – 8.00am, would have two officers on duty at the Security Centre, monitoring CCTV and provided access control for all 5 sites, plus 2 officers mobile, patrolling all 5 sites. One Supervisor may also be

available as mobile back-up on both the day and night shift.

There was a broad support for change in service with those tenants consulted however the vast majority wanted the hours' concierge were on site to change. Therefore the proposal submitted to members was a day shift of 6.00am – 6.00pm, with four officers on shift and the bulk of monitoring being provided by the Security Centre. The night shift would be 6.00pm – 6.00am, with seven officers on each night shift, with an onsite presence at each of the main blocks.

There were five vacancies within the current establishment of 34 Concierge Security Officers, so a further reduction of seven officers was needed. Ten officers had expressed a level of interest in early retirement and/or voluntary redundancy (ER/VR) on a 'no commitment' basis although no formal invitation to apply for ER/VR had been issued.

The option proposed would save £500,000 per annum. If the new service was fully in place by April 2010 there would be £292,788 which would not had been directly de pooled, however the role of concierge staff would change as a result of the review and would include a range of housing management duties. These duties would be funded from the housing management budget.

RESOLVED that:-

1. the de pooling of concierge charges in line with Government policy be accepted.
2. to the new level of service as detailed be agreed.
3. the Head of Community Protection be authorised to progress discussions with staff and trade unions in order to reduce the concierge workforce to 22 officers (a reduction of 12 on the current establishment) and note that the cost of the changes in staffing will be met from the Housing Revenue Account as part of the medium term financial plan.

3. Reasons for the Decision

To ensure service charges were depooled in line with government policy and that the depooled costs were affordable to recipients of the service.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillors Mrs Womphrey declared a personal, prejudicial interest in respect of this item on the grounds that she had a family member affected by the proposals. Councillor Womphrey left the meeting room during consideration and voting on this item.

Councillor Mrs McCoy declared a personal non prejudicial interest in this item as she was chair of Stockton and District Advice and Information Service.

6. Details of any Dispensations

None

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

By midnight on Friday, 24th April 2009

Proper Officer
20 April 2009