

MINUTES OF HOUSING COMMITTEE HELD ON

3 July 2008

7.30pm – 8.31pm

PRESENT

COUNCILLORS

Joshua Jolles (Chairman)

Lee Dangerfield (Vice Chairman)

Simon Carter *(from 7.50pm)*
David Kirton

Bob Davis
Lesley Rideout

APOLOGIES

Mike Garnett

Chris Millington

SUBSTITUTES

Muriel Jolles for Mike Garnett

CO-OPTEEES

Lydia Noon
(Leaseholder Rep)

Elsie Matthews
(Tenant Rep)

1. WELCOME

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed the new Members to the Committee and the new Tenant and Leaseholder representatives.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on the 6 March 2008 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Tenant Representative's Informal Questions

Concern was raised that there was a delay by Officers in sending the responses to informal questions raised by the Tenant representative, Mrs Jane Steer, during the last meeting.

It was agreed that Mrs Steer would discuss the matter with the Housing Operations Manager after the meeting.

5. **WRITTEN QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

A list of questions and their responses are at Appendix A of these minutes.

6. **NON-CONTENTIOUS BUSINESS**

None.

7. **REVIEW OF SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICES**

The Committee received a report on the outcome of an internal service assessment, together with a scope for a review using the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE), for the Sheltered Housing Service.

RESOLVED that:

- (A) to note the findings from the initial KLOE self-assessment and Improvement Plan as set out at Appendix 1;
- (B) The Housing Committee receives a further report regarding the outcome of the comprehensive review of older peoples services in January 2009.

8. **KIER HARLOW PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS & STANDARDS**

The Committee received a report detailing the arrangements, standards, and processes in place to manage the performance of Kier Harlow Ltd.

RESOLVED to approve the major and minor performance indicators as set out at Appendix 1.

9. **MEADOW COURT RE-DEVELOPMENT - VARIATION TO LEASE**

A report was presented outlining Home Housing Group's proposal to re-develop the site at Meadow Court (which it holds under a long lease from the Council) to provide new affordable housing and housing for sale.

RECOMMENDED to the Policy & Resources Committee to vary the existing lease with enhanced nomination rights for the Council, as set out in paragraph 9 of the report.

10. **FORMER TENANTS' WRITE OFFS**

The Committee received a report seeking approval to write off former tenant rent arrears in accordance with Standing Orders.

The Committee noted two minor amendments to the appendix (1) Case No 4 should read £2439.99 not £2439.00 and (2) Case No 8 should read £1484.89 not £1454.89. The total debt to be written off remained at £18177.79.

RECOMMENDED to the Policy and Resources Committee that the cases listed in Appendix A (including the amendments detailed above) be written off.

11. **COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN**

RESOLVED that the Committee Forward Work Plan be noted.

12. **REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

Policy & Resources Committee
26 June 2008

Review of Non-Housing Capital Programme 2008/09 & Implications for Housing Capital Programme 2008/09

The Committee received a reference from the Policy and Resources Committee.

RESOLVED to note that the Policy and Resources Committee had agreed to transfer £827,000 of capital receipts to support Non-Housing Capital Programme and the resulting 2007/08 out-turn position on the Non Housing Capital Programme.

13. **MATTERS OF URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE

APPENDIX A

WRITE QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Q1. QUESTION FROM LYDIA NOON ON BEHALF OF LEASEHOLDER MEMBERS OF THE HOME OWNERSHIP SERVICE IMPROVEMENT TEAM ON BEHALF OF ALL LEASEHOLDERS

Many leaseholders have been billed for Service Charges which have risen by as much as 40% to 50% since last year, showing very large increases in cleaning, caretaking, repairs and maintenance and management costs, which the leaseholders cannot accept as either fair or valid; how can this be justified and what is the Housing Management doing about it?

At the Leasehold Forum on 16th April 2008 leaseholders were promised an explanation regarding these costs within one month. To date, some 10 weeks later, no explanation has been received. When will this information be provided?

REPLY FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The Tenant and Leaseholder service charging “principles” and policy were reviewed and agreed by the Housing Committee in February 2008.

At the Leaseholder Forum held on the 16th April, many leaseholders made complaints about the level of increase in their service charges for 2008.

The Council is investigating and reviewing the increase in charge and level of service provided and apologises for the length of time its has taken to provide the information requested.

The Home Ownership Service Improvement Team has discussed the concerns at the last meeting on the 5th June 2008 and were informed of the current position and the Council`s action to resolve them. The Council will be arranging a special Leaseholder Forum on the 31 July to feedback the information requested and how the services charges have arisen.

Q2. QUESTION FROM ELSIE MATHEWS

Tenants are very disappointed by the lack of democracy in choosing tenant representatives to be co-opted to the Housing Committee. What changes are proposed to make this a more democratically accountable and transparent process?

REPLY FROM THE CHAIRMAN

This Committee approved a number of changes to the tenant and leaseholder engagement model at its meeting held in January this year. Whereupon it was agreed that to move forward on this concern and other matters, that a task and finish group would review the Compact and Code of Conduct principles, protocols and procedures. This has been completed. However, it is the Administration's intention to review soon the wider community engagement model to make improvements and your concerns will be considered as part of this review.