

A MEETING OF THE HOUSING BOARD

WAS HELD ON 10 JANUARY 2007

The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Cully) (ex-officio) (P), Councillors Allen (P), Burgess (P), Cully (P), Foster (P), Foster-Reed (P), Gill, Mrs Mudie (P), Philpott (P), Rigg (P) and Mrs Wright (P).

Also in attendance: Tenant Representative – Mrs Janne Carter

It was reported that, in accordance with Standing Orders, notice had been received that Councillor Smith would replace Councillor Gill for this meeting.

23 APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were received on behalf of Councillor Gill.

24 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor Mrs Wright be appointed as Chairman of the Board.

25 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor Cully be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Board.

26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

27 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2006 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 BEST VALUE SHELTERED HOUSING WORKING GROUP

The Board considered the report of the Housing Services Manager (a copy of which is attached in the Minute Book as Appendix 'A') bringing before Members the conclusions of the Working Group on the Best Value Sheltered Housing Review.

The Chairman of the Sheltered Housing Working Group thanked all the group members for their commitment for the duration of the Best Value Sheltered Housing Review.

It was proposed and seconded that this matter be deferred to allow time for consultation with residents of all the Sheltered Housing Schemes. It was suggested that consultation should consist of an afternoon at some schemes with residents, Group Spokespersons, Ward Councillors and officers.

Members suggested that those residents unable to attend the consultation afternoons could be supplied with a report and given an opportunity to submit their views.

RESOLVED: That the Board defers the decision on the recommendations to the Housing Board meeting in June 2007 to give time for consultation afternoons to take place at the Sheltered Housing Schemes.

31 ALLOCATIONS POLICY REVIEW

The Board considered the report of the Housing Services Manager (a copy of which is attached in the Minute Book as Appendix 'B') seeking Members' approval of recommendations to amend the existing Allocations Policy, prior to consultation with customers and housing association partners.

It was suggested that encouragement to use the bidding process could be enhanced by requesting for a declaration to be signed by the customer confirming that they understood the bidding process thereby encouraging bidding. Members were informed that, at present the law was not clear and therefore officers requested sight of the amendments when available to establish any impact this might have, before any changes were made. The Borough Solicitor stated that case law did not identify what was 'a reasonable length of time' to bid. It was explained that the law changed in 2002 and was not yet fully explored therefore officers could only note concern and explore the Code of Guidance once published otherwise a penalty could be incurred.

Members were also concerned about bidding penalties as they related to vulnerable people. The process was explained including the right of appeal, that reasons for refusal were likely to give an indication of vulnerability as would the updating of medical information and that authorised persons could bid on the vulnerable person's behalf. Members welcomed the work on homelessness waiting lists and the Tower Blocks.

The Borough Solicitor explained that under the law, factors were given to reasonable preference groups, the legality of the scheme would have given weight to 'local connection' rather than 'residency' enabling a balance to be struck and if this was not adhered to it could appear to be potentially unlawful.

Some Members reported that residents were unhappy with the new Banding System as it appeared to be less transparent and less understandable and local people appeared to be disadvantaged and disillusioned by the system. It was proposed and seconded that the present Banding System should revert to a Points System arrangement as previously, starting from the 8 May 2007 bidding cycle.

There was concern as to the impact of returning to a points system might cause and the

large amount of resources that might be needed to reverse the systems especially when taking into account the increase in numbers on the Housing Register and the significant number of changes to records. There was some support for preparing an assessment to compare the two systems prior to making a decision on any reversal and/or to let the new system settle down.

The Housing Services Manager advised that it had been a long and detailed process to set up the new banding system and offered to make an assessment of the issues and the implications of reverting to the points system. He felt it would be very difficult to achieve a switch of the systems by March 2007 because of the resources needed to change the IT system and other processes.

