

**HOUSING MANAGEMENT BOARD**

11 November 2008

5.30pm – 7.45pm

**Present:** Councillors: Armstrong, Blackhurst, Blencowe, Levy, Pitt (Chair), Taylor, Todd-Jones, Wright and Ward

Tenant Representatives: Tony Barnes, Diane Best, Brian Haywood, John Marais and Terry Sweeney

**Also Present:** Councillor Smart, Executive Councillor for Housing

<b>FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL</b>
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**08/HMB/36      Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair

**08/HMB/37      Apologies For Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Shah and Tenant Representative Beverley Dennis

**08/HMB/38      Declarations Of Interest**

- Tony Barnes: personal interest – (08/HMB/44) as his property had been refurbished to include disabled adaptations
- Diane Best: personal interest – (08/HMB/46) as a leaseholder
- Brian Haywood: personal interest – (08/HMB/44) as he had disabled adaptations in his bathroom
- Terry Sweeney: Personal interest – (08/HMB/43) as a resident of Litchfield Road but not a user of the laundry

**08/HMB/39      Public Question Time**

None

**08/HMB/40          Additional Item: Gas Maintenance Contract**

The Chair expressed his concern at late items being added to the agenda for the second meeting in a row and this view was echoed by the Executive Councillor

The Engineering Services Team Leader introduced the item and informed the Committee that the current contract expired in March 2009 and permission was sought to enter a formal agreement together with South Cambridgeshire District Council with the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) for the tendering of annual inspection, servicing, repair and certification of gas installations in Council housing stock

In response to a question from Diane Best the officer confirmed that any new contractor would be required to continue providing a service for leaseholders. It was also stated that current methods of collecting service based data was out of date and needed to be enhanced in order to capture the information electronically and process via the web

In response to a question from Tony Barnes regarding South Cambridgeshire District Council's possible stock transfer, it was confirmed that tendering would be done on two separate pricing models - therefore enabling the City Council to still continue independently if needed

On advice from Members officers agreed to conduct a full risk assessment on this issue prior to the tendering and subsequent award of the Gas Contract

The Engineering Services Team Leader confirmed that tenant representatives would be involved in site visits to the short listed contractors and that South Cambridgeshire District Council were also planning tenant involvement

The Committee approved the recommendations unanimously

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations

**08/HMB/41          Digital TV**

The Technical Manager introduced the item and explained that permission was being sought to enter a formal agreement within a public sector procurement framework created by the organisation known as 'Fusion 21' for the supply and installation of suitable digital television reception equipment

It was confirmed that research had been undertaken on public sector frameworks but the Council saw the use of 'Fusion 21' as a cost effective way to procure the contract. The involvement of 'Fusion 21' had also been approved by the Councils Corporate Procurement Officer. The 'mini-competition' as mentioned in 2.2 of the officer's report would be a sub-selective process to assess contractor's ability to meet the needs and requirements of residents of the City

The Director of Community Services confirmed that whilst efforts would be made to use local contractors the framework would ensure that a suitable firm, capable of fulfilling the large contract, would be found

In response to a question from Councillor Levy the Technical Manager confirmed that the proposed installation of the IRS service was 'future-proof' and provided a sound base for tenants to add to and upgrade their own service as required. It was also confirmed that the proposed revenue cost of £22,000 was the replacement cost of the asset

Members felt that there was still a significant amount of confusion among tenants and leaseholders about the implications of going digital and officers agreed to use a variety of methods (such as the 'Open Door' publication) to keep residents actively informed. It was also confirmed that a dedicated telephone helpline would be set up to give information and advise residents

In response to a question from Councillor Blencowe the Technical Manager confirmed that the Committees previous decision was to stop maintaining the current system from March 31<sup>st</sup> 2009 but it was hoped that all new systems would be installed by then

The Committee approved the recommendations by 11 votes to 0

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations

## **08/HMB/42      Service Plan Performance Review**

- Housing General Fund

The Director of Community Services introduced the item and highlighted some of the key achievements of the 2008/09 Service Plan

It was confirmed that the results of the recent Housing Inspection would be reported Committee in due course

In response to concerns raised by Councillor Levy about the delay of the Homeless Assessment Centre, the Director of Community Services highlighted the complex legal issues and the difficulties using the old building. It was also confirmed that the Government funding for the project was secured

- Housing Revenue Fund

The Technical Manager introduced the item and highlighted some of the key achievements of the 2008/09 Service Plan

In response to a question from Diane Best it was confirmed that Leaseholders would be involved with the fire risk assessment

Tenant and Leaseholder Representatives highlighted the success of the Housing Tour in September 2008 and the Resident's Festival Day in October 2008 and urged more Councillors to attend

The Committee approved the actions proposed to ensure that objectives and performance targets for 2008-09 could be met

The Executive Councillor approved the actions

### **08/HMB/43      Cost Efficiency Review – Estate Based Laundries**

The Area Housing Manager introduced the item and confirmed that the 5 laundries would be looked at individually (not on block) with the decision being brought back to the March HMB Meeting

It was stated that the Decent Homes Standards and the implications of meeting the Disability Discrimination Act would also need to be taken into account

In response to a question from Councillor Wright regarding energy efficiency the Area Housing Manager confirmed that white goods energy ratings were always taken into account when equipment was replaced

As a result of further discussion Members approved the following amendment to the recommendation:

'To approve a cost and ENERGY efficiency review on the estate based laundry service....'

The Committee approved the amended recommendations unanimously

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations

## **08/HMB/44      The provision of disabled adaptations in Council owned properties – Review of Policy**

The Property Services Officer introduced the item and explained that the purpose of the report was to review the policy for funding adaptations for tenants with disabilities who lived in Council owned stock

Tony Barnes welcomed the report but felt that adaptations should be funded from the General Fund and not the Housing Revenue Account

The Director of Community Services recognised the concern but stated that the General Fund was also very tight. It was also confirmed that changes to the Capital Programme would be reported to the Community Services Committee

After further discussion the Chair suggested that budget issues should be tackled at the allocated January meeting. The Property Services Officer felt that the key issue in considering a change of funding source would be the potential implementation of the means testing for Council Tenants

In response to a question from Councillor Ward, the Technical manager agreed to forward details of waiting times for Occupational Therapists to all Members.

With regard to section 15 of Appendix A of the officer's report, Councillor Wright asked what support was in place to assist applicants to meet the appeals deadline of 60 days. In response the Executive Councillor stated that the 60-day limit mirrored that currently used for private sector appeals and that the Council allocated funding to the Cambridge Law Centre in order to provide support with housing issues

In response to a question from Councillor Ward the Property Services Officer confirmed that no appeals had taken place in the last 12 months

After discussion around the membership of the Appeals Panel the following amendment was agreed to 15.2.2 of Appendix A of the officer's report:

'The Appeals Panel will comprise two City Council Senior Managers (not involved in the original case) and one senior Manager of an independent organisation'

The Committee approved the recommendations unanimously

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations

**08/HMB/45      Inspection of Housing Footpaths**

The Area Housing Manager introduced the item and highlighted an error in 5.2 of the officer's report. The trip hazard forms will be recorded and kept for *as long as legally required* (not just for 6 years as stated). This was due to the fact that minors could still make claims up until 3 years past their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday

In response to a question from Diane Best the Area Housing Manager confirmed that tarmac footpaths were less likely to cause trip hazards than paths with slabs

The Director of Community Services confirmed that the City Council was looking at changing the designation of footpaths so that they would become the responsibility of the County Council. However, discussions were ongoing

The Committee approved the recommendations unanimously

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations

**08/HMB/46      Leasehold Income Management Policy**

The Area Housing Manager introduced the item and confirmed that the City Council currently had 1,065 leaseholders, the annual Service Charge debit was more than £240,000 and Section 20 Major Repairs were likely to reach in excess of £500,000 of invoiced works to leaseholders. It was also confirmed that the Performance Targets would be reported to the Committee on an annual basis

Diane Best voiced her support for the Policy and felt that it was open and transparent and that leaseholders had been fully involved

In response to questions from Councillor Levy and Councillor Ward regarding forfeiture the Housing Accountant confirmed that, in the case of leaseholders with mortgages, the lending authority would be contacted first to see if they were prepared to cover the debt. In the case of leaseholders without mortgages, the property would be put back into rental stock

The Committee approved the recommendations unanimously

The Executive Councillor approved the recommendations

The meeting ended at 7.45pm

**Chair**