

MINUTES OF HOUSING COMMITTEE HELD ON

12 November 2009

7.30pm–8:10pm

PRESENT

COUNCILLORS

Lee Dangerfield (Chairman)

Shona Johnson (Vice Chairman)

Sarah Jane Dangerfield

Bob Davis

Lesley Rideout

Clive Souter

John Strachan

CO-OPTES

Mrs M Mackenzie (Leaseholder)

Mr B McKenzie

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

26. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 10 September 2009 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27. MATTERS ARISING

None.

28. WRITTEN QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

A copy of the written question and its response is attached at Appendix A of these minutes.

29. NON-CONTENTIOUS BUSINESS

RESOLVED that agenda item7, Committee Forward Work Plan, be taken as non-contentious business.

30. **COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN**

RESOLVED to note the Committee Forward Work Plan.

31. **TENANT & LEASEHOLDER SERVICE CHARGES – ANNUAL REVIEW OF PRINCIPLES**

The Committee received a report providing an update on the annual review of the principles for tenant and leaseholder service charging.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) no new service charges would be introduced.
- (b) Officers would present an updated set of service charge figures for current services to the Housing Committee in February 2010.

32. **REFORM OF COUNCIL HOUSING FINANCE – CONSULTATION PAPER**

The Committee received a report providing an analysis and response to the proposals contained in the paper on '*Reform of Council Housing Finance*' recently issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

RESOLVED to:-

- (a) note the analysis detailed in Appendix A.
- (b) endorse the response given by Officers and shown in Appendix B to the report.

33. **HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

The Committee received a report updating the Housing Asset Management Strategy, which had been revised following consultation with stakeholders and community groups.

RESOLVED to approve the Housing Asset Management Strategy, as submitted.

34. **ANNUAL LETTINGS PLAN 2010-2011**

The Committee received a report presenting the Council's first Annual Lettings Plan 2010 – 2011.

RESOLVED to approve the Annual Lettings Plans 2010-2011.

35. **EMPTY HOMES UPDATE**

The Committee received an update on empty homes performance in relation to Council owned properties.

RESOLVED to:-

- (a) note the current progress and continued improvement in performance.
- (b) approve the policy amendments to the lettable standards as outlined in paragraph 13 of the report.

36. **REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

None.

37. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

(i) Tenant Voice

Mr B McKenzie confirmed that he had attended an interview in Cambridge for a position on Tenant Voice.

The Chairman undertook to give a verbal report on the work of Tenant Voice at the next meeting of the Committee in February 2010.

(ii) Tenant & Leaseholder Representatives

The Chairman thanked Mr McKenzie (Tenant representative) and Mrs Mackenzie (Leaseholder representative) on behalf of the Housing Committee for their participation.

The Committee noted that new representatives would attend the next Housing Committee in February 2010.

CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE

WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Q1. **Mr Mick Patrick**

It was quoted at the Housing Finance Consultation meeting on 22 October 2009 that if self-financing was implemented Harlow Council after 30 years would have a £92million surplus to its HRA account.

Can Harlow Council assure its tenants that the Government would let them keep this money as the Council's HRA in 1990-2000 was £3.46 million in surplus, but had to transfer this sum over several years to the general fund to replace the major repairs allowance?

Reply from the Chairman

I can confirm that in the worse case scenario our indicative model for self financing would show a surplus to the revenue account after 30 years of £92m with the good news that a housing capital programme could be fully funded.

But predicting the future economy is difficult and the indicative model shows that only in the last ten of the 30 year period that there be enough money to spare to spend over and above our basic aspirations.

So we would need to be very cautious about entering into an arrangement on these terms. Council Housing Finance Reform is on tonight's agenda.

The arrangements which you refer to in order to smooth changes in HRA subsidy regulations will come to an end this year.

Q2. **Mr Mick Patrick**

In reference to Harlow Council's 7000-8000 housing waiting list, could you please tell us how many 3/4 bedroom homes would need to be built to create a chain reaction to reduce the Council's housing waiting list to as near zero as possible?

Reply from the Chairman

The Council's Housing Strategy identifies that one of our strategic objectives is to:-

“maximise the delivery of a range of new affordable homes and make best use of existing housing resources to help those in housing need”

The Council works with partners to develop ideas and solutions aimed at providing affordable homes within Harlow, and in addition to the provision of new affordable homes, the Council wishes to make best use of its existing housing to ensure it is effectively making use of what is already available.

The Housing Register is a measure of desire to move rather than an actual measure of housing need and it is therefore not possible to quantify actual need using these figures alone. Other data is therefore required to give an accurate forecast of housing requirements.

Analysis of the existing Housing Register would indicate that at June 2009 there were 824 households registered for a three bedroom property and 351 for four bedroom accommodation. There will also be a number of other households that wish to move to either smaller, sheltered or other accommodation and if the needs of these households were satisfied it would effectively release a number of three and four bedroom houses.

However, at the present time it is not possible to provide a quantitative answer and it should be noted that any analysis would have to take account of individual household's willingness to move to optimum sized accommodation.