

Community Services Committee – 2 March 2004

Minutes of the meeting of the **Community Services Committee** held on **2 March 2004** when there were present:-

Cllr K A Gibbs (Chairman)
Cllr T E Goodwin (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Mrs R Brown
Cllr R G S Choppen
Cllr Mrs L Hungate
Cllr Mrs J R Lumley

Cllr C R Morgan
Cllr Mrs M J Webster
Cllr Mrs B J Wilkins

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs R A Amner, Mrs S A Harper, C C Langlands and J R F Mason.

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr C A Hungate

OFFICERS PRESENT

G P Woolhouse - Head of Housing, Health and Community Care
S J Clarkson - Head of Revenue and Housing Management
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

104 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 February 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

105 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors T E Goodwin and Mrs B J Wilkins each declared personal interests in the item on Disposal of Commercial Premises, 126 Hgh Street, Great Wakering by virtue of being a user of the premises and living in Great Wakering respectively.

106 COMMONHOLD AND LEASEHOLD REFORM ACT 2002

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on a number of procedural changes that have been made to leasehold management by virtue of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002.

Members noted that the percentage test associated with the eligibility rights of leaseholders to buy the freehold of their building had changed from 75% to 50%.

Resolved

That a report on the service delivery of the housing management function be considered by a future meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee. (HRHM)

107 DISPOSAL OF COMMERCIAL PREMISES – 126 HIGH STREET, GREAT WAKERING

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on a request for the sale of a commercial unit in Great Waking.

Responding to questions, the Head of Revenue and Housing Management confirmed that, if the properties identified in the report were purchased, they would remain as shops. Any valuations would reflect levels of business.

Resolved

- (1) That a valuation of the units on the open market be gained.
- (2) That the Council proceed with the disposal, at open market value, of 124, 126 and 128 High Street, Great Waking. (HRHM)

108 STOCK OPTION APPRAISAL EXERCISE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on the process surrounding the Stock Option Appraisal Exercise.

Members were pleased to note that the Head of Revenue and Housing Management had appointed to the post of Housing Manager (Service Delivery) and that the successful candidate could join the Council within a week. It was noted that the Council's Tenant Participation Officer would play a pivotal role in facilitation of the Option Appraisal Exercise.

Responding to questions, the Head of Revenue and Housing Management advised that:-

- The appointment of four Members plus one reserve to the proposed Housing Management Board would equate with the number of tenant representatives that had come forward. Should it be possible to encourage involvement from a fifth tenant, then five Members can be appointees.

- At times Member Board Meetings are likely to be at a frequency of every six weeks.

The Committee agreed that officers should be congratulated on having produced an action plan that GO-East was treating as an example of “Best Practice”. A Member observed that the Option Appraisal Exercise had been introduced and was driven by the Government Office for the Eastern Region and was not something that the Council had chosen to undertake. It would be appropriate for this factor to be included in tenant communications on the Exercise.

Resolved

- (1) That the timetable and action plan for the option appraisal exercise, including the appointment of an Independent Tenant Adviser, be adopted.
- (2) That external consultants be appointed to help in the exercise.
- (3) That the following Members be appointed to sit on the Management Board:-
 - Cllr K A Gibbs
 - Cllr Mrs S A Harper
 - Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
 - Cllr Mrs M S Vince

 - Cllr R G S Choppen (reserve)
- (4) That the changing role of the Tenant Participation Officer and the establishment of the Management Board be approved.
- (5) That it be recommended to the Policy & Finance Committee that there is a review of the hours, status and salary of the Tenant Participation Officer and a review of the Housing Management Team as to its capacity to deliver Option Appraisal. (HRHM)

109 DE-REGULATION OF HOUSING IN FRANCIS WALK, CROWN HILL, CLARENCE ROAD AND TENDERING AVENUE, RAYLEIGH

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on the de-regulation of some Pensioner Designated Housing to General Needs Housing.

During debate it was observed that the accommodation at Francis Walk was currently the only location where residents could have pets. It would be unfortunate for this facility to be removed, particularly in the context of the work of the District Council’s Animal Welfare Charter Sub-Committee, which

was likely to be recommending that the possibilities for allowing pets in housing accommodation/schemes be extended.

Responding to questions, the Head of Revenue and Housing Management advised that:-

- It would be possible to remove Francis Walk and Crown Hill from proposals, if this was the only area of concern for Members.
- Whilst de-regulation led to circumstances when the right to buy is available, the likelihood of this happening was remote and there have been occasions when the Authority has lost right to buy appeals on the basis that accommodation did not fulfil all the criteria required for 'elderly person' designation.

It was observed that, whilst there was a need to consider the balance between OAP designated and general needs housing, the Authority should be mindful of aspects such as right to buy and the need to maintain its sensitive lettings policy to reduce conflict between tenants' lifestyles.

The Committee felt that, given the complex nature of de-regulation proposals, it would be appropriate to ask the Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee to analyse possibilities and report back with recommendations.

Resolved

That consideration of this matter be referred to the Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee for detailed analysis, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to report back with recommendations. (HRHM)

110 INTRODUCTORY TENANCIES

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on introductory tenancies for all new tenants of Council housing.

In endorsing proposals, Members recognised that the Council had already experienced the levels of disruption caused, particularly to neighbours, when tenants disregard the terms of a tenancy.

Resolved

That, in principle and subject to a full consultation process, the adoption of introductory tenancies be favoured for all new tenants of social housing as part of the Council's overall strategy to tackle anti-social behaviour. (HHHCC)

111 HOUSING CORPORATION FUNDING BIDS 2004-2006

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care on the bids submitted by Housing Associations to the Housing Corporation for funding for housing schemes in the District.

Members endorsed the concern of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care that the details of a bid from NACRO Community Enterprises were still awaited. As the strategic Housing Authority, the Council should expect that organisations bidding for Government money for development within the District should consult the Authority in some detail. The lack of communication from NACRO was not in the spirit of partnership working. The Committee agreed that a letter should be sent to NACRO outlining the Council's disappointment at not having received any details of their bid and indicating that it would be appropriate for there to be prior discussions with the Council on any future bids.

Resolved

- (1) That those bids recommended for support, as set out in the appendix to the report, be supported.
- (2) That a letter be sent to NACRO Community Enterprises outlining the Council's disappointment at not having received any detail of NACRO's bid and indicating that it would be appropriate for there to be prior discussion with the Council on any future bids. (HHHCC)

EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Resolved

That the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that exempt information as defined in Paragraph 13 of Part 1 of Schedule 12 of the Local Government Act 1972 would be disclosed.

112 UNFIT HOUSE

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care on progress in dealing with a long-term empty property.

Resolved

That the works specified in the notice served under the provisions of the Housing Act 1985 on the person having control of the property, detailed in the exempt report, be carried out and the costs so incurred recovered, in

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accordance with the provisions of Sections 193 and 194 of that Act.
(HHHCC)

The meeting closed at 8.17pm.

Chairman

Date