

**A MEETING OF THE HOUSING BOARD
WAS HELD ON 7 NOVEMBER 2007**

The Mayor (Councillor Gill)(ex-officio), Chairman of Policy and Organisation Board (Councillor Cully)(ex-officio) (P), Councillors Allen (P), Ms Ballard (P), Burgess, Champion (P), Mrs Cully (Vice Chairman) (P), Foster, Foster-Reed, Mrs Mudie (P), Rigg (P) and Mrs Wright (Chairman) (P).

Also in attendance: Tenant Representative – Mrs Janne Carter

It was reported that, in accordance with Standing Orders, notice had been received that Councillors Carter, Hicks and Hook would replace Councillors Foster, Foster-Reed and Burgess for this meeting.

25 APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were submitted on behalf of The Mayor (Councillor Gill) and Councillors Burgess, Foster and Foster-Reed.

26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

27 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2007 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true and correct record.

28 DEPUTATIONS

There were no deputations.

29 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

PART II

30 REDEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS FOR THE LEISURE

The Board considered the report of the Housing Services Manager (a copy of which is attached in the Minute Book as Appendix 'A') giving an outline of progress that had been made in relation to the redevelopment of The Leisure at Cunningham Drive, Bridgemary. The report included consultations that had taken place with a number of parties in relation to the realisation of a new scheme for the site. Details of the proposed management options, as requested by Members at the previous meeting of the Housing Board, were in the report. The report sought a decision to transfer the land to Hermitage Housing Association who would carry out the redevelopment of The Leisure.

It was requested by a Member that, with a scheme of this magnitude, Group Housing Spokespersons should be involved in the work on the detailed proposals for the redevelopment of the Leisure Sheltered Housing Scheme and this was accepted.

RESOLVED: That the Housing Board recommends the following to the Policy and Organisation Board:

- (a) the land at The Leisure, excluding that occupied by the bungalows, be transferred to Hermitage Housing Association for no financial consideration, and authority be delegated to the Housing Services Manager in consultation with the Borough Solicitor to finalise the terms of the transfer;
- (b) the Housing Services Manager, in liaison with Ward Councillors and Group Housing Spokespersons continue to work on the detailed proposals, including financial, management and development discussions, for the redevelopment of the Leisure Sheltered Housing Scheme; and
- (c) future management arrangements for the new scheme will be as follows:
 - the establishment of a local management panel to monitor and review performance of both the management and care of the new scheme. The management panel would consist of representatives of all partners to the scheme including local residents' representatives, a local Ward Councillor and representatives from the voluntary sector.
 - the establishment of a nominations panel to assess applications for the scheme and to ensure that both the housing and care needs are assessed jointly. This would consist of representatives from Gosport Borough Council (GBC), Hampshire County Council and Hermitage Housing Association. Vacancies to the scheme would be advertised through the Gosport Choice Based Lettings Scheme with agreed housing and care criteria attached.
 - access in perpetuity for residents of 26-45 Cunningham Drive to the new facilities at the redeveloped Leisure scheme, with costs pegged to GBC prices for guest rooms etc, for a period of five years from the opening of the new scheme.

31 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT – PLAN TO RESTORE BALANCES

The Board considered a joint report of the Housing Services Manager and the Financial Services Manager (a copy of which is attached in the Minute Book as Appendix 'B'), the purpose of which was to provide information to Members explaining the significant reduction in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) balances during 2006/07 and the actions being taken to restore the balances to a level required by the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

It was explained to Members that the report set out the variances from expenditure to budget in the financial year from 1st April 2006 to 31 March 2007. Variances were normally expected but in this instance they had been downward variances but despite this, plans had been put in place to restore balances.

Members were advised that further repairs' expenditure for the financial year 2006/2007 had been identified by officers several weeks after the year-end. These expenses had to be included in the previous financial year thus bringing the balance of reserves to a low level; this was at the time when officers were developing a monthly monitoring system. However, Members were assured that measures had since been put in place to closely monitor and control expenditure on a monthly basis in conjunction with Connaught.

Members expressed their disappointment at this set of accounts but welcomed officers' efforts to restore balances in 2007/2008 and requested that the HRA account 2008/2009 be brought up to a good working balance. The Financial Services Manager confirmed that the 2008/2009 budget was currently being prepared and would include further proposals to help restore the balances to the target level indicated within the Council's Medium Term Strategy by 31 March 2009. In addition, assurances had been given by Connaught that expenditure was reducing and this had been borne out by recent monthly monitoring figures.

It was confirmed by officers that a further report(s) would be submitted to the Housing Board regarding any budget difficulties so that any remedial action could be considered by Members at an early stage.

RESOLVED: That the following actions to restore the Housing Revenue Account balances in 2007/08 be approved:

- (i) a reduction is made in the 2007/08 Capital Programme, enabling a reduction of £300,000 in the Revenue Contribution to Capital within the Housing Revenue Account 2007/08;
- (ii) to support the principle that the HRA Budget 2008/09 is prepared with a view to further restoring the HRA balance to the minimum acceptable as detailed in the Medium Term Financial Strategy;
- (iii) the improved monitoring and management procedures be noted in relation to the Connaught partnering arrangement.

32 VOID PROPERTIES

By reason of special circumstances, the Chairman determined that this item be considered at this meeting notwithstanding the fact that it had not been available for public inspection in accordance with the provisions of Section 100B(4)(a) of the Local Government Act 1985.

The special circumstances were created by the need to urgently discuss a plan for dealing with high cost void properties in the Borough.

Members expressed concern about the length of time three properties in the housing stock were to be left vacant in the Borough, one of these properties had proceedings issued against it so Members concentrated on the two remaining void properties. Officers explained that approximately four void properties a year on average in the last couple of years required substantial investment estimated at between £20,000 and £25,000 each and included major structural repairs and rising damp.

Officers were concerned about the current budget position and suggested postponing a decision on these particular void properties until the commitments for the year were fully realised. Officers were also mindful of unexpected expenditure, for example, the possibility of storm damage to housing stock and the budget implications of any such event. It was noted that 'void turnaround' performance had improved in the previous 18 months.

Members were concerned that they had not previously been made aware that these properties were vacant for extended periods. They considered that this could be damaging to the Council and that a long term solution should be found as soon as possible to reduce the length of time these two properties were vacant, to re-house those living in cramped conditions and to avoid any piecemeal solutions as many properties of a similar age were likely to have similar defects.

Members then discussed the options that might be available to prevent any need for any void properties to remain empty for a prolonged period while finding alternative funding; these included investigating disposal of a small number of properties, replacement with prefabricated properties and borrowing under the Prudential Code.

It was suggested that it might be advantageous for Members and Officers to work together to formulate a plan for dealing with high cost void properties and to delegate authority to a Void Properties Sub-Board consisting of the three Group Housing Spokespersons. It was noted that disposal of any property would need to be referred to the higher Board. It was recognised that following production of the plan any decision to, for example, sell any property would require approval by Housing Board and other Boards/Council.

RESOLVED: To establish a Voids Sub-Board comprising the Group Housing Spokespersons with delegated authority to produce a plan for dealing with vacant properties with large scale structural works.

The meeting commenced at 6pm and concluded at 6.40pm.

CHAIRMAN