

## Review Committee – 11 March 2008

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Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **11 March 2008** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs J R Lumley  
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs S A Harper

Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn  
Cllr T Livings

Cllr P R Robinson  
Cllr Mrs C A Weston

### **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs L M Cox and J R F Mason.

### **OFFICERS PRESENT**

G Woolhouse	-	Corporate Director (External Services)
J Bourne	-	Head of Community Services
S Neville	-	Strategic Housing Manager
P Gowers	-	Overview and Scrutiny Officer
M Power	-	Committee Administrator

### **95 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 FEBRUARY 2008**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### **96 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllrs Mrs J R Lumley and Mrs C A Weston declared a personal interest in item 6 of the agenda relating to choice-based lettings by virtue of membership of the Rochford Housing Association Board.

### **97 UPDATE ON ITEMS RAISED AT PREVIOUS MEETING**

At the meeting of the Review Committee on 12 February, issues were raised that required further investigation:-

- **Review of the operation of the Planning Enforcement Service (Minute no 58)**

An update in respect of the two outstanding items was provided.

- **Taxi Licensing/Regulations (Minute no 60)**

The Committee was advised that the taxi licensing regulations operated by the Council were up to date and fit for purpose.

### 98 CHOICE-BASED LETTINGS

The Committee received a verbal update from the Head of Community Services with respect to choice-based lettings, which is summarised below.

All local authorities were legally obliged to have a choice-based lettings allocation policy in place by 2010. The policy would provide prospective tenants with increased choice, with vacant properties being advertised in printed form, on the Internet or by SMS text message. Tenants registered with the local authority could 'bid' for (or place an expression of interest in) a property. The Government anticipated that implementation of the new scheme would promote sustainable communities and that tenants would feel empowered and more engaged in the process. Provision would be made to assist more vulnerable prospective tenants with the bid process.

The Government has stated that the schemes should contain a built-in provision for cross-border movement of tenants among the five Thames Gateway South Essex authorities (TGSE). This would necessitate all authorities in the TGSE sub-region allocating specific properties for this purpose and there being a common allocation policy.

Rochford District Council was a member of the Thames Gateway South Essex Partnership, which had successfully bid for funding for a project to develop a sub-regional choice-based lettings scheme, in conjunction with the other Thames Gateway authorities. The partnership had been awarded £96,000 towards projected total costs for the project of £160,000. A coordinator, and then subsequently a consultant, had been employed to initiate the scheme and to draft a scheme specification for the purchase of a choice-based lettings scheme. Southend Borough Council had purchased its own scheme and was in the process of implementing it. There was an option for Rochford District Council to join the Southend scheme.

Rochford District Council would liaise with Rochford Housing Association and other registered social landlords operating in the District. A new IT system for strategic housing is currently being developed that would need to interface with any new scheme that was adopted.

GoEast Government officers would be providing the Thames Gateway Sub-Regional partnership with further information at a meeting in April.

An initial report on choice-based lettings would be made to Executive Board on 26 March 2008, and in the Autumn of 2008, a further report would go to Executive Board with final proposals for either a local or sub-regional scheme. It was anticipated that implementation of the new scheme would commence in January or February 2009, to be completed in time for the 2010 deadline.

In response to questions, the following was noted:-

- The Government anticipated that the new system would reduce void losses; however, there might be a time-lag because of the need to advertise properties.
- Where there is more than one bid, a decision on the allocation of the property would be made following review of the bids, and the applicant with the greatest need would be allocated the property.
- Housing allocation for all applicants would be very similar to what existed at present.
- People who lived outside the Thames Gateway area who had relatives in the Rochford District would still be eligible to apply for housing in the area. It was noted, however, that applicants with a local connection could still be given a higher priority.
- Members would agree the percentage of available housing stock that would be allocated for cross-border housing.
- As there existed an element of choice in RDC's current scheme, there may be the opportunity for the Council to adapt its current scheme. This would be discussed at the meeting with GoEast in April.

It was noted that Decisions on choice-based lettings were included in the Forward Plan. If the Review Committee wished to provide input into these decisions, they could request further briefings from officers at future Review Committee meetings.

### **99 PLANNING APPEAL PROCEDURES REVIEW**

The Committee considered the final report of the project team on the Review of Planning Appeal Procedures.

#### **Recommended to Executive Board**

- (1) That in the case of Appeals, Members should only be used as third party witnesses.
- (2) That a Planning Officer should be used as an expert witness for the majority of Planning Appeals when the Head of Planning and Transportation does not feel that the use of an outside consultant would be of benefit. (HPT)

#### **Recommended to the Standards Committee**

That training for Members on the latest changes in planning legislation takes place every four months. (HICS)

### 100 GLOBAL WARMING REVIEW

The Committee considered the final report of the project team on the Review of the Implications of Global Warming Agenda on Rochford District and the role the District Council and its communities might play.

The content of the report was agreed, subject to the following amendments:-

That the wording in paragraph 3.3 be changed from 'some key facts and figures are' to 'during the Review the Committee was advised of the following details'.

That the wording of paragraph 7.3.1 be amended to read 'a visit was arranged and a Member of the Review Committee visited Holt Farm Primary School to talk to the pupils'.

#### **Recommended to the Executive Board**

- (1) That the Council develops a Sustainable Energy (Climate Change) Strategy by September 2008, in order that resource implications can be considered by the Council as part of the 2009/10 budget process.
- (2) That detailed action plans are developed to ensure that the Sustainable Energy strategy is delivered. If practicable, this should also be developed by September 2008, in order that resource implications can be considered by the Council as part of the 2009/10 budget process.
- (3) That the Council becomes a signatory to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change at the earliest opportunity.
- (4) That the following specific targets are established in the Corporate Plan:-

'Over the next five years we will:-

- Work on reducing the Council's own carbon dioxide emissions by 30% (based upon a 2005 baseline).
- Achieve a recycling target of 50% within the 5-year period.
- Through the Council's Local Development Framework, ensure that the future development of the District up to 2021 is planned and carried out in a sustainable fashion.

By 2017 we will:-

- Implement an Adapting to Climate Change Action Plan for action, monitoring and review.

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- Work on reducing the Council's own carbon dioxide emissions by 60%
  - Secure a recycling rate of 60% per year'.
- (5) That the Council engages with Local Area Agreement partners to reduce the carbon footprint of domestic properties and business and public sector activities.
- (6) That further action be taken to encourage recycling in respect of the business sector.
- (7) That officers explore the implementation of the action plan produced by the Carbon Trust. (HES)

As it would be Cllr Mrs S A Harper's last Review Committee meeting, the Chairman thanked her for her work as a Councillor and in particular for her work as Vice-Chairman of the Review Committee.

The meeting closed at 9.20 pm.

Chairman .....

Date .....

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