



**Customer Opinion Panel Minutes
Monday 11th July 2016 – Council Chambers**

Gosport Borough Council

Ian Lycett – Chief Executive
James Hill – Housing Services Manager
Tim Hoskins – Head of Housing Finance
Mark Johnson – Head of Property Services

Sam Downing - Resident Involvement Officer
Val Leopold - Senior Housing Officer
Carol Garrett - Housing Officer
Syed Haque - Housing Officer

Guests:

Mrs S Greenwood	Miss J Light	Miss R Walker	Mr J Cattle
Miss J Perry	Mrs E Saunders	Mr B Sherman	Mr B Pullen
Mr P Batty	Cllr Mrs L Batty	Ms V Twyman	Miss S Bellerby
Mr J Mardle	Mr T Withers	Mr K Burns	Ms A Hill
Mr L Bedford	Mr T Gale	Mr T Bott	Mrs T Bott
Mrs P Grant	Miss J Reed		

Apologies:

Mrs S Spelzini	Mrs D Corbett	Mrs L Smith	Miss J Anders
Mrs M Cook	Mrs J Brown	Mrs M Griffin	Mrs V Carter
Mr B Hudson	Mrs R Hill	Mr G Heaver	Ms M Charlesworth
Mr B Wakefield	Mrs L Hay	Ms J Rowe	

1.	<p>Message from Val Twyman</p> <p>Val Twyman gave the following message to all present at the outset of the meeting:</p> <p>In April, several of us who go to COP attended the South Coast Training event in Southampton. There were also tenants from other organisations including: Fareham; Southampton; Winchester; Spectrum and The New Forest. I took part in the Housing Law workshop along with three other tenants from Gosport.</p> <p>During the break-out session we all discussed how our own organisations and tenants work together. The representatives from Gosport came to the conclusion that Gosport Council do listen to the COPs and we should be thankful that the COPS do work even though sometimes it doesn't always seem like that.</p>
2.	<p>Welcome and Introduction</p> <p>Sam Downing opened the meeting and gave introductions.</p>

<p>3.</p>	<p>Ian Lycett - Chief Executive</p> <p>Ian Lycett discussed a number of changes within the Council as a whole and also within the Housing Unit. He introduced James Hill who is the current Housing Services Manager.</p> <p>Corinne Waterfield who was our Housing Services Manager from 2012-2015, started a process of reform in the Housing Unit and then unfortunately needed to move away from Gosport. When Corinne left, there were two choices, to either fill the post and allow that person to move forwards with the changes or to carry out a full review of the Housing Service.</p> <p>The decision was made to employ Stuart Palmer to undertake a full review of the Housing Service because Local Government/Councils and Housing have changed significantly over the past 10 years and we wanted to make sure that GBC's Housing Services is the best it can be for the 21st Century.</p> <p>Stuart began the housing review in July 2015 and at the time, all the housing staff were advised that the review was not about saving money, it was about getting the structure and management right for the Housing Service.</p> <p>Gosport Council is fully committed to our Housing Service – All political parties support retaining our housing stock. We borrowed £57M to buy GBC out of the annual financial commitments to Central Government. GBC had a Business Plan and had started building Council houses again at St Vincent Road.</p> <p>Then, Central Government introduced a 1% cut on Council rents – good for tenants – not for Business plan and now GBC are faced with the requirement to sell at least £1/£2M Council houses a year off. Please see information from Tim Hoskins.</p> <p>GBC therefore face huge financial pressures – How can we continue to deliver improvements to our houses?</p> <p>The Council are funded in two ways, Council Tax and Central Government Grant.</p> <p>For example, £1200 Council Tax a resident pays, Gosport gets only £120.00; The majority going to Hampshire County Council.</p> <p>Our Central Government Grant has suffered massive cuts.</p> <p>Millions of pounds have already been saved and staff have been reduced by 30% and Management 60%.</p> <p>At the last budget the Chancellor announced the GBC Grant was to be cut by a further £1.5M in the next 3 years with £666,000 next year.</p> <p>Full Council agreed last month to share management with Portsmouth City Council and the Chief Executive post and the other Senior Managers are</p>
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	<p>leaving 30th September.</p> <p>This is not a merger or a combined Council, GBC will remain a separate Council – Gosport Councillors will remain in charge. Council meetings will continue to be held at the Town Hall. Customers should not notice a difference.</p> <p>By sharing management with Portsmouth City Council, GBC are already well on the way to finding the £666,000 for next year.</p> <p>James Hill is employed by Portsmouth City Council but working at Gosport.</p> <p>Everything else will remain the same, looking to find efficiencies, drive out costs and improve services.</p> <p>We are convinced there is no other solution that works financially and this is the best for the staff, the Council and for our tenants.</p>
4.	<p>James Hill - Housing Services Manager</p> <p>James Hill thanked everyone for attending, and introduced himself and provided the following information:</p> <p>His substantive post at Portsmouth City Council (PCC) is Deputy Director of Property and Housing. He has worked in social housing since 1995 and worked for PCC since 2001. In 2012 James led the PCC response to the troubled families initiative which took him out of Housing and involved joint working with services such as Children's social care, health etc. James grew up in Gosport, went to school, college and had his first house in Gosport and still has friends who live in Gosport.</p> <p>James introduced Julie Smith from PCC (she is currently on annual leave but will attend future COP meetings). Julie is an Area Housing Manager for PCC, responsible for the Housing Service delivered to 5,000 properties situated outside Portsmouth in Havant. Julie has great links with Hampshire County Council (HCC) and is an experienced manager ideally placed to cover the work of Head of Operational Services; previously Charles Harman was in post.</p> <p>Housing Services Review</p> <p>James covered the key themes and findings from the Housing Service review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movement towards 'neighbourhood management' which would involve team around the customer. • Improved joint working within Housing and across multi-agencies. • Flatter management structure. • Improvement in leadership/ development of teams. • Structure that achieves better value for money. <p>PCC initial views on the Housing Services Review (why we placed that</p>

