

MINUTES OF HOUSING COMMITTEE HELD ON

15 January 2009

7.30pm – 10:19pm

PRESENT

COUNCILLORS

Joshua Jolles (Chairman)

Lee Dangerfield (Vice Chairman) Simon Carter

Bob Davis

Shona Johnson

Chris Millington

Lesley Rideout

APOLOGIES

Mike Garnett

SUBSTITUTES

Sarah Jane Dangerfield for Mike Garnett

CO-OPTees

Mr D Thomas (Leaseholder)

Mrs J Steer (Tenant)

37. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

38. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 13 November 2008 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

39. **MATTERS ARISING**

(i) **Minute 31 – Door Entry Systems**

Arising from a question about the door entry systems, it was confirmed that, following consultation with residents, a list of priority schemes would be identified and included in the Housing Capital Programme 2009/10, which would be presented to the Committee at the special meeting in February 2009.

- (ii) Minute 34 - Former Tenant Write Offs
The Chairman confirmed that a satisfactory explanation about cases 1 & 6 presented at the November 2008 meeting had now been received by the Committee by email and that the cases would be re-presented for write off at the next meeting of the Housing Committee in March 2009.

40. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

- (i) Written Questions

None.

- (ii) Petition

A petition of 26 signatures was received from residents of Netteswellbury Farm raising concerns about proposals to re-assign the complex from sheltered to general needs housing and the potential loss of the Common Room and laundry facilities.

The Chairman reassured the petitioners that the proposals, if agreed, would not result in any resident being forced to move to other premises and that a decision about the Common Room at Netteswellbury Farm would be taken following consultation with residents.

With regards to laundry facilities, it was confirmed that if the proposals were agreed, communal washing machines would remain available at a small charge.

41. **NON CONTENTIOUS BUSINESS**

RESOLVED that agenda item 7, Committee Forward Work Plan, be taken as a non contentious item.

42. **COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN**

RESOLVED to note the Committee Forward Work Plan.

43. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT UPDATE 2008/09 & BUDGET PREPARATION 2009/10**

The Committee received a report providing an update on the Housing Revenue Account to 31 March 2010 following the submission of the Medium Term Financial Strategy to the Policy and Resources Committee on 18 December 2008.

RESOLVED to note the report.

44. **HOUSING PROPERTY INSPECTION FRAMEWORK**

The Committee received a report outlining (i) the current housing property inspection processes and framework and (ii) recommending improvements to ensure value for money in the Council's repairs and maintenance activities.

The Committee discussed the role of Tenant Inspectors and requested that the enhancements to the scheme be reviewed by the Committee in six months time.

RESOLVED

- (A) to note the arrangements for regular and routine inspection of Council house properties, as set out in paragraph 5;
- (B) that a feasibility study be undertaken on the introduction of a Tenant Rent Deposit Scheme, as outlined in paragraph 7;
- (C) that Officers review the Tenant Recharging Policy (as set out in paragraphs 8-12) on an annual basis and include resources assumptions within revenue budgets;
- (D) the enhancements to the Tenant Inspectors Scheme, as set out in paragraph 16, be approved as a pilot to be reviewed by the Committee in six months time.

Given that it was 9.30pm, the Chairman adjourned the meeting for 10minutes for a comfort break and when the meeting reconvened at 9:40pm the Committee agreed to continue for a maximum of 1hour to conclude the business on the agenda.

45. **TENANT & LEASEHOLDER SERVICE CHARGES – REVIEW OF ENERGY CHARGES**

A report reviewing the heating charges made to tenants and leaseholders was received by the Committee.

Whilst the report recommended the adoption of Option C, an amendment was proposed that Option B be implemented.

A number of questions were raised by Members about the impact on energy recharging of the proposals to re-designate some sheltered housing schemes into general housing. Accordingly, it was suggested that this matter be considered by a Sheltered Housing Working Party (*minute no. 47b refers*).

RESOLVED

- (A) to approve the implementation of Option B, as set out in paragraph 23, for heating charges to tenants and the situation of any tenants in sheltered accommodation which may be re-designated to general housing, be referred to the Sheltered Housing Working Party to report back to the special meeting of the Housing Committee in February 2009;
- (B) that a cap on charges be introduced to address fuel poverty. For 2009/2010 this shall be set in accordance with paragraph 29 of the report;
- (C) that the preferred option and capping be applied only to existing tenants in sheltered housing accommodation (i.e. the arrangements do not apply to new tenants after 6th April 2009 or, as now, to those in general needs accommodation;
- (D) that the sheltered housing charges be reviewed on a six monthly basis;
- (E) that a report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee on differential charges for garages that have landlord's lighting.

46. **COMMON HOUSING REGISTER**

The Committee received an update on progress in establishing a common housing register to enable the allocation of Council, registered social landlords (RSLs) and housing association properties.

RESOLVED

- (A) to develop a common housing register scheme, as outlined in paragraphs 23-27;
- (B) that a resource bid be included in the Housing Revenue Accounts Estimates for 2009/10.

47. REVIEW OF SHELTERED HOUSING

The Committee received a report on the progress made with the review of the sheltered housing service and making recommendations for taking the service forward.

Members discussed the report at length and whilst there was support, in principle, for re-designating a number of schemes to general housing, it was agreed that more detailed information on individual schemes was required.

Members also expressed concern regarding the inclusion of TV licences in the charges and asked for them to be removed.

RESOLVED

- (A) to note the findings from the review as outlined in Appendix A;
- (B) that approval be given, in principle, to reallocating a number of sheltered housing schemes to general housing in order to reduce the Council's over provision of sheltered housing and to streamline the Sheltered Housing Service. The schemes named in the report are to be considered in the first instance, but the Committee requires more detailed information in every case. A Sheltered Housing Working Party (comprising of 3 Conservatives, 1 Liberal Democrat and 1 Labour) shall be set up to study the evidence and report back to the Special Housing Committee meeting on 5 February 2009;
- (C) that the call handling partnership agreement with Tunstall Response Services Ltd be increased to a 24 hours and 365 days service, with a review in 12 months;
- (D) that an amendment be made to the allocations policy to raise the qualifying age for entry to sheltered housing to 65, as set out in paragraph 12;

- (E) the savings and increased fees, as set out in financial strategy (paragraphs 22 – 30), be included in the Capital and Revenue Estimates for 2009/2010 and the Medium Term Financial Forecast with the exception of TV licence charges;
- (F) that coin operated washing machines be introduced in all sheltered housing schemes, as set out in paragraph 28;
- (G) that a review of sheltered scheme security be carried out and reported back to Committee.

48. **TENANT REPRESENTATIVES ON HOUSING COMMITTEE**

The Committee received a report seeking approval to increase the number of tenant representatives on the Committee.

The Committee noted the concerns of the tenant and leaseholder representatives that the Tenants' Forum had not been consulted on the proposals.

RESOLVED that tenants and leaseholders would be consulted on the proposals and that a report would be presented to the Committee at it's first meeting of the municipal year 2009/2010.

49. **REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

None.

50. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE

