

Extraordinary Council - 10 September 2003

Minutes of the meeting of **Extraordinary Council** held on **10 September 2003** when there were present:-

Cllr R A Amner (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs R Brown (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr C I Black	Cllr Mrs M D McCarthy
Cllr P A Capon	Cllr G A Mockford
Cllr Mrs T J Capon	Cllr J M Pullen
Cllr T G Cutmore	Cllr P K Savill
Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn	Cllr C G Seagers
Cllr J E Grey	Cllr S P Smith
Cllr K H Hudson	Cllr D G Stansby
Cllr A J Humphries	Cllr Mrs M A Starke
Cllr C A Hungate	Cllr M G B Starke
Cllr Mrs L Hungate	Cllr Mrs M S Vince
Cllr C C Langlands	Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr T Livings	Cllr P F A Webster
Cllr C J Lumley	Cllr D A Weir
Cllr Mrs J R Lumley	Cllr Mrs B J Wilkins
Cllr J R F Mason	

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs L A Butcher, R G S Choppen, K A Gibbs, T E Goodwin, Mrs S A Harper and R A Oatham.

OFFICERS PRESENT

R Crofts	-	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
G Woolhouse	-	Head of Housing, Health & Community Care
S Clarkson	-	Head of Revenues & Housing Management
J Bostock	-	Principal Committee Administrator

Representing the Audit Commission - Alison Brown, Best Value Housing Inspector

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Council consider the report of the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) which highlighted the actions that had been and would be taken following the Audit Commission inspection of the Housing Strategy and Housing Management Best Value Reviews.

In introducing his report the Corporate Director referred to officer disappointment at the Audit Commission's overall assessment of the Council's housing services, particularly in the context of high levels of tenant satisfaction identified through customer surveys. It was accepted that, at the time of the inspection, there was some weakness in strategy areas. Specific

reference was made to a Government requirement that the Authority undertake a full option appraisal of the best way to manage the Council's housing stock. From current indications it was possible that an appraisal could cost in the region of £150,000 to £250,000. Officers were consulting with the Government Office on the possibility of a less costly approach given the relatively small size of the Council's housing stock. Reference was also made to the potential value of inviting the Community Housing Task Force to provide a Member teach-in on option appraisal. It would be appropriate for officers to report further on the resource factors/actions associated with option appraisal, the way forward on housing strategy and the recommendations emanating from the inspection process.

Council welcomed Alison Brown who was in attendance to present the outcome of the Audit Commission's inspection of the Council's Housing Strategy and Housing Management Best Value Reviews. The presentation covered the investigative work undertaken by the Inspection Team, the findings associated with judgements on whether a service is good and whether it is going to improve and the concluding recommendations.

In discussing the post inspection assessment, Members expressed disappointment that little account appeared to have been taken of positive aspects, such as the very significant levels of customer satisfaction highlighted by recent surveys of all Rochford tenants and residents. Satisfaction rates were particularly important to Councillors given that a primary function was to serve the inhabitants of a district. The nature of a Councillor's work in the community also meant that an understanding of public views on Council services could be developed.

In referring to organisational objectives, a Member observed that few organisations had a track record of achieving all that they set out to do. Reference was made to the high level of resources which had to be applied to the best value review process and the possibility that, from a cost benefit perspective, it would have been more effective for these to have been applied to service development. Reference was also made to the high levels of expenditure likely to be associated with any changes to the housing service.

Responding to Member questions, Alison Brown advised that:-

- The Commission had responded to correspondence issued by the Council in June. Copies of the response would be re-issued.
- In terms of tenant satisfaction the inspection had identified some very positive aspects, such as the Council's responsive repair arrangements and the quality of officer responses to customers.

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- The results of customer satisfaction questionnaires were just one element of assessment measuring, which also included comparisons with the performance of authorities across the country. Good practice guides/examples of good practice authorities were available for all service areas.
- It was appreciated that authorities could experience difficulties in engendering appropriate tenant involvement. Across the country authorities undertook a range of approaches. The recent appointment of a Tenant Participation Officer should help the Council in this area.
- The Inspection Team had been aware that Hardwick House was to be redeveloped. It was, however, used as an example of long term void properties.
- In terms of survey returns, there was a tendency for elderly persons to indicate higher levels of satisfaction than younger persons.
- Good practice could be demonstrated by an authority regardless of size.

The Chairman thanked Alison Brown for attending the meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That arrangements be made for the Community Housing Task Force to provide a Member teach-in on the subject of Option Appraisal.
- (2) That officers submit a preliminary report to the October meeting of the Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee with proposals and action plans to take forward the new housing strategy and address comments set out in the Inspector's report. (CDF&ES)

The meeting closed at 9.02pm.

Chairman

Date