review on hold)

Whilst the direction of travel is right the solution (structural element) is worth placing on hold to avoid a situation where the changes were made only for them to be 'unpicked' and worse the teams to go through another period of change.

Where are we at now?

- Monday 13th June 2016 both James and Julie joined GBC covering the work of two key posts more or less fulltime.
- The Housing Services Review has been formally suspended but it doesn't mean that it was a waste of time as it included feedback from staff, the COP etc. and the direction of travel was correct and necessary.
- A Community Board report of Wednesday 29th June approved the approach and next steps. The report is available on the GBC website.

So what is happening?

- Immediate actions are complete including the movement of the Housing Options team.

Next steps

- Vision, GBC and PCC are stronger together.
- Proposals to be shaped which create the
 - Shared management.
 - Housing Service structure and roles/responsibilities.
 - Shared learning and development.
 - Ensuring the service has the right tools to deliver the service.
- Proposals then presented and consulted upon.
- What does this mean for customers?
 - Maintaining a Gosport Housing Service.
 - Focus on right first time.
 - Focus on designing the service to meet your needs.
 - Focus on neighbourhoods/community.

Why is the arrangement with Portsmouth a 'match made in heaven'?

- The full council report of Wednesday 8th June 2016 para 2.6 references the wider shared Navel heritage etc. (shared history etc.), also many people work and live on both sides of the water. The Portsmouth Property and Housing Directorate is very similar,
 - Retained housing stock.
 - Portfolio that includes corporate assets/mobile homes parks.
 - Private sector housing and housing options.
 - Strong commitment to:
 - Resident engagement/customer involvement.
 - Housing Management, Repairs and Maintenance, Leasehold Management, Sheltered Housing but with additional specialist teams for example Anti-Social

Behaviour Unit.

- Lots of opportunity to share knowledge, experience and expertise.

Will it mean a takeover/merger? No, and why not?

- GBC will remain an independent separate Local Authority.
- Housing customer demands start in Gosport and the service delivery needs to be responsive and close to the point of demand.

