

## **Executive 13 September 2006**

Present: Councillor Williams (Chairman)  
Councillors Bishop, Mrs Bradley, Clark, Garner, Hall, Leighton and Mrs Lewin-Harris.

Officers: Mr J J Thornberry (Strategic Director), Ms S Adam (Strategic Director), Mr M Western (Head of Housing), Mr J Williams (Housing Operations Manager), Mr M Hembrow (Housing Property Services Manager), Mrs L Wyatt-Jones (Strategic HR Consultant) and Mr G P Dyke (Member Services Manager)

Also present: Councillors Mrs Biscoe, C Cluff, Henley, House, Morrell, Prior-Sankey and Mrs Whitmarsh

(The meeting commenced at 6.10p.m.)

### **69. Apology**

Councillor N Cavill

### **70. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 August 2006 were taken as read and were signed.

### **71. Public Question Time**

Patricia Rowe asked for clarification of the role of tenant members on the Shadow Board. She also asked what consultation had been carried out with the wider community, particularly those who were not Council tenants. She felt that there was a general misunderstanding regarding the valuation of stock.

Malcolm Western and Jeremy Thornberry replied that tenant representatives on the Shadow Board fully understood their role. The prime duty of a Board member was to that body rather than the body or organisation that had nominated them. One third of members of the Board were tenants, one third councillors and the remaining third were independent. Board members were able to represent a particular body of opinion without prejudicing their position. Malcolm Western also stated that although a decision had been taken not to consult the wider community to the same extent as tenants, exhibitions had taken place at a number of public events.

Councillor Garner replied that any questions concerning stock valuation would be willingly answered so that the position was quite clear.

Councillor Williams also replied that the Board would represent the best interests of the community they were there to serve. This was compatible with the Company's objectives and their place on the Board. It was clear that this issue

would impact on the whole community and not just those who were Council tenants.

He made it clear that houses would not receive anything like full market value. However, any surplus that was received would be ploughed back into providing affordable housing. It was important to note that the properties would not be sold to the private sector but would be transferred to a Registered Social Landlord.

## **72. Declarations of interest**

Councillor Mrs Biscoe declared a personal interest in Agenda item no 6 as a member of the Shadow Board and as a tenant of a Council owned garage.

Councillor Prior-Sankey declared a personal interest in Agenda item no 6 as a tenant of a Council owned garage.

Councillors C Cluff and Morrell both declared a personal interest in Agenda item no 6 as members of a company which was involved in providing valuations in respect of Right to Buy properties.

## **73. Housing Transfer Offer Document**

Members were aware that extensive consultation had been taking place with tenants to consider transfer of the Council's housing stock to a new Registered Social Landlord, Deane Housing. Leaflets, newsletters and other written material had been sent to all of Council tenants to explain:-

- 1) Why the Council had chosen this path
- 2) The £1.85m per annum shortfall in funding that would be experienced should the Council be required to keep services as they are and meet the Government's "Decent Homes" standard.
- 3) The cuts to services and jobs that would be necessary in order to close the funding gap
- 4) How tenants' rights would be protected
- 5) What the benefits of transferring to Deane Housing would mean to tenants.

This information had been supported by staff, Councillors and Deane Housing Shadow Board members attending many different public events, "door knocking", static stands in supermarkets and a mobile trailer visiting many villages and estates. Staff were now visiting tenants who had been missed in the first round of door knocking. There had also been press coverage of the consultation procedures. All staff had been kept updated through meetings, newsletters and information from their managers.

The main aim was to ensure that all tenants knew about the Housing Transfer Consultation and understood its implications

At the same time a draft offer document had been prepared which had previously been scrutinised by the Executive, Housing Review Panel, Deane Housing Shadow Board, the Tenants Forum, advisors and housing managers. The Tenants Panel, supported by Aldbournes, the independent tenants advisors, had worked hard on this document. In conjunction with the offer document a DVD/video and summary pamphlet were being prepared.

After much consultation and advice a final draft of the offer document had now been prepared. A copy of the draft was circulated at the meeting. In view of the tight timescale for producing the document and the need for it to be agreed by various regulators, it had not been possible to circulate it earlier. Indeed a number of last minute alterations were necessary and details of these were also reported.

The majority of the promises in the offer document reflected the issues raised in previous reports and could be funded from the £34.7m valuation. There were, however, some changes to the consultation promises that would have financial implications for the Council. In addition it might be necessary to consider providing an additional service regarding the provision of replacement glazing.

It was now necessary to decide whether the Council should take the next step towards balloting the tenants on transferring the housing stock to Deane Housing. The next step would be "stage one"; and would involve issuing each tenant with a copy of the offer document, DVD/video and summary. At the same time tenants would be visited by staff to ensure a full understanding of the promises contained in the offer document. A market research exercise would then be undertaken to clarify tenants' understanding and likely voting position.

Further special meetings of the Executive and Council had been arranged to take place on Monday 13 November 2006, when the Council must decide whether or not to proceed to ballot.

RESOLVED that:-

- i) funding for individual digital TV reception be diverted to fund dedicated budgets for each sheltered housing scheme;
- ii) the timing and cost of upgrading communal TV aerials be considered once these details were known and built into the Council's Capital Programme;
- iii) an additional £148,000 p.a. be included for improved grounds maintenance, reducing the valuation to £34.545m
- iv) the Leader of the Council and the portfolio holder for Housing Services be authorised to deal with the glazing issue referred to in the report should this prove necessary;
- v) the Council be recommended that the offer document be "signed off" and stage one of the ballot process be implemented with tenants being issued with a copy of the offer document.

(The meeting ended at 7.53p.m.)

