

3. HOUSING FUTURES - NEW LANDLORD SELECTION PANEL

The Corporate Manager – Affordable Homes, presented the report. He explained that the New Landlord Selection Panel had examined the models available and had recommended the establishment of a standalone local housing association as, in its opinion, it best met the needs of South Cambridgeshire District Council and its tenants.

Cllr Heazell said that she understood that standalone housing associations gave low priority to the provision of additional affordable housing within the first five years of their existence, and asked if tenants were aware of that. In reply, the Corporate Manager-Affordable Homes said that there was awareness on the panel of this and that this was a potential downside to the standalone model. Jo Greenbank, from Savills, added that it had been demonstrated that a standalone model could provide more affordable housing by entering into a development consortium with other housing association partners, and by doing so the integrity of the standalone organisation would be retained. The Independent Tenant Advisor supported this statement and commented that many standalone associations had entered into such partnerships. However Jo Greenbank said that the provision of new affordable housing had not been one of the criteria awarded the highest priority by the panel.

A number of issues that would face the Shadow Board were discussed, including possible golden shares for tenants and voting proportions. The Housing Futures Project Manager reminded the meeting that the Shadow Board would decide many of the items under discussion, and both the Executive Director and the Leader stressed that the outputs of the Shadow Board should not be predetermined.

The Executive Director informed the meeting that all members of the New Landlord Selection Panel had been written to and thanked for their input. He said that he was confident that the conclusion reached would be in the best interests of the tenants.

The Leader of the Council, exercising the powers of the Housing Portfolio Holder in his absence, **RECOMMENDED** to council that the conclusion of the New Landlord Selection Process be supported and that a new standalone local housing association be **AGREED** as the preferred model of a new local housing association landlord, should tenants vote in favour of a housing transfer.

4. HOUSING FUTURES - TENANT BALLOT PAPER

In advance of the discussion of item 4 (the Tenant Ballot Paper) the Leader took questions about the aborted election for the tenant members of the Shadow Board.

Cllr Heazell asked about the cost of the second election and the number of people that were affected. She also requested a written response to the questions. Cllr Roberts asked for clarification about how the error had occurred.

In reply the Executive Director advised as follows:

- The first priority would be to write to all tenants to apologise and explain the situation. He added that all tenants that had already contacted the council had been dealt with.
- The first election process had been completely abandoned and that any returned voting papers would remain unopened.
- The cost would be minimised, but would include the cost of sending out a new

voting form.

- The database was robust, but the extract from it was incorrect, with some former joint tenants being included in the mailing, rather than just current secure tenants.
- Evidence suggested that around 400 voting papers had been issued incorrectly.

Tenant ballot paper

The Housing Futures Project Manager presented the report and advised the group the view was there was only one question that could be on the ballot paper, which was:

Are you in favour of the Council's proposal to transfer ownership and management to (proposed new housing association landlord)?

In the following discussion both Cllr Roberts and Cllr Heazell reminded the Leader of the words of the Portfolio Holder from the Council meeting of 31st January when it was said that there would be a retention option on the ballot paper. In reply the Leader said that to do so would not be in line with best practice. The Independent Tenant Advisor said that the Secretary of State would need to be satisfied that any wording on the ballot paper was unambiguous and that the inclusion of a retention option on the ballot paper could be seen as a confusing for tenants. He added that following CLG best practice would ensure compliance.

The meeting was informed that the ballot would come at the end of a comprehensive communication programme and that tenants would be well advised of the implications of retention before the ballot, the offer document being key to the information cascade.

The Leader of the Council, exercising the powers of the Housing Portfolio Holder in his absence, **AGREED** that there should only be one question asked on any ballot of tenants on a housing transfer proposal and the wording should be in accordance with CLG guidance as follows:

Are you in favour of the Council's proposal to transfer the ownership and management of your home to (proposed new housing association landlord)?

