

HOUSING MANAGEMENT BOARD9 January 2006
5.30pm to 7.30pm

Present: Councillors James (Chair), Armstrong, Blencowe, Downham, Kightley, J Smith, Stebbings and Ward substituting Slatter.

Tenant Representatives: Judith Aveling, Tony Barnes, Brian Haywood, John Marais, Terry Sweeney and Anna Vinelott.

Also Present: Councillor Smart (Executive Councillor for Housing and Health).

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

06/HMB/13 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 7 November 2005 were confirmed as a correct record.

06/HMB/14 Apologies For Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Herbert and Judith Aveling.

06/HMB/15 Congratulations to Tony Barnes

The Housing Management Board congratulated Tony Barnes for being awarded a MBE for his services to the community in Cambridge.

05/HMB/16 Declarations Of Interest06/HMB/18, Rent Arrears

Councillor Stebbings declared a personal interest in this item as a council tenant. Terry Sweeney, Tony Barnes, Brian Haywood and John Marais declared personal interest in this item as they are council tenants.

06/HMB/19 Tenancy Management Policies and Procedures

Councillor Stebbings declared a personal interest in this item as a council tenant. Terry Sweeney, Tony Barnes, Brian Haywood and John Marais declared personal interest in this item as they are council tenants.

06/HMB/21 Grants to Cambridge Tenant Federation and Residents' Associations for 2006/07

Terry Sweeney declared personal interest this item as he is the Director of the Council Tenant Federation.

06/HMB/17 Public Question Time

There were no public questions to the Board.

06/HMB/18 2006/07 Service Plan and Housing Revenue Account Budget

(See also record of decision HMB/060109/A5)

The Director of Community Services presented the report to the Board.

Service Plan

The Director of Community Services presented the Service Plan and clarified that objectives for next year were included, whilst the Housing Revenue Account gave performance details.

Councillor Blencowe urged more awareness and strategic thinking on the part of the Council on development, as new developers collaborated with social housing landlords. He pointed out the need to be prepared to take more than 30% of the project.

Councillor James supported this argument and advised that the need for more awareness in development should be noted in planning.

Housing Revenue Account Budget

Julia Hovells, the accountant for Housing, presented the report to the Board.

Tony Barnes enquired about the effect of prudential borrowing on the budget. Julia Hovells explained that Prudential Borrowing would have an impact on the Housing Revenue Account, and in turn the Housing Investment Strategy, as all available surpluses were currently committed to the Investment Plan, and that officers were currently working on modelling the effects of Prudential Borrowing on the Housing Revenue Account to enable a report in the March Committee Cycle

Councillor Blencowe enquired as to whether approving the budget for 2006/07 and 2007/08 would in any way over-rule any decision that may subsequently be made, in relation to the provision for sheltered housing in the budget, and the request that Prudential Borrowing be further explored.

Julia Hovells advised that the financial position for the Housing Revenue was reviewed regularly, and in setting a budget for 2006/07, the ability to revisit this at a later stage, ie; the revised budget process during the November cycle, was not lost. She also commented that the 2007/08 forecast budget was merely an indication of future budget levels, to demonstrate to members any one-off items of expenditure or income for 2006/07 that would not continue, and that the 2007/08 budget process would be subject to the same scrutiny at this time next year. Clarification was given that budget approval would not in any way pre-empt decisions that may be taken in March, and that the Housing Revenue Account would be reviewed in light of any decision made.

At this point, the Director of Community Services advised that future briefings, on options for funding the investment in sheltered housing, would be notified to members as soon as the work underway had been completed.

The Board approved the recommendations by 10 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

06/HMB/19 Rent Arrears Target 2005/06

(See also record of decision HMB/060109/A6)

The Area Housing Manager, Andrew Latchem presented the report to the Board.

The Area Housing Manager advised a rent arrears target of not more than 2.00%; it is currently 2.2%. The Area Housing Manager pointed out that the Council was very close to best practice. This practice sought balance between enforcement and encouragement and support to pay rent monthly in advance, preferably by direct debit.

He noted to the Board that 2 new members of staff have been allocated to advise and reach tenants outside working hours, from 7:00 to 9:00 am and from 5:00 to 8:00pm.

Terry Sweeney congratulated the Council for its humanity in the way arrears were collected.

John Marais expressed concerns about new legislation which would require housing benefit to be paid directly to the tenant, and not the landlord, which could increase the amount of rent arrears

The Committee approved the recommendations by 12 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

06/HMB/20 Tenancy Management Policies and Procedures

(See also record of decision HMB/060109/A7)

Sandra Farmer, Area Housing Manager, presented the report produced to address inconsistencies in service delivery.

