

HOUSING MANAGEMENT BOARD6 November 2006
5.30pm- 8.50pm

Present: Councillors: Armstrong, Blencowe, Downham, Herbert, James (Chair)
Kightley, J. Rosenstiel, Stebbings and Upstone.
Tenant Representatives: Tony Barnes (Vice-Chair), Diane Best, Brian
Haywood, John Marais, Terry Sweeney and Anna Vinelott.

Also Present: Councillor Smart, Executive Councillor for Housing.

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

06/HMB/53 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 26 June 2006 were confirmed as a correct record.

06/HMB/54 Apologies For Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

06/HMB/55 Declarations Of Interest

Councillor Stebbings declared a personal interest as a council tenant.

06/HMB/61 Terry Sweeney declared a personal interest, as a council tenant in sheltered accommodation. Tony Barnes declared a personal interest as a Director of a Registered Social Landlord.

06/HMB/56 Public Question Time

Mr Dickins a member of the ROAM Group and inspector of Decent Homes work, asked a question about issuing parking tickets. He wanted to know why City Services did not receive parking tickets while Apollo and City Services did. Mr Dickins gave an example where three vehicles were parked one CityCare, one Apollo and one City Services. CityCare and Apollo received a parking ticket. City Services did not. Colin said that both CityCare and Apollo workers have to pay the fines themselves and get reimbursed from CityCare and Apollo. He had evidence that this had happened at parking bays on the St Matthew's Estate.

The Executive Councillor for Housing undertook that this would be looked into.

Action by: Head of Technical Services

(Note: Mr Dickens attended the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 7 November to raise the matter with the Executive Councillor for Planning & Transport who was responsible for parking enforcement)

06/HMB/57 Leaseholder representative vacancy

The Director of Community Services advised the Board that its procedures had been followed and that Mrs Diane Best had been the only nomination received.

Resolved –

To co-opt Mrs Diane Best as leaseholder representative on the HMB.

06/HMB/58 Service Plan Performance Review and revised revenue and capital budgets – Housing Revenue Account/General Fund (HRA aspects only)

Tony Barnes requested that where officers use abbreviations and initials in reporting, that these are spelt out for the reader.

In response to a question from Cllr Blencowe, the Board noted that the £30,000 provision for DCLG Financial Freedoms Modelling would not necessarily all be used nor would the full amount be used for work undertaken by the Housing Quality Network consultancy.

Regarding increased costs of electricity within 'Estate Management' cost centres (£94,000), the Housing Accountant advised that the expenditure was approximately 50% for communal lighting areas in blocks of flats and 50% for street lighting on housing land. The Housing Accountant also confirmed, in response to a question from Tony Barnes, that increased electricity costs in sheltered schemes would be recovered via increases in service charges to tenants for future years.

Members discussed the objective 'to seek additional sources of home improvement funding to improve conditions for people on low incomes, and to achieve better value for money.' It was noted that there had been a low take up, despite advertising. Cllr Blencowe queried whether the advertising had failed to reach all age groups on low incomes as the publicity may have been skewed towards older people. The Director of Community Services undertook to circulate the criteria.

Action by DCS

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

06/HMB/59 Service progress following re-structuring of sheltered housing services

Members of the HMB commended the report and thanked the Independent Living Services' Manager for her oral update.

06/HMB/60 Financial freedoms – case study on the effects of withdrawing from the housing subsidy system

Following the introduction of the report by the Housing Business Manager, the Executive Councillor stated if this were to progress beyond the pilot three issues would need to be satisfied (i) that the model would work for the Government; (ii) that

there were real benefits for the City's tenants and (iii) it would not destabilize the Council's overall finances.

Members were advised of a further briefing by Housing Quality Network on 30 November and a reminder would be sent.

Tony Barnes stated that this would give local government the opportunity to preserve its housing stock. John Marais stated that the Government was shifting a bit under pressure from Council tenants and the concession to look at negative subsidy was welcome.

The Committee approved the recommendation by 15 votes to 0.
The Executive Councillor approved the recommendation.