The Leader of the Council, exercising the powers of the Housing Portfolio Holder in his absence, **AGREED** that the informal consultation material as well as the formal consultation – or 'offer' document will set out the local implications of the retention option in accordance with the CLG guidance so that tenants can make an informed and clear choice on the options for the future ownership and management of their homes when they asked to vote on this matter.

5. HOUSING FUTURES - RETAINED SERVICES

The Corporate Manager – Affordable Homes, presented the report, advising that it was the summary of work carried out by officers that would have implications for staff, tenants and the shadow board, who would be formulating a 30-year business plan. He said that both Travellers Site Management and Floating Support and Lifeline would sit best with the new local housing association, while all other retained housing functions would be best managed by the Council, and added that the Audit Commission's studies of the housing transfer process suggested that the recommended process was best practice.

The Leader of the Council, exercising the powers of the Housing Portfolio Holder in his absence, **AGREED** that if tenants support a housing transfer then:

- i) The functions of Traveller Site Management, Floating Support and Community

Carecall Services be included in the package of services that are to be delivered by the new local housing association

- ii) That the other non-landlord housing services including administration of the housing register, allocations/CBL, homelessness and housing advice, private sector housing and the strategic and enabling functions be retained by the Council at point of transfer.

6. HOUSING FUTURES - MANAGING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Principal Solicitor was in attendance for this item.

The Housing Futures Project Manager presented the report and identified appendix 1 as a model protocol as developed by the Council's legal advisers for the pre ballot phase, Trowers and Hamlin. The group then discussed the content of the model protocol.

Paragraph 4.1.5

The restriction of the circulation of documents containing confidential information was queried as this was felt to prevent an open and transparent flow of information and it was agreed that the wording be amended from "Restrict circulation of documents containing confidential information" to "Restrict circulation of documents containing commercially sensitive information".

Paragraph 4.2.3

The Independent Tenant Advisor said that his role did not preclude Members giving informal advice to tenants, and thought that to do so would be to impose an unfair restriction on Members.

The Principal Solicitor suggested that the restriction could be limited to formal roles and was asked to seek further clarification from Trowers and Hamlin. Members would be advised of any feedback in advance of the Council meeting on 17 July.

The Leader of Council, exercising the powers of the Housing Portfolio Holder in his absence, **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the council adopt a protocol to guide members and employees involved in a potential housing transfer.

The Leader, exercising the powers of the Housing Portfolio Holder in his absence, **AGREED** that the project management arrangements for any post ballot phase be considered and agreed ahead of any ballot in order that a clear split of roles and responsibilities be achieved. This should also include an assessment of resources to take forward the post ballot negotiations on behalf of the council and secondment arrangements to provide executive support to the prospective new local housing association landlord.

Councillor Mrs Heazell left the meeting.

7. HOUSING FUTURES - BUDGET POSITION

Agenda items 7 and 8 were dealt with together.

Councillor Roberts questioned the venues for the first two Shadow Board meetings (The Holiday Inn, Impington and Madingley Hall).

In reply the Executive Director said that as the Shadow Board was not part of the council he was keen for their meetings to be located at neutral venues. An attempt had been

made to secure use of the Marketing Suite at the Business Park, but this had been unsuccessful. It was also noted that the marginal cost of the two venues selected was low when compared to the cost of alternatives.

In future the Shadow Board would make the decision over choice of venues.

The purpose of the meeting on 14 July was questioned given that the tenant election process had not been completed.

The Executive Director said that the views of the members and 6 tenant candidates had been canvassed and a decision made to proceed with the meeting as a briefing on the understanding that the first "proper" Shadow Board meeting would not be held until August when the tenant members would have been elected.

8. HOUSING FUTURES - PROJECT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

The Project Plan was **NOTED**.

9. TO CONSIDER FORWARD PLAN ITEMS

The Forward Plan was **NOTED**.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

The next meeting will be held at 2pm on Thursday 7 August 2008 in the Monkfield Room, South Cambridgeshire Hall.

The Meeting ended at 4.15 p.m.
