

HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE

2ND MARCH 2005

PRESENT	Councillor Gale (Chair) Councillors Mrs Brown, Mrs Burn, Grogan, Kay, Mrs Pinkney, Mrs Seabury, Sinclair, Taylor, Mrs Todd and David Wilson.
APOLOGIES	Councillors Mrs Hilditch, Mrs Jones (ex-officio) and Stonehouse.
ALSO PRESENT	Councillor Clements (ex-officio).
ADVISERS	A. Northcote, Head of Neighbourhood Operations; D. Milburn, Head of Business Support; Mrs M Roe, Service Development Manager, Mrs J Dunn, Principal Neighbourhood Operations Manager; P Cummings, Property Services Manager (Gas Safety) and Mrs H Wilson, Committee Administrator.

MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15th December 2004 and special meetings held on 13th January and 17th February 2005 were taken as read, confirmed as true records and signed by the Chair.

410. ALMO UPDATE

Consideration was given to the next steps in the ALMO process, together with a summary of the programme of work until November 2005. Members were reminded that until the announcement of the successful ALMO applications had been made the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had recommended that authorities proceed as if they had been successful.

In response to Councillor Kay the Service Development Manager advised the tear off slip provided to tenants was a familiar method of gauging tenants support for the proposals and had proven effective in other authorities. She also confirmed for Councillor Mrs Todd that in consultation with the Community Housing Task Group and Customer Panel the wording on the slips would be considered carefully to ensure misunderstandings did not occur.

Councillor Kay then raised concerns that tenant representation may not be fairly distributed in terms of the geographic areas of the district. He was advised that the matter was currently being considered by the Customer Panel together with P.S. Consultants.

In response to Councillor Taylor the Head of Neighbourhood Operations advised that the Housing Service would undergo an indicative Best Value Inspection later in the year and then again after twelve months. This would indicate whether the service was on course to gain the two stars to attract the extra funding. He also confirmed that should the two stars be achieved it would be necessary to revise the Capital Programme.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the proposed programme of work until November 2005 be agreed;
 2. that the Director of Housing Services implements the work programme.

411. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY AND PROCEDURE GUIDE

Consideration was given to proposals regarding the amended Allocations Policy and Procedure. Members were advised that Shelter had raised concerns regarding the practice of suspending applicants who had housing related debt and the eligibility criteria elements of the Allocations Policy.

In response to Councillor Grogan the Principal Neighbourhood Operations Manager clarified the procedure regarding the re-housing of tenants who had arrears. She also confirmed for Councillor Sinclair that a process of vetting on the tenant would always be undertaken prior to the allocation of any property.

Councillor Mrs Todd believed that it would be useful for applicants on the housing register to be made aware of the amount of points they were in receipt of. In response she was advised that letters were issued to advise of this, however, the Housing Services Department were to review the procedure in the future.

- RESOLVED**
1. that the revised Allocations Policy and Procedure attached at Annex 2, be approved;
 2. that the Customer Panel be advised of revised Policy and Procedure.

412. RECOVERY OF FORMER TENANTS ARREARS

Members were advised the item was to be withdrawn at this stage.

- RESOLVED** that the item be withdrawn.

413. KEY LINES OF ENQUIRY (KLOE)

Consideration was given to the addition of three key lines of enquiry to the Audit Commission's Housing Key Lines of Enquiry together with the implications for the housing service.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the significant impact the new KLOE's have on the inspection of the Council's housing service, be recognised;
 2. that increased awareness of the additional KLOE's in the Housing Services Department be raised;
 3. that the new KLOE's be used as a framework to review and assess housing services.

414. DRAFT REGIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY 2005

Consideration was given to the response to the Regional Housing Strategy (RHS). Members were advised that a revised draft version of the RHS had been published for consultation and that housing authorities in County Durham together with the Council would issue a joint response.

Councillor Kay raised concerns regarding the statement that Wear Valley had the highest percentage increase in house prices he believed the rate of increase would be unsustainable. Councillor Taylor was of the opinion the increase would have a dramatic effect on Right to Buys.

RESOLVED that the response to the RHS attached at Annex 8; be approved.

Councillors Kay and Wilson left the meeting.

415. AUDIT COMMISSION – GAS SAFETY : GUIDANCE NOTES FOR LANDLORDS

Consideration was given to revisions of the Council's Gas Safety Policy and Procedure which was in response to new guidance notes on gas safety issued by the Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate.

RECOMMENDED that subject to specialist legal advice the amended Gas Safety Policy and Procedures be adopted.

416. PRE PAINT REPAIRS AND PAINTING WORKS 2005/06

Members were provided with an update on the progress of the pre-paint repairs and painting works during 2004/05 and proposals for 2005/06.

- RECOMMENDED**
1. that the progress on pre-paint repairs and re-painting works during 2004/05 be noted;
 2. that Standing Order 8.1 be suspended ;
 3. that up to the maximum budget provision Bell Group (UK) Limited be appointed as contractor.

The meeting concluded at 6.55pm

CHAIR