

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

19th April 2012

PRESENT:-

Conservative Group

Councillor Lemmon (Chairman), Councillor Hewlett (Vice-Chairman) and Councillors Ford, Harrison, Mrs. Hood, Murray and Smith.

Labour Group

Councillors Dunn, Mrs. Heath, Mulgrew, Rhind, Shepherd and Stuart (substitute for Councillor Richards).

In attendance

Councillor Atkins (Conservative Group)

HCS/74. **APOLOGY**

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Richards (Labour Group).

HCS/75. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 8th March 2012, were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

HCS/76. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Ford, Harrison and Murray declared personal interests in Minute No. HCS/80, as Members of Derbyshire County Council. Councillor Dunn declared a prejudicial interest in Minute No. HCS/80, as an employee of Derbyshire County Council.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

HCS/77. **ASSOCIATION OF RETAINED COUNCIL HOUSING (ARCH)**

The Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) had been in existence since 2006. Since this time, ARCH had become a national organisation with over 60 member authorities representing over 1 million tenants. However, as the organisation continued to grow, the risk and liabilities of the volunteer executive board members were not clear and were potentially extensive, even though the input given was voluntary and without financial recompense. For the last few months, a different governance and secretariat structure had been considered.

Consequently, changes meant that a third party organisation would run the daily secretariat activities of the association, organise the association's finances, be the first line response to government and others, organise

meetings and conferences and disseminate information to seek views from the wider membership. Costs of such a third party service would be met from the £2,000 membership fee, given the fact that membership had been growing steadily for a number of years. It had also been agreed that ARCH moved from a partnership arrangement, to a company limited by guarantee. The Executive Board of Directors of the company would provide the strategic and policy direction, direct and oversee the work of the secretariat, and undertake the formal treasury function etc.

It was proposed that both the Chairman of Housing and Community Services and the Head of Housing and Environmental Services become directors of the company. The same arrangements were being mirrored in the other 9 current Executive Board member authorities, making up 19 Directors of the Company. The election of Directors would be reviewed at the first AGM of the new company currently scheduled for September 2012.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Council becomes a member of the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) Limited.***
- (2) That the Chairman of the Housing and Community Services Committee and the Head of Housing and Environmental Services become Directors of ARCH Ltd.***
- (3) That in accordance with s.323(1) of the Companies Act 2006, the Council authorises the Chairman of the Housing and Community Services Committee and the Head of Housing and Environmental Services, or their substitutes, to be the Council's representatives at any Meeting of ARCH and execute voting rights on behalf of the Council.***
- (4) That it be recommended to both Finance and Management Committee and Full Council for approval.***

HCS/78. **CAPITAL INVESTMENT – EMPTY HOMES**

A report was submitted which sought Members approval to use £100,000 capital funding, as agreed at Finance and Management Committee on 12th January 2012, to support the delivery of the new Empty Homes Strategy 2012-2017.

A new Draft Empty Homes Strategy had been presented to this Committee in November 2011. The consultation period for this strategy had now ended, resulting in substantial changes. Members were informed that without a funding incentive for homeowners/landlords, that the Strategy would in essence be restricted to giving advice and taking enforcement action.

A priority of the Empty Homes Strategy was to “encourage owners to bring homes back into use to meet an affordable housing need”. The proposal was to utilise the £100,000 to support this priority by:-

- Providing up to a £9,000 grant to owners of properties vacant for more than 2 years, to support the renovation of these properties, and to meet the decent homes standard in return for the property being let at an affordable rent level to households on the Council's waiting list for a minimum 5 year period. (It should be noted that bringing a home back into use would result in an income for the Council via the New Homes Bonus of approximately £1,500 for a 6 year period [£9,000 in total]).
- Piloting a first time buyers scheme by offering a grant of up to £5,000 towards the cost of renovating an empty home to eliminate any Category 1 Hazards as defined by the Housing Act 2004. It was anticipated that in these cases, properties would have been vacant for less for than 2 years and would generally require only minor repairs although specific works would include rectifying assessed hazards.

It was proposed that a minimum of 2 first-time buyer schemes be supported, up to a maximum of £10,000 of the total available funds, and that the remainder of the funding (£90,000) was allocated to the empty homes grant scheme.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) ***That £100,000 capital funding be allocated to support the delivery of the new Empty Homes Strategy by:***
 - ***Providing a grant to first-time buyers for properties requiring work to remove assessed priority hazards and:***
 - ***Supporting an empty homes grant scheme to homeowners/landlords to encourage the bringing back into use of homes vacant for more than 2 years.***
- (2) ***That the first-time buyer funding is allocated on a "first-come" basis for a 12-month period.***
- (3) ***That the Strategic Housing Manager be delegated discretion to target grants at homeowners of specific empty homes vacant for more than 2 years across the District as a way of encouraging them to bring homes back into use.***

HCS/79. **MEMBERSHIP OF EFFICIENCY EAST MIDLANDS LIMITED (PROCUREMENT CONSORTIUM)**

Until November 2011, the Council was a member of the Efficiency East Midlands (EEM) Consortium – a consortium of local authorities, ALMOs and housing associations. Since the formation of EEM, membership had expanded to 16 members, who managed over 134,000 properties within the region..

EEM Consortium and EEM Limited was a partnership which operated solely for the purpose of its Members. All of the consortium's framework contracts had now been transferred to EEM Limited, a new not-for-profit company, limited by guarantee, which had been set up on behalf of the previous EEM Consortium. The company model was considered to be the most tax efficient

model, and best method for the fair distribution of any potential surpluses generated by the Company, back to its members.