Initial impressions

- More time James spends here the more convinced he is that it is the right fit.
- GBC staff/ housing service (excellent people that want to do a good job, pride in working for GBC and proud to live here).
- Time to shout about the service delivered, celebrate the positives and learn from our mistakes.
- There was a recent incident involving a lightning strike (not once but twice) and last week saw a swarm of bees! All incidents have reinforced how well teams work together.
- There is massive scope for improvement in all aspects of the service and an appetite for change with a chance for GBC housing to emerge as an innovative forward looking, dynamic and agile service with greater resilience to the current financial pressures.
- The service does remain under enormous financial pressure and the shared management arrangement with Portsmouth will mitigate the pressure but isn't enough on its own, further efficiencies are required.

To summarise

- The shared management arrangement will make both organisations stronger but financial pressures will remain significant.
- Social Housing is under enormous strain and we are awaiting important information from Government which will enable us to understand the impact of initiatives such as 'pay to stay'.
- All your normal contacts will remain the same.
- Communications via 'At Your Service' the 'Sheltered Housing' newsletter and COP will be used to keep you updated with any proposals or changes.
- James can be contacted via email james.hill@gosport.gov.uk and Julie can be contacted via email julie.smith@gosport.gov.uk
- If you would like to provide views on how the Housing Service could be improved please contact James or Julie.

Questions

Q. Portsmouth is a city and Gosport is a town, how can you come over from the city and take over?

A. Gosport will remain a separate Council and will be accountable to elected members and residents. There is no appetite for Portsmouth to take over. A

Housing Service will remain in Gosport; both Ian and James appreciate that there will be some element of uncertainty and James acknowledged that Gosport is unique. Portsmouth Housing Services doesn't have a one size fit all approach; it manages 15,000 properties and have different services for different areas within Portsmouth. James understands the differences that we have in Gosport; and the benefits of a small organisation, for example really strong joint working across teams, compared to the larger unitary. Time will be taken to understand what the Gosport Housing Service model needs to be.

Q. All this makes good sense, is there a danger that in a couple of months all councils will get together to make a 'super council'?

A. We already work with other councils and have shared services. Hampshire County Council will shortly be sending out a consultation to all residents living in Gosport to gather their views about creating a unitary authority. There are no plans in the short to medium term to create a unitary authority but long term this may happen. It was stressed that this could be a long time away.

Q. There are concerns surrounding communication and lack of it within the Borough, also concerns that eventually there won't be a Resident Involvement Team (RIT) and communication with residents.

A. It was stressed that all 'deletion of posts' have now been withdrawn. There is no reason to withdraw the production of the At Your Service or the Annual Report. There is still a forum for resident involvement in Gosport, and that will continue. James couldn't make any guarantees about specific posts but did say that there is a strong commitment to resident/community engagement in PCC Housing.

Q. How big is the RIT at PCC?

A. At PCC there is a Residents Consortium which comprises approximately 15 members from residents associations across the city who are regularly engaged. The remit of the RIT at PCC is different to that at GBC as they work with the wider community and carry out engagement across the whole community.

4.

Tim Hoskins - Head of Housing Finance

Tim provided the following update.

Before 2012 many councils that had housing stock were required to pay some of the rent they received from council housing tenants to the Government. This was known as the subsidy regime. For example in 2011/12 we paid £3.5m in subsidy, equating to 29p per £ of income.

In April 2012 we were able to enter a deal with the government to pay a 'one off' lump sum to end the annual payment. This initiative was called Self Financing. We borrowed money to pay the government (£57m) which left us better off. The interest on borrowing is equated to an annual payment of £1.8m.

What did we do with the additional money?

- Conversion of Agnew House to the Agnew family centre.

- Barclay House refurbishment/upgrade.
- Fortune House refurbishment.
- Alec Rose/Slocum House refurbishment.
- St Vincent new build scheme 14 x 2bed and 2 x 3bed (1st new social housing built by authority in over 30 years).
- Purchase of 3 additional properties.
- Increase in repairs and Maintenance /cap improvements budget to £7m+ per annum.

For a while we had never had it so good; we had a strong business plan and financial certainty and could plan for the future or so we thought.

But.....

In April 2015 the Government changed the social rent formula from RPI +1/2% to CPI +1% meaning that social rents were set to increase at 1% lower than in our Business Plan over next 30years, this spelt the end of rent convergence and an estimated £20m reduction in income over 30 years.

