

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

16th March 2006

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Richards (Vice-Chair in the Chair), Councillors Carroll, Dunn, Mulgrew, Taylor (substitute for Councillor Southern), Southerd (substitute for Councillor Wilkins) and Whyman, M.B.E.

Conservative Group

Councillors Harrison, Hood, Mrs. Littlejohn and Shaw.

Independent Member

Councillor Mrs. Walton.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from Councillors Southern and Wilkins (Labour Group).

HCS/77. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Special Meeting held on 12th January 2006 and the Meeting held on 9th February 2006 were taken as read, approved as true records and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS DELEGATED TO COMMITTEE

HCS/78. **PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL STRATEGY 2006**

The Committee considered a report which sought Members' approval for a proposed Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2006 which would supersede and consolidate two previous documents:-

- The Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy 2003
- The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2004

Members were advised that the Strategy reflected forthcoming changes arising from the Housing Act 2004. The Committee was informed that the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy formed part of the Council's wider Housing Strategy which would guide the Council's actions in intervention in relation to some 33,000 private sector households in the District.

The report advised that the existing Private Sector Renewal Policy 2003 was approved by this Committee on 13th March 2003 and the related strategy document agreed on 8th January 2004 required revision to reflect recent house condition and energy efficiency survey information and the significant legislative changes arising from the Housing Act 2004.

The Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2006 identified the Council's priorities to promote and support good quality, affordable housing in the private sector in the following key areas:-

- Older, Disabled and Vulnerable people
- The Private Rented Sector
- Rural Homes
- Empty Homes
- Home Energy Efficiency
- Crime/Home Safety

The Committee was advised that it was proposed to target the priority areas listed above with a range of interventions, including better information and advice, licensing and enforcement, capital release loans and specific grant assistance. The package of grant assistance proposed was aimed particularly at providing decent housing conditions for the vulnerable and promoting affordability.

Members were informed that the Decent Home Grant would complement the existing Home Repair Assistance Grant, Emergency Renovation Grant and Healthy & Warm Referral Scheme and secure Decent Home standards and affordable warmth for the Council's most vulnerable residents. It was noted that the introduction of a two tier system for Landlords Grants was intended to promote affordable rented accommodation and that Landlords would have the opportunity to access a higher level of assistance in return for setting at Registered Social Landlord (RSL) levels for the duration of the grant condition period. It was noted that the introduction of 'First time buyer's assistance' was subject to means testing but would provide funding for major repairs which may otherwise make a property too costly for young people trying to access the lower end of the housing market.

The Committee was advised that the financial implications of the Strategy were as follows:-

- The interventions proposed would utilise the existing Housing Renewal Capital Programme, £800,000 per annum including the Disabled Facilities Grant allocation.
- A bid for additional capital up to £600,000 to fund additional specified initiatives to deliver 'decent homes' for vulnerable people had been submitted to the Regional Housing Board, the outcome of which would be announced in March 2006.
- A fee income of 10% would be returned on all grants delivered in-house.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee

- (1) Approves the draft Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy 2006.***
- (2) Agrees the proposed range of grant assistance detailed at Section 8 of the Strategy document.***
- (3) Approves the proposed Implementation Plan for 2006/07 as detailed in Section 10 of the Strategy document.***

HCS/79. **AFFORDABLE WARMTH STRATEGY**

Members considered a report on the Affordable Warmth Strategy, the purpose of which was to seek Committee approval for the contents of the Draft Affordable

Warmth Strategy and for the principle of having a single cross-sector Affordable Warmth Strategy to be adopted and monitored by the Local Strategic Partnerships Healthy Communities Thematic Group.

The Affordable Warmth Strategy 2005-2010 would seek to ensure that landlords, homeowners and local authorities acted in a co-ordinated and effective way to deliver affordable warmth within the District and thus deliver the objectives of the government's UK Fuel Poverty Strategy. The Fuel Poverty Strategy set a target of ending fuel poverty for all vulnerable households by 2010 (vulnerable households were defined as those who are older, disabled or suffering from long term illness and families with children). Committee was advised that the Strategy had been produced and had been adopted by the Local Strategic Partnership as Affordable Warmth could only be delivered if all sectors contributed to it. This would include Private Sector Landlords, Registered Social Landlords as well as the local authority.

The Committee was advised that the most significant consequence of fuel poverty was its effect on people's health and wellbeing, there was a clear relationship between temperatures and the incidents of respiratory cardiovascular diseases. Nationally there were between 20,000 and 40,000 additional deaths each winter depending on the severity of the weather. Significant benefits of affordable warmth included:-

- Reduced costs for the health service
- Improved quality of life
- Increased energy efficiency and reduced energy use
- Reduced social inclusion
- Reduction in CO² and other Greenhouse Gas emissions

The Committee was advised that overall South Derbyshire seemed in-line with nationally expected levels of fuel poverty. Members noted that there were 89 Council properties with a rating of 40 or below and that the heating costs for these would be significant enough to put low income groups at risk of fuel poverty. Members noted that the key aims of the Affordable Warmth Strategy were to:

- Identify all Private Rented housing within the District and devise incentives to ensure these provide affordable warmth.
- Identify owner occupied households a risk of fuel poverty and target advice and measures to help them achieve affordable warmth.
- Ensure housing provision by Registered Social Landlords provided affordable warmth.
- Ensure all Council Housing provided affordable warmth.

RESOLVED:-

That the Committee

- (1) Agrees to the principle of a cross sector Affordable Warmth Strategy to be monitored and pursued via the South Derbyshire Local Strategic Partnerships Healthy Communities Thematic Group.***

- (2) Accept the contents of the draft Affordable Warmth Strategy as detailed in Appendix 2 and summarised in Appendix 1 of the report.**
- (3) Request that a report on the action taken to implement the Affordable Warmth Strategy be submitted to a future Meeting.**

HCS/80. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT [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 on 17th November 2005, the Special Meeting held on 12th January 2006 and the Meeting of 9th February 2006 were taken as read, approved as true records and signed by the Chair.

MEMBERS' QUESTIONS AND REPORTS (Paragraph 1)

Councillor Whyman asked that Members be provided with information on Officer contact details during the absence of the Housing Services Manager. The Director of Community Services outlined the existing Officer contact arrangements in Housing Services and confirmed that he would e-mail the details to Members. The Director of Community Services then gave a brief presentation to the Committee on the recent decision of the House of Lords in Price v Leeds City Council.

REVIEW OF LOCAL AUTHORITY STOCK TRANSFER COMPANIES (Paragraph 3)

The Committee considered a report on capital realised by councils upon transfer and any impediments to councils using that capital, together with any additional finance available for stock maintenance and improvement by the new landlord and the opinion of the tenant as to the quality of service provided following the transfer. The Committee noted the content of the report.

K. J. RICHARDS

CHAIR