

OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

16th May 2005

PRESENT:-

Labour Group

Councillor Harrington (Chair) and Councillors Bambrick and Murphy.

Conservative Group

Councillor Hood (Vice-Chair) and Councillor Mrs. Littlejohn.

(Councillors Atkin and Mrs. Hood also attended the Meeting).

APOLOGY

An apology for absence from the Meeting was received from Councillor Bale (Conservative Group).

OV/35. **MINUTES**

The Open Minutes of the Meeting held on 4th April 2005 were taken as read, approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

OV/36. **HOUSING BEST VALUE REVIEW 2005**

The Chair presented a report which had been prepared by the Community Scrutiny Committee, the purpose of which was to assist Officers and Members to prepare for the inspection in June 2005 and to assist the Housing and Community Services Committee to improve the quality of its services. The Chair reported that several meetings had taken place during March and April 2005 which were attended by the Chair of Housing and Community Services Committee, the Director of Community Services and the Head of Housing Services. The Committee had decided to focus on three issues:-

- The development of the housing vision
- Consultation with internal and external stakeholders (particularly tenants)
- Repairs and voids.

Development of Housing Vision

The Chair reported that work was advanced on preparing a new Business Plan which would demonstrate that progress was being made. He commented that there could be a problem with medium to long term funding by 2010/12, although representations to the Government and funding reserves may address these risks. It was considered that these funding issues would need to be addressed by 2007/2008. Financial pressures would continue to increase whilst the capital value to the Council would continue to decline and there was concern that the annual review, on its own, could delay addressing these financial issues. It was therefore

recommended that a risk assessment be carried out and an action plan prepared, in parallel with the annual review.

Consultation with Internal and External Stakeholders

The Chair reported that extensive consultation had already taken place with individual tenants, tenant groups, TACT (Tenant Advisory and Consultation Team), use of the tenant newspaper and presentations at Tenant Area Meetings. He explained that there was a desire to undertake further consultation and indicated that arrangements had been made to review the Tenant Compact.

The Meeting was advised that Members were initially involved via a seminar and a further seminar would be held on 24th May, prior to the inspection. A Members' Group had overseen the process and reports had been made to the Housing and Community Services Committee, the last being on 21st April 2005. The Chair reported that staff had been addressed through team briefings whilst bullet point crib sheets were to be provided to raise awareness of the inspection. The Community Scrutiny Committee felt that although improvements had been made, more could be achieved and it was recommended that the process of staff consultation should be strengthened.

Repairs and Voids

The Chair reported that the voids procedure had been reviewed and that new procedures had been agreed for implementation shortly. He explained that the system was regularly reviewed through action plans. Most of the long term voids consisted of sheltered accommodation and were classified as 'difficult to let' for a number of reasons. It was reported that there had been an increase in performance since July 2004 with regard to the reduction in voids and a faster turnaround in repairs. A substantial level of this increase in performance was attributed to the declassification of sheltered housing stock. However, it was noted that the transition to general purpose stock would have to be managed over a long period. It was recommended that a more proactive approach to the management of voids in the Sheltered Housing Service be developed, particularly with outside agencies.

The Chair concluded his presentation by thanking Officers and Members, on behalf of the Community Scrutiny Committee, particularly those who had prepared reports and provided information and advice at this busy time.

A detailed report on the matter proposed to be submitted to the next Meeting of the Housing and Community Services Committee was circulated to Members and it was agreed that the Chair be authorised to approve any minor re-wording to the report.

OV/37. **ANNUAL REPORT**

The draft Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees was circulated. The format of the report had been altered and that there was now one Annual Report for all three Committees. It was noted that Member Training and Development was an outstanding issue and it was hoped that Councillors Carroll and Mrs. Wheeler, the training representatives of the two political groups, would be able to attend the next meeting of the Overview Committee following the rearrangement of their meeting with the Council's

Training and Development Officer. It was noted that the Annual Report would be presented to Full Council on 30th June 2005 and that any comments, in advance of that date, would be welcomed.

OV/38. **REPORTS TO POLICY COMMITTEES**

The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration confirmed that a report was to be submitted to the Housing and Community Services Committee on the Best Value Review of Housing Stock Investment and Asset Management (Minute No. OV/36 refers).

It was noted that a response on the report on Sheltered Housing was due from the Housing and Community Services Committee to the Community Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed that the Housing and Community Services Committee be reminded of this outstanding issue.

It was also noted that a report on the Best Value Review process by the Corporate Scrutiny Committee had been presented to the Finance and Management Committee which had included various recommendations which were accepted. However, no response on the actions required had been received and it was agreed that the Finance and Management Committee also be reminded of this outstanding issue.

OV/39. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Head of Policy and Economic Regeneration suggested that an “Away Day” for Members of all three Scrutiny Committees could be held to consider a new Work Programme for the forthcoming year. It was agreed that this be held at Sharpe’s Pottery Centre early in June following Annual Council on 19th May 2005, when the new Committee compositions would be agreed.

K. HARRINGTON

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 5.00 p.m.