Then....

- New national rent policy.
- 1% rent reduction for 4 years from 2016/17 meaning a loss of income over 4 years £3.2m.
- £65m over 30year plan as rents £8.70 per week lower than budgeted by 2019/20.

There's more...

Housing and Planning act passed by Parliament in May 2016

An extension of Right to Buy (RTB) to Registered Providers and the need to fund new homes that meet housing need will be funded by a high value voids levy. All Local Authorities (LA) will be expected to make a payment to Central Local Government (CLG) when their high value properties become vacant. Financial details still unclear but estimates of costs to GBC (based on data already submitted) of £2.1m net per annum to be funded by selling of stock.

Pay to stay

Tenants with an income over £31,000 will be required to pay an additional 15p per £ in rent. LA's responsible for collection and administration of scheme. This is estimated to affect 7% nationally of all LA tenants. Powers to move tenants who fail to supply income data to market rents.

Sum Up

The result is that the new national rent policy and the introduction of the Housing and Planning Act as well as the continuation of the RTB scheme have once again put considerable pressure on the HRA finances.

What are we doing to address these issues and alleviate some of the pressure?

- The move to share management of Housing Services with PCC will help relieve some pressure and also bring about some efficiency into the future and also ensure that front line services are protected.
- Looking at where costs can be saved on the repairs and maintenance programme.
- Profiling our stock in order to sell only the properties that aren't profitable for us.

Questions

Q. Has the introduction of Universal Credit caused a financial burden to local authorities?

A. Universal Credit was rolled out on 20th March 2016 at GBC, starting with single residents. We have a very good Income Recovery Team who will identify any issues with rent not being paid. Residents who are identified as being vulnerable will continue to have their rent paid rather than the Universal Credit paid to them and them having the responsibility of paying their rent.

Q. How will the shared management arrangement impact on the Kier contract?

A. There are regular monthly meetings with Kier; we are hoping to make efficiencies with the Kier contract. The contract with Kier is for 10 years with a possible extension of a further 5 years. The contract is being reviewed as we are half way through and we will be looking to make savings and carrying out efficiencies. We are not currently in the situation to cut budgets yet and we still have plans to make improvements to our stock. Prior to 2012 we did not have the money to invest in our stock but we now do.

By procuring the three contracts in 2010/11 (Kier, Sodexo and Urbaser) this has enabled us to save £15 million. All three contracts are currently being reviewed.

Q. Are there any plans to share services with the contracts?

A. It could be an incentive, so yes this could be possible. Where we have a partnering contract with Kier we will be looking at making efficiencies and Kier will be looking to share practices. As part of the next Contract Monitoring Group (CMG) meeting we will be looking at a new efficiency with the introduction of a new system which will have a positive impact for residents. The next CMG meeting will be held in September, date to be confirmed.

Q. How many houses could we potentially lose per year with the introduction of the Housing and Planning Act to sell Housing Association properties under the 'Right to Buy' (RTB)?

A. Approximately 5 per year, along with 15-20 RTB sales from GBC stock.

Q. How many people are on the waiting list?

A. 880 people on the waiting list

Q. How many people living in temporary accommodation are on the waiting list?

A. 127 registered as Homeless and in our accommodation.

Q. How many people are there on the waiting list wanting to move to a

	<p>smaller property? A. We have 62 Customers registered as under occupying.</p> <p>Q. How many people are there on the waiting list wanting to move to a larger property? A. We have 362 Customers registered as being bedroom deficient.</p> <p>James advised that PCC are also affected by the same financial cutbacks and are facing similar issues to GBC. Therefore working with PCC will give us a stronger voice.</p> <p>Q. What is happening to the former Addenbrookes care home site, are there still plans? A. Yes, there are still plans, Hampshire County Council are in talks with Housing Associations.</p> <p>Everyone was thanked for attending, the formal meeting ended.</p>
5.	<p>Date of next COP</p> <p>To Be Confirmed</p>

Distribution:-

Attendees, HSH, Chairman of Community Board, Housing Spokesmen, Group Leaders, Web Site