Further details on this organisation and reasons for joining, including value for money that would be achieved were included within the report.

It was also be necessary for the Council to nominate a representative to attend meetings of EEM Limited. The representative would execute voting rights on behalf of the Council, although the Council would not be obliged to conform to any resolution which it had voted against on the grounds identified within the report.

Membership to EEM Limited was currently based on 50p per property maintained, therefore the cost to the Council would be £1,525 per annum, which was accounted for in the HRA. However, cashable savings of £20,000 per annum had already been identified through the materials framework provided by EEM Limited.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Council becomes a Member of Efficiency East Midlands Limited (EEM Ltd).**
- (2) That in accordance with s.323(1) Companies Act 2006, the Council authorises the Repairs and Improvements Manager or his substitute to be the Council's representative at any meeting of Efficiency East Midlands Limited, and execute voting rights on behalf of the Council.**
- (3) That it be recommended to both Finance and Management Committee and Full Council for approval.**

HCS/80. **DERBYSHIRE HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY CONSULTATION**

A report was submitted which informed Members about the current Derbyshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy consultation which would enable Members to contribute towards a combined South Derbyshire District Council response to the document.

Changes in the NHS would see public health functions transfer to the County Council from April 2013, and as a result of this, Derbyshire County Council had set up the Derbyshire Health and Wellbeing board which was made up of representatives from a range of organisations including local councils, the NHS and patient groups to ensure health services were co-ordinated and delivered effectively across Derbyshire. One of the key tasks of the group was to develop a Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Derbyshire that would guide its work and that of many other organisations over the next few years. Key priorities for Derbyshire would be set, which focused on improving local health outcomes. Key priority areas had been developed and the Board was inviting feedback to ensure that themes were appropriate. The proposed five high level priorities were confirmed along with suggested responses to be fed back via the consultation document.

RESOLVED:-

That the response from South Derbyshire District Council to the Derbyshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy consultation as detailed in the report, be approved.

(Councillor Dunn declared a prejudicial interest in this item and withdrew during the consideration and determination thereof).

HCS/81. ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT

A Community Covenant was a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces community. It was intended to complement the Armed Forces Covenant which outlined the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces, at local level.

The report provided background on the Armed Forces Community Covenant and associated community grant scheme, and recommended that the Council pledge its support to the Covenant.

It was suggested that paragraph 3.8, bullet point No. 5, be amended to read “further potential offers could be to let ‘Help for Hero’s’ or any Armed Forces charity use the town hall for a fund raising event every year free of charge”

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the Council pledges its support to the Armed Forces Community Covenant and will work with the Royal British Legion, Derbyshire Branch, to promote awareness of the Covenant throughout the District.***
- (2) To work with the Royal British Legion to promote opportunities for applications to be made to the Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant Scheme.***
- (3) That Paragraph 3.8 (Bullet Point 5), of the report be amended to read;***
 - Further potential offers could be to let ‘Help for Heroes’, or any armed forces charity, use the Town Hall for a fundraising event once a year free of charge.***

HCS/82. SPORTS FACILITY STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

A report was submitted which provided a framework for the production of a Facility Development Strategy, and an update on the progress on a number of facility related projects which were being developed in partnership with public, charitable and voluntary sector partners. Also outlined in the report was the proposal to nominate 2 recreation areas in the District as QEII Playing Fields, to commemorate the Queens Jubilee.

Following the adoption of the South Derbyshire Playing Pitch Strategy, it was now appropriate to develop a strategy which covered built sport and recreational facilities and other outdoor activities. Such a strategy was vitally important as an underpinning document for the emerging Local Plan/Local Development Framework and which ensured the District was competitive in acquiring external funding by having robust evidence for facility development applications. As part of the strategy preparation work, officers had worked with Sport England, and had been able to commission the facility planning modelling tool, which provided a statistical and needs based assessment on current deficits of swimming, sports hall, artificial grass pitch and fitness station provision in the District, which were detailed in full in the report.

Full details were provided on funding sources and the overriding principles which were proposed to be applied to guide the development of the strategy.

Updates were given on current projects including Etwall Leisure Centre, Green Bank Leisure Centre, Melbourne Sporting Partnership, Melbourne Leisure Centre, Rosliston Forestry Centre, Eureka Park and Gresley Old Hall.

It was also proposed that land owned by the Council at Newhall Park and Cockshut Lane was submitted to the Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge. This was billed as a 21st Century version of the King George V Playing Fields initiative and aimed to dedicate 2,012 outdoor recreational spaces for sport, play and recreation across the Country by 2012, in celebration of the Diamond Jubilee.

RESOLVED:-

- (1) That the proposed Facility Strategy Framework, which will be used to prepare a development strategy for the built sport and recreational infrastructure in the District, be approved.***
- (2) That further development of the Green Bank Leisure Centre, Etwall Leisure Centre and Rosliston Forestry Centre projects, including applications to the Sport England Inspired Facilities fund be approved.***
- (3) That progress with the Melbourne Sporting Partnership, Melbourne Leisure Centre, Gresley Old Hall and Eureka Park projects be noted.***
- (4) That the declaration of Cockshut Lane (Melbourne) and Newhall Park, as Queen Elizabeth II Fields Challenge, be approved.***

HCS/83. **WORK PROGRAMME**

Members were asked to consider the updated work programme and review its content where appropriate.

RESOLVED:-

That the updated work programme be approved.

HCS/84. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RESOLVED:-

That, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the Meeting as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that there would be disclosed exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A of the Act indicated in brackets after each item.

MINUTES

The Exempt Minutes of the Meeting held on 8th March 2012 were received.

J. LEMMON

CHAIRMAN