

Stock Options Appraisal Review Group Membership and Proposed Remit

Introduction

The formation of a Review Group is an important vehicle for the Options Appraisal process. The Review Group has a key role to play in ensuring that the appraisal is successful and it is imperative that the meetings are focused and deliver what is necessary to achieve the tight timetable.

Formation of the Group

The Council intends to take an inclusive approach to the appraisal process, and has identified key stakeholders to be represented on the Review Group. Three key groups have been asked to nominate representatives:

- Council Members – who will have 3 representatives
- Tenants and leaseholders – who will have 3 representatives as nominated by the South Derbyshire Tenants' Forum and one Observer
- Staff – who will have 3 representatives; one from the Housing Service, one from the Council's Corporate services and a Union representative (If Unison/UCATT decline to participate a second nomination form Housing Services to be sought).

Officers responsible for the delivery of the options appraisal will also be present, as will other officers from the Council who will attend as necessary to provide the group with specialist advice. Similarly, consultants appointed for both the Council and the tenants will also be in attendance, and specialist advisers may be involved in future meetings, e.g. stock condition and asset management specialists. In addition representatives from Government Office for the East Midlands have been invited to attend as observers to the process.

The officers and advisers likely to be involved are:

Officers

Bob Ledger Head of Housing

Advisers

Lead consultants as advisers to the Council on stock options
Independent Tenants' Adviser

Communications consultants may be recruited

Remit

The Group will conduct the review against the 4 options:

- stock retention, no change
- transfer of the stock to a Housing Association;
- Private Finance Initiative;
- Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO).

In reaching its recommendation the Group will evaluate the options against the medium to long term likely ability of the Council to deliver against a range of issues which are likely to include, but are not limited to, stock investment to meet aspirations, service range and quality, support to vulnerable residents, new homes, tenant and resident involvement in governance, protection of jobs and improving service capacity, enhanced repairs and support service (e.g. decorating and gardening help), investment in community facilities and services, and improvements to open areas to meet expectations.

Although the Council will have to make the final decision as to which option should be pursued, there are many actions that the Review Group will take before reaching a position where they can make a recommendation to the Council.

This will include:

- Appointment of Independent Tenant Adviser
- Agreeing the communications strategy and its method of delivery
- Agreeing the empowerment strategy
- Agreeing the criteria against which the options will be measured
- Monitoring and adjusting the timetable
- Considering and debating the information provided
- Considering and debating the options available
- Recommendation to Committee on an option for future

Timetable

The Group will report its recommendations to the Housing and Community Services Committee in sufficient time for a report to be considered at its scheduled meeting in March 2009.

Substitute members

The information that will be provided to the group over a series of 4 -5 meetings will build up to form an overall picture. It is therefore important that members of the group attend as often as possible. If they are unable to attend, Group members should contact officers for clarification of anything in the papers that they require further information on. Given the tight timetable for the Appraisal it is suggested that use of substitutes would be ineffective and would be unhelpful due to the loss of continuity.

Representation

Although the individuals present at the group are looked on as representatives, it is clear that they cannot represent all of those that make up their constituent group and cannot be expected to consult with all the members of that group. This is particularly important for tenants and leaseholders. The expectation is that Review Group members will provide an opinion that is partly defined by their constituent group membership and partly by their own knowledge and experience. It is the combination of these different backgrounds and interests that will be the strength of the Review Group. The ITA will work to support the Review group via wider engagement of tenants and leaseholders.

Meeting protocol

The Review Group should not be seen as a talking shop dominated by officers and advisers. Although it is likely that the nature of the work means that either officers or their advisers are likely to introduce papers, it is imperative that all members of the Review Group feel able to participate in the debate and to ask questions freely without challenge.

To encourage this, the following are proposed as Ground Rules for the Group:

- All contributions should be valued
- Different people will have different views and that diversity is encouraged
- Only one person should speak at a time
- Any individual issues should be managed outside the meeting
- All members of the Group should be addressed by their first names

The Review Group will receive any papers 5 working days in advance of meetings taking place (save the first meeting due to the timing of any Council decision to re-open the Appraisal). Notes of meetings will be produced including key points and actions.

Openness and accountability

The options appraisal process that is being adopted is an open and inclusive one. It is not expected that any of the information that is provided to the group would need to be held confidentially and the intention is that the information is available for you to discuss with others. In the unlikely event that any confidential information does come to the Group, perhaps as work in progress, the Group will be advised and asked to maintain confidentiality until a final version is available. All steps will be taken to ensure that full information is presented to the Group in order that members may reach an informed view.

Recommendation

The Review Group is asked to amend and approve the above.