

Draft minutes subject to approval at the next meeting of 1

Executive – 13 November 2006

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

Officers: Mrs P James (Chief Executive), Mr J J Thornberry (Strategic Director),
Mr M Western (Head of Housing (Housing Transfer Consultation
Coordinator)) and Mr G P Dyke (Democratic Services Manager)

Also Present: Councillors Beaven, Croad, Edwards, Hayward, Henley, The Mayor
(Councillor Hindley), Lees, Lisgo, Meikle, Morrell, Paul, Stone, Watson,
Wedderkopp and Wilson

(The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm.)

86. Public Question Time

- (i) Nigel Behan, Branch Secretary, Somerset Branch, UNISON, asked what measures the Council would take to secure Council housing being maintained if it was decided not to proceed with the tenant's ballot.
- (ii) Patricia Rowe, representing Taunton Deane's Tenant's Against Transfer, made a statement regarding information that had been published by the Council in support of a Stock Transfer. She also submitted a petition signed by persons who were opposed to the transfer of Council housing.

87. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2006 were taken as read and were signed.

88. Declarations of Interest

Councillor N Cavill declared a personal but not prejudicial interest as a member of the Shadow Housing Board.

89. Proceeding to Housing Transfer Ballot

Submitted report which drew attention to the present position now that the end of the formal consultation period with the Council's tenants regarding Stock Transfer had been reached. Now that this consultation period had ended it was for the Council to decide as to whether or not to proceed to Stage Two, the ballot of tenants as to the transfer of housing to Deane Housing Limited.

A subsequent addendum report was also submitted which was read alongside the main report to the Executive. The report contained a further update as to the results of the telephone survey carried out on behalf of the Council. Details were submitted of the results of that survey together with an assessment of what its implications were for the Council.

The telephone survey had been carried out on behalf of the Council by SMSR, an independent market research organisation, so that these results could be taken in to account when deciding whether the Council should proceed to Stage Two (ballot of all tenants).

One of the major objectives of the Stock Transfer project had been to raise awareness of what Stock Transfer was and what it would mean to tenants. A survey had indicated that the aim of ensuring that sufficient tenants were fully aware of the issue before them had been properly met.

Until this point, voting intentions had also shown a steady trend with a reducing level of “don’t know/won’t reveal” and consistent majority of those who were in favour of transfer over those who were not. However, that trend had now sharply reversed with the recent SMSR opinion testing. The telephone sample had shown a sizable majority opposed to the transfer and with an increased number of respondents unprepared to give their voting intentions. This unexpected reversal in a firm trend presented the Council with a real dilemma as to whether it should now proceed to the formal tenant ballot under Stage Two.

The unanimous view of the Councils’ advisors and the Government Office of the South West was that:

- The survey results pointed to the near certainty that the tenant body would reject the Stock Transfer.
- The work done in raising the level of awareness amongst tenants as to the process and its implications for tenants had been successful and had reached an acceptable level.
- Their advice consequently was that the Council did not proceed to Stage Two ballot.

The cost of employing the Electoral Reform Society to carry out a ballot on the Council’s behalf was £14,000. If the Council did not proceed to Stage Two then that £14,000 would be saved. However, the tenants had always been told that it would be they who would make the final decision as to the future management of their homes. This had been emphasised by the use of the “You Decide” logo and by the commitments made by the Council throughout this project. In view of the promise that had been consistently made to tenants that it would be them that would decide the future of Council housing stock it was;

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to proceed to Stage Two of the formal Housing Stock Transfer by carrying out a ballot of its tenants on

whether Taunton Deane Borough Council transfer its homes to Deane Housing Ltd.

(The meeting ended at 6.55 pm.)