RESOLVED: That

- (a) With effect from bidding cycle 8 May 2007, the present banding system should revert to a points based system and ensure compliance with legislation;
- (b) In future amendments to the Allocations Policy and Choice Based Letting Scheme should be considered jointly;
- (c) The Choice Based Lettings Scheme should be reviewed and a report should be presented to a future Housing Board meeting;
- (d) Delegated powers be given to the Housing Services Manager to implement the recommendations approved by this Housing Board and that they be deferred for further consideration at a future Housing Board meeting;
- (e) The Planned Lettings targets be amended as follows:
 - 1 General Needs:
 - Homeless down from 45% to 35%
 - Transfer static at 25%
 - Waiting list up from 30% to 40%
 - 2 New Developments
 - Transfer down from 90% to 70%
 - Waiting list and homeless up from 10% to 30%
 - 3 Sheltered and Designated Elderly
 - Transfer 50%
 - Waiting list and homeless 50%
 - 4 Tower Blocks
 - Homeless customers 10%
 - Transfer customers 10%
 - Waiting list customers 80%
 - 5 Amend the definition of a new development from:
Cherque Farm, Clarence Yard, Royal Barracks to any new development involving 10 or more new properties in one location;
- (f) Customers subject to specified behaviour penalty provisions within the Allocations Policy be additionally subject to special rules relating to sensitive lettings, namely:
 - a) Approval of any offer of re-housing, where a dwelling is a sensitive letting, be subject to Head of Section (Housing Options) discretion; and
 - b) The Head of Section (Housing Options) to have delegated powers to amend

the applicant's priority, in the negative, to a maximum permissible under law in the specific circumstances of that application

c) The definition of a specified behaviour penalty in this recommendation excludes penalties applied for refusal of offer of re-housing, rent arrears and financial means

d) Sensitive lettings are defined as:

i) The actual property being re-let was void due to repossession action (formal written notice or beyond) against the previous tenant for nuisance/anti-social behaviour, criminal behaviour justifying possession action; or

ii) An immediate neighbouring property is currently subject to repossession action as in (1); or

iii) In the sub-locality area a minimum of 10% of tenancies are currently subject to repossession action as in (1);

iv) For the sub-locality area the Police or Principal Housing Officer, or equivalent, has made a strong recommendation to the Council that it be designated a sensitive letting area (recommendations to be reviewed every six months) and that recommendation has been accepted. Such recommendation to be made within a framework protocol (to be produced)

v) In the sub-locality a minimum of 10% of tenancies are currently occupied by sublet tenants; and

- (g) Customers refusing an offer of re-housing that they have personally bid for, and where that refusal is not reasonable, have a penalty applied to their application (minor penalty as defined in Allocations Policy).

32 REVIEW OF THE CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME

The Board considered the report of the Housing Services Manager (a copy of which is attached in the Minute Book as Appendix 'C') giving information on the first 24 weeks of the Scheme to the end of November 2006. Members had previously received an interim report at Housing Board on 1 November 2006 encompassing the first 12 weeks of the new Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL).

Members were informed that there were amendments to Table 6 in the report in that the 'comparison of numbers of applications received immediately before and after Choice Based Lettings was introduced' should be '22 weeks post CBL with 46.5 average weekly applications and total applications received 1024'.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the Housing Services Manager's report be noted.

33 REVISED REPAIRS PROGRAMME 2006/07

The Board considered the report of the Housing Services Manager (a copy of which is attached in the Minute Book as Appendix 'D') setting out a revised Housing Repairs Programme for 2006/07 and sought Members' approval for the revised programme.

Due to a significant reduction in Supported Capital Expenditure (Borrowing) from the Regional Housing Board, officers had identified savings of £250,000 with no likely disruption to residents. It was explained that St Vincents storm damage specified in the appendix to the report, was that suffered towards the end of 2005 and that the door entry systems item referred to St Johns Square in March 2006.

The primary reasons for the increasing difficulty in identifying properties where the tenant would accept gas fired central heating were explained and a Member requested that when there was a change in tenancy this matter could be addressed. Members were positive about the low number of Right to Buy sales.

RESOLVED: That the Board approve the Housing Repairs Programme 2006/07 subject to Policy and Organisation Board's approval of the revised budget.

34 PARTNERING ARRANGEMENTS FOR PAINTING AND DECORATING; HEATING AND ELECTRICAL INSTALLATIONS

The Board considered the report of the Housing Services Manager (a copy of which is attached in the Minute Book as Appendix 'E') seeking Members' approval for the proposed appointment of a painting and decorating partner for the next five years and the Board's approval to extend the current heating/electrical partnership with 1st Saxon-Clenmay for a further two years from April 2007.

