

Minutes of Health & Housing Committee

Meeting Date: Thursday, 12 November 2009 starting at 6.30pm
Present: Councillor B Hilton (Chairman)

Councillors:

S