06/HMB/61 Simons House – recommended procedure for selecting the registered social landlord to demolish and redevelop the site for older person housing

Following the report's introduction, Cllr Herbert asked whether the Council would set minimum standards; what specific criteria would be included in the Brief and would/should that be published; would the Council invite those without specific knowledge of sheltered housing; and for an update of the Mansel Court refurbishment. In response, the Enabling and Development Manager stated that the Brief would give a steer – but without being too prescriptive, in order to encourage innovative and realistic proposals. The brief will set minimum standards based on standards required by Supporting People, Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Lifetime Homes standard and the Housing Corporation's rigorous standards. The draft Brief would be available for members to see if they wished. As stated in the report, only RSLs with proven experience of providing good older person accommodation will be invited to tender. Regarding Mansel Court, the Head of Technical Services stated that work would start on site before Christmas and was expected to finish by December 2007.

Councillor J Rosenstiel requested that officers consider that the selection process include visiting schemes run by the RSLs, benchmarking against what the RSLs currently provide and involvement of those who currently live in such schemes. It was noted that the Brief would require the RSLs to detail how tenants would be involved in the design. Mrs Best also asked how the Council would involve stakeholders. In response to a comment from Cllr Upstone, the Enabling and Development Manager stated that the brief would require the new building to achieve Eco Home Excellent Standard.

Cllr Blencowe was of the view that the Brief should specify the number of units the Council wanted. The Enabling and Development Manager stated that it would be more than 30 2-bed units and that these would be for the over 55s and designed as homes for life (ie to allow for required care services to be brought in to tenants). The Board was advised that with the changes to care packages and Supporting People funding, the Council could not be too rigid in its requirements – flexibility was needed to allow for changing needs.

In response to a request from Councillor Downham, the officers undertook to provide information on the Lifetime Homes standard. Councillor Downham asked

whether the eight bungalows could be retained as bungalows were much needed in the City. She was advised that the scheme would not be viable without the land from the eight bungalows. The initial feasibility indicated that without the land the number of units reprovided would be reduced to 17, plus there would be loss either of garden or parking areas.

Brian Heywood asked if the officers would look into underground parking to allow for more green space and to avoid compounding parking difficulties in the area. He was advised that it would be looked at but is possibly not going to be viable due to cost and/or the site being short of space to have an adequate run-in/run-out.

Having listened to the debate the Executive Cllr requested that the officers consider a 'panel' to advise the selection panel. The 'panel' would be on the lines of that used for the Decent Homes preparatory work and involve tenants and Members of the HMB as appropriate.

Action by DCS

John Marais proposed the following amendment to the recommendation:

Replace all with "The disposal of Simons House and the two other schemes under consideration, should be put on hold until it is clarified whether or not the financial outlook for the HRA would be substantially improved by possible changes suggested by the Department of Communities and Local Government."

The Board were copied a briefing note explaining the officer's view why the decision should not be delayed (this is interleaved with the Minute Book copy).

Councillor J Rosenstiel stated that it was not viable to postpone the decision; tenants had already been consulted and it would be another two years for a decision to be made. She requested that the wording in 3.10 of the report reflected that the Ex Cllr, Chair and spokes also be involved.

Action by DCS

The Director of Community Services advised the Board that the Council must work within the current financial climate – the DCLG modeling may but equally may not happen – the risk was therefore too great. Any delay on the scheme would have real financial consequences for the HRA over the coming years.

The Executive Councillor stated that she and the Chair had asked for the briefing paper from the officers to explore the options available. Having seen the officers' views, she was convinced of the need to approve the recommendation.

John Marais stated that the Council was breaking its promise to its tenants and that a higher proportion of the sheltered tenants as a group had voted to keep the Council as their landlord.

Mr Marais' amendment was put to the vote and was lost 8-7 on the casting vote of the Chair.

[Following the tied vote on this item, the Chair was mistakenly advised that he had a casting vote, which he used. Whilst the Chairs of scrutiny committees have casting votes, the Chair of HMB does not. In the event of a tied vote at HMB, the matter is

referred for decision to the Executive Councillor. In this case, the voting took place in the presence of the Executive Councillor who was therefore aware that voting was tied]

The Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendation for the Executive Councillor by 9 votes to 5.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendation.

06/HMB/62 Write-offs of former tenant arrears

The Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendation for the Executive Councillor by 15 votes to 0.

The Executive Councillor agreed the recommendation.

06/HMB/63 Record of Decision – Approval of spending on consultants: DCLG case study

This was noted (and had appeared earlier on the agenda).

The meeting ended at 8.50pm

Chair