



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Review of Rents of Parks Houses
Date:	21 st March 2014
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property and Projects
Contact Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Estates Manager, Property and Projects Dept.

1	Relevant Background Information
1.0	Parks houses are residential properties located on land for which the Parks and Leisure Department have operational responsibility. Parks and Leisure look after allocation of the dwellings to Council employees and have management responsibility for the properties. Property and Projects Department provide advice in relation to reviews of rents and content of Tenancy Agreements. The nature of the Tenancy Agreements for these houses provides less protection for occupiers than equivalent Housing Executive or private rented sector lettings.
1.1	<u>Legal Basis</u> Legal Advice obtained requires the Council to restrict these lettings to Council employees. Letting on the open market or to those on housing waiting lists, would fall outside the Council's functions and legal scope. Legal advice confirms that because the lettings are to employees and the wording contained in the 'Tenancy Agreement' states the occupancy is 'at the will and during the pleasure of the Council', the occupier has no legal interest in the property. This means the occupier's status is more akin to that of a Licensee rather than a tenant. In addition the Council has no duty to re-house any tenant whose tenancy is terminated. The combination of these factors offers less protection to the occupier than a Housing Executive or private rented sector tenancy.
1.2	This report provides a review of rent on six properties.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Since 1991 Parks Houses rents have been calculated using the Northern Housing Executive Rents Point Scheme. Points are allocated based on the number of rooms and facilities and have then been further adjusted by the Estate Management Unit to take into account the following factors: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Location of the dwelling2. Access and surrounding environment3. Condition of the dwelling4. Security duty

	<p>5. Security of tenure</p>
2.2	<p><u>Rental Adjustment</u></p> <p>Due to the unique situation of many of the Parks Houses it is considered appropriate to make adjustments for the factors listed above. The rents are adjusted where houses are situated in cemeteries or more out of the way locations. Adjustment is also made where the occupier has a duty, under the tenancy agreement, to investigate any disturbance or unlawful entry occurring at anytime on the adjoining Council property, and report the same immediately to the police. In many cases the tenant will also have the responsibility outside normal park opening hours (e.g. at night) to open, close and lock gates in order to gain access to, or egress from, the dwelling. Adjustments are also made for the absence of parking arrangements where appropriate.</p> <p>Each time rents on these properties are reviewed the condition of each dwelling is considered and account taken of any renovations, improvements as well as any need for repairs.</p>
2.3	<p><u>Allocation of Property to Staff</u></p> <p>A number of criteria are applied to allocate the houses including: that the individual must be permanently employed by Belfast City Council and has to be bound by a tenancy agreement which was linked to their continuing employment. The tenancy agreement requires the individual to take on certain responsibilities specific to the property but in general they pertain to opening and closing gate, reporting incidents of ASB to the police and some minor maintenance of the gardens.</p>
2.4	<p><u>Summary of Each Property</u></p> <p>The attached table (Appendix 1) provides information of the nature of each property as well as the existing and proposed rent. A summary of existing and proposed rents is also provided below for Committee's consideration.</p> <p>Over the two year period since the last review, Housing Executive rents have risen by approximately 6%. While the proposed revised rents take account of this increase the allowances applied to each house in terms of location and condition have also been reviewed. The resultant increased rents while remaining relatively modest, and in some cases nil increases are considered to reflect the relative advantages and disadvantages of their sites, surrounding locations and tenancy constraints.</p>

3	Resource Implications																												
3.1	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>Subject to all the dwellings being let for the entire year, the proposed revised rents would increase the total annual rental income from the dwellings referred to in this report, from the current £17,784 to £18,512 per annum.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Address</th> <th>Existing Weekly Rent</th> <th>Proposed Weekly Rent</th> <th>Equivalent Monthly Proposed Rent Including Rates</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>743 Upper Newtownards Road</td> <td>£48</td> <td>£50</td> <td>£287</td> </tr> <tr> <td>511 Falls Road</td> <td>£56</td> <td>£58</td> <td>£339</td> </tr> <tr> <td>62 Antrim Road</td> <td>£78</td> <td>£81</td> <td>£473</td> </tr> <tr> <td>125 Ballygowan Road</td> <td>£45</td> <td>£50</td> <td>£278</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2a Stranmillis Road</td> <td>£60</td> <td>£62</td> <td>£350</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2 Park Road, Mallusk</td> <td>£55</td> <td>£55</td> <td>£293</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Address	Existing Weekly Rent	Proposed Weekly Rent	Equivalent Monthly Proposed Rent Including Rates	743 Upper Newtownards Road	£48	£50	£287	511 Falls Road	£56	£58	£339	62 Antrim Road	£78	£81	£473	125 Ballygowan Road	£45	£50	£278	2a Stranmillis Road	£60	£62	£350	2 Park Road, Mallusk	£55	£55	£293
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3.2	<p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <p>No additional human resources required.</p>																												

3.3	<u>Asset and Other Implications</u> Ensures appropriate rental levels for dwellings.
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4	Equality and Good Relation Considerations
4.1	No known equality or good relation issues associated with this report.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Committee is recommended to approve the revised rents set out in the body of this report.

6	Key to Abbreviations
6.1	None

7	Documents Attached
6.2	Appendix One - Summary of Each Property

Property Address	Accommodation	Attached to store/office	Existing Weekly Rents	Proposed Weekly Rents	Combined Monthly Rent + 2013/2014 Rates
743 Upper Newtownards Road (Dundonald Cemetery)	Two Storey House Kitchen Dining Three Bedrooms Living Room Bathroom	Attached to store and cemetery office near the entrance to Dundonald Cemetery.	£48	£50	£287
511 Falls Road (City Cemetery)	Two Storey Kitchen/Dining Living Room Four Bedrooms Bathroom	Attached to Cemetery Office - near the entrance to City Cemetery.	£56	£58	£339
62 Antrim Road (City of Belfast Zoo)	Two Storey House Two Living Rooms Kitchen Dining Room Bathroom Three Bedrooms Study	Detached House on the edge of the Zoo with separate access.	£78	£81	£473
125 Ballygowan Road (Roselawn Cemetery)	Storey and a Half Kitchen Dining Room Living Room Bathroom Three Bedrooms	Detached House at the entrance of Roselawn Cemetery. Parking for one private car.	£45	£50	£278
2a Stranmillis Road (Botanic Gardens)	Storey and a Half Living Room Dining Room Kitchen Bathroom Two Bedrooms	Detached Gate Lodge at College Park entrance to Botanic Gardens.	£60	£62	£350
2 Park Road, Mallusk (City of Belfast Playing Fields)	Bungalow Kitchen Living/Dining Bathroom Three Bedrooms	Detached Bungalow close to the changing accommodation in the centre of City of Belfast Playing Fields.	£55	£55	£293