



Lewes District Council

www.lewes.gov.uk

Housing Working Party

Minutes of a meeting of the **Housing Working Party** held in the **Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes** on **Wednesday 15 February 2012** at **2:10pm**

Present:

Councillor R K Maskell (Chair), M P Chartier, S B Davy, S J Osborne (Minutes 6 – 8), S Saunders (Minutes 6 – 8) and A X Smith

Officers Attending:

A Chequers, Corporate Head – Housing Services
Z Downton, Committee Officer
T Johnson, Head of Housing Repairs and Improvements
L Martin, Housing Projects Manager
R Tahsin, Tenant Participation Manager

Also Present:

B Piper and L Steer, Tenants' Representatives

Minutes

6 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

7 Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor S Adeniji.

8 Draft Housing Revenue Business Plan 2011-2040

The Working Party considered the Draft Housing Revenue Business Plan 2011-2040, which was an update to the Business Plan 2004-2034. The Business Plan 2011-2040 sought to show that the Council was achieving housing targets and was ready for the changes in financing the Business Plan, ie. the implementation of the Housing Revenue Account Self-financing reforms by April 2012.

The Corporate Head – Housing Services explained that, at its previous meeting on 19 December 2011, the Working Party had considered the original draft of the Business Plan. The Corporate Head thanked colleagues for their work in producing the first draft of the Business Plan and further explained that it

Action

Action

was still work in progress, hence the invitation to receive comments from the Working Party. He suggested that the Working Party could reconvene to consider the final draft of the Business Plan if councillors wished.

The Business Plan 2011-2040, prepared in parallel with the Council's Housing Strategy, focused on the management and maintenance of the Council's own housing properties and land. The 30 year plan outlined how Housing Services would contribute to achieving the aims of the Housing Strategy.

The main difference from the Business Plan 2004-2034 was the implementation of the Self-financing reforms, whereby the Council would be allocated a portion of the National Housing debt. The intention was to secure a sustainable future to repay interest and part of the capital debt, whilst planning works to maintain homes to a decent standard and to improve the living standards for Council tenants.

The Working Party questioned how the Council planned to increase the availability of affordable housing by making best use of its housing and other assets (as stated on page 3 of the Business Plan). The Corporate Head – Housing Services responded that this would be achieved by reviewing the housing stock and land to make sure it was fit for purpose. Also, there would be the facility to borrow a certain amount more above the debt settlement figure that the Council was required to borrow, which would make funding available to put back into the housing stock.

The Working Party noted, on page 7 of the Business Plan, the rise in the number of households on the housing register and commented that the upward trend would only continue given the present financial climate. The Corporate Head – Housing Services advised that the current number of households on the waiting list was around 2,500. He explained that, under the Localism Act 2011, Councils could remove band D applicants from the waiting list, but that it would be a matter for the Working Party to consider and Cabinet to approve at the appropriate point in the future.

In response to a councillor's question, the Corporate Head – Housing Services responded that he would be able to provide the Council's level of rent for studio dwellings after the meeting.

The Working Party commented, in reference to Section 3.4.2 'Social Housing Needs' on page 7, that the areas within the District in demand of 1-bedroom dwellings were Lewes, Newhaven and Seaford towns. The Working Party commented that the Housing Needs Survey showed a greater need for housing than that reflected in the housing register, due in part to reluctance by some to go on the register because of an expectation that their housing needs would not be met.

The Tenants' Representatives expressed concern regarding the lack of properties suitable for disabled tenants, the Council's ability to adapt properties to suit disabled tenants' needs and the ageing housing stock. The Corporate Head – Housing Services advised that the Council was

CHHS

Action

guided by occupational therapists' assessments and physical limitations of properties, but that adaptations were made where feasible. He acknowledged that the Council would need to look at those properties that could be converted to increase the number appropriate for disabled tenants, and the provision of such properties within new build schemes.

The Working Party noted that the Tenants Incentive Scheme (TIS) had been reviewed and enhanced, as mentioned on page 13 of the Business Plan. The Corporate Head – Housing Services explained that, subject to Cabinet approval, the TIS would be launched and promoted across the District during 2012. In response to a councillor's question, the Corporate Head – Housing Services advised that the Council would be contacting all tenants affected as a result of the Government's Welfare Reform which may affect tenants living in under occupied properties. However, it was noted that those new reforms would not affect pensioners.

In response to a query from the Working Party regarding page 15 of the Business Plan, the Corporate Head – Housing Services advised that around 100 garages in the District were currently unused, mainly due to being unmodernised or located in unpopular areas. He explained that the void rates of garages would continue to be kept under review and also that the advertising of vacant garages outside of the Council would be addressed.

CHHS

Under Priority 5, on page 20 of the Business Plan, the Working Party expressed concern that introductory tenancies to reduce anti-social behaviour, including racial harassment were only for new lettings. The Corporate Head – Housing Services explained that there was a clause in existing tenancy agreements regarding issues such as anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse.

The Corporate Head – Housing Services highlighted, under Section 6.6.2 'Housing Finance Reform', that the debt figure to be taken on the settlement date had been reduced slightly to approximately £56.6m. He advised that the Council should be financially better off under self-financing than under the current subsidy system and the level of surplus money would be closely monitored. Local authorities would have the ability to put funding back into their own housing stock under the new reforms.

In terms of the presentational style of the Business Plan, the Working Party questioned how people would see the relationship between the Business Plan and the Service Plan, and also how meaningful the document was when completed targets were still being included. The Working Party suggested an aspirational, forward planning approach to the content and style. The Corporate Head – Housing Services thanked councillors for their comments and advised that the completed plan would be presented differently to the working draft and completed targets would be removed. He had discussed with colleagues that the Plan should be forward looking. He also agreed to forward a copy of the Business Plan 2004-2034 to members of the Working Party for information purposes.

CHHS

		Action
<p>The Working Party queried why certain targets appeared to be repeated within the Service Plan, as set out at Appendix 1 of the Business Plan, and suggested that it should be an open and transparent document. Councillors also commented that the Service Plan should clearly reflect parts of the Business Plan so that people could see how both plans linked together. The Housing Projects Officer responded that the appended Service Plan was a working document and would be updated and reformatted. The Corporate Head – Housing Services explained that the Service Plan contained targets which were longer term but appeared to be low level in achievement, therefore he would be mindful that the wrong impression was not given. He explained that the final draft of the Service Plan would be more succinct. He thanked the Working Party for their comments on the Service Plan.</p> <p><u>Resolved:</u></p> <p>8.1 That the Draft Housing Revenue Business Plan 2011-2040 be noted;</p> <p>8.2 That the comments made on the Draft Housing Revenue Business Plan 2011-2040 be taken into account when producing the final draft; and</p> <p>8.3 That the Housing Working Party be requested to reconvene, at an appropriate date to be advised in due course, in order to consider the final draft of the Business Plan 2011-2040 and to receive a finance update.</p>		
9	<p>Date of Next Meeting</p> <p><u>Resolved:</u></p> <p>9.1 That it be noted that the date, time and location of the next meeting of the Working Party would be confirmed in due course.</p> <p>The meeting ended at 3.25pm</p> <p>R K Maskell Chair</p>	<p>CHHS/DF</p> <p>All to note/CO</p> <p>All to note/CO</p>