Members questioned why Councillors had been excluded from the selection process for the appointment of a painting and decorating partner but acknowledged that this had been regrettable and would be addressed. Officers explained that this omission had not been intentional and that Tenants' Representatives and Internal Audit had been involved.

Members requested that representatives from all political parties should be present at similar future selection processes and partnering arrangements and welcomed the proposed protocol.

RESOLVED: That

- (a) Contract Standing Orders be waived in accordance with Standing Order 1.4.1 and that Richardson Decorating be appointed as the Housing Services painting and decorating partner for 5 years from January 2007 to January 2012;
- (b) The extension of the current partnering arrangement for heating and electrical installations until April 2009 with 1st Saxon – Clenmay be approved; and
- (c) A protocol that the Housing Board Chairman and Housing Group Spokespersons or nominated deputies be invited to participate in the selection processes for all Housing partnering arrangements be approved.

35 GARAGE REVIEW: PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO LICENCES

The Board considered the report of the Housing Services Manager (a copy of which is attached in the Minute Book as Appendix 'F') proposing a change in policy to allow the storage of household goods in garages and that the garage licence agreement be amended accordingly.

Members were informed that a review into the condition of Council garage stock had been underway since July 2006 and was likely to be completed by March 2007. A copy of an interim progress report to the Chairman of Housing had been circulated to Members in November 2006. It had become apparent that there was a clear demand for storage space by residents, this practice was not included in the current Housing Service garage

licence and the storing of household items was difficult to patrol and enforce.

There was a perception by some Members that Bridgemary had been singled out for garage inspections but it was confirmed that the review had simply started with Bridgemary. The second phase of inspections was likely to include Leesland and Lee-on-the-Solent Wards. There was Member support for inspecting all garages in the Borough both internally and externally or alternatively repairs could be made when reported or as part of Housing Officers' visits. Members would welcome information on the new licence agreement to be sent to the tenants of garages. It was confirmed that it had been planned to inspect all garages in the Borough but resources had been limited although other resources could be redirected to address the matter.

Members were assured that the storage of household items would not include dangerous materials and if this was found to be the case enforcement action could be taken and licences could be terminated. There was some support for gaining entry to the garages where no access had so far been possible to establish their usage.

Members were in favour of amending the recommendation to include details of the amended licence.

RESOLVED: That the licence agreement be amended, in consultation with Legal Services, to additionally allow the keeping of household goods in Council garages as detailed below:

- A licence is granted by the Council for the purpose of garaging/parking a vehicle owned by the licensee (or member of their family), **and additionally if required the storage of household items.**
- No trade or business shall be carried out and the licensee must not sub-let, assign, or allow any third party to use the garage/car port/locking post.
- The Council and persons authorised by them shall, at any time, be permitted to enter/inspect and/or carry out work.

36 PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROPOSAL

The Board considered the report of the Housing Services Manager (a copy of which is attached in the Minute Book as Appendix 'G'). The report gave an outline of the British Gas incentive scheme, its relevance to improving energy efficiency in Gosport, why it would be advantageous for the Council to participate, the benefits it would bring to local residents and the gains in relation to improved energy efficiency.

Members were informed that this proposed scheme for the private sector was one of a number of alternative schemes available. Following a request, a précis of the alternative schemes would be circulated to Members of the Board.

Members welcomed the British Gas scheme and it was confirmed that the government placed a climate change levy on all the major energy utilities. It was money from this fund that British Gas used to finance its Council Tax refund scheme to install insulation in private properties. It was confirmed that if residents took part in the proposed scheme they would not be obliged to switch energy suppliers.

It was confirmed that in some cases the construction of a property might not lend itself to any further insulation and those residents would be advised accordingly. Following a Member's question it was confirmed that it would be established whether 'blown fibre' insulation might be suitable in these cases.

RESOLVED: That the British Gas incentive scheme as outlined in the Housing Services Manager's report be endorsed and officers be instructed to enrol Gosport Borough Council in the British Gas sponsored scheme to promote energy efficiency.

The meeting commenced at 6pm and concluded at 7.57pm

CHAIRMAN