The Area Housing Manager agreed to send the procedures to the tenants as Councillor Downham suggested.

Councillor Blencowe gave thanks for the tenancy management policies and procedures and enquired about estimated costs, which were not yet certain. Councillor Downham insisted on the importance of having the cost clear for external inspection.

The recommendation was approved by 11 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

06/HMB/21 Appointment of Main Contractor for Mansel Court Refurbishment Project

(See also record of decision HMB/060109/A8)

Will Barfield, Partnering Manager, presented the report.

Tony Barnes accepted the Partnering Manager's arguments (see officer's report) but pointed out that contractors needed to be tested. This point was seconded by Councillor Slater who urged the need for maintenance of appropriate records of problems and solutions by contractors.

Terry Sweeney enquired about the costs of contracting Apollo. This could only be valued in terms of time (6 months) and effort (residents' involvement) without taking in consideration the subsequent effect in decent homes and better value.

At this point, the Director of Community Services advised that Apollo London Ltd. was aware that the Council was not committed to future contracts and, therefore, this would ensure best value for money for the Council.

Councillor Downham enquired about the exclusion of the contractor who refurbished Rawlyn Court. The Partnering Manager recognized that, despite having done a good job, the selection of Apollo was determined by the Decent Homes procurement process.

Councillor Blencowe felt uneasy about the prospect of committing £3 million to a single contractor in the eventuality that further refurbishments were needed and questioned the good practice of the process. He also enquired about the possibility of offering the project to a local contractor.

At this point Bob Hadfield, Head of Technical Services, reassured the Board that Apollo London Ltd. was good value for money, reliable and had consistent experience in the housing market.

Brian Haywood expressed his concern about the achievement of best value for tenants' money.

John Marais anticipated that, in any case, the comparison could only be done once the refurbishment in Mansel Court was finished.

Tony Barnes advised on the need to record the money spent in the allocation process to abide by the principles of transparency and achievement of best value for money.

The Committee approved the recommendation by 10 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

06/HMB/22 Cambridge Federation Grant & Resident's Association Grant for 2006/07
(See also record of decision HMB/060109/A9)

Marella Buckley, Principal Tenant Participation Officer, presented the report to the Board defining the Federation as the ideal mechanism to challenge the Council's services on behalf of the tenants.

Councillor Downham enquired about how the federation is monitored and how minority groups, who should be encouraged to participate, are reached.

Marella advised that this will be achieved by coordination of efforts with residents' associations.

Councillor Downham felt hopeful that residents' association would be able to participate in the Tenants' Federation.

Councillor James expressed his concern about the possibility of preempting the federation by coordinating the residents' associations. This point was shared by councillor Slatter who

thought that instead, residents' associations should be encouraged in order to avoid the extra cost of maintaining the federation by tenants.

Brian Haywood congratulated the Tenants' Federation and the Council for their achievements and sensitivity towards Cambridge's tenants. He also advised that more support was needed for the residents' associations to carry out the duties of secretary, treasury and so on.

Councillor Blencowe pointed out that, as a consequence of having a grant, it was expected that they would have a programme of work, such as for example, reaching minority groups.

Marella advised that the federation was expected to reach the charter mark and external accreditations from national bodies as a consequence of their customer care and sensitivity to diversity.

John Marais noted that the residents' associations were funded by the Housing General Fund.

The Committee approved the recommendations unanimously by 12 votes to 0.
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations.

06/HMB/23 Strategy to Widen Resident Involvement

(See also record of decision HMB/060109/A10)

Marella Buckley, Principal Tenant Participation Officer, presented the report to the Board.

Terry Sweeney noted that only residents attend residents' associations meetings when there was an issue to solve and that the Tenants' Federation had done a great job so far.

Councillor Slatter noted that the strategy did not involve working with partners and was concerned about duplication of efforts without putting their knowledge in common with other organisations.

Marella advised that the police used to use residents' associations in order to work with the community.

Tony Barnes pointed out that, if the whole initiative were to involve residents, the Council should be able to find other funding routes. The Executive Councillor noted the point.

Brian Haywood advised that the residents' associations had proved very valuable in fighting vandalism and so on, and that they are funded not only by the Housing Budget but by other sources.

Finally, the Director for Community Services advised that the way the Council involved and interacted with tenants acknowledged diversity.

The Committee approved the recommendations by 11 votes to 0.
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

The meeting closed at 7.30pm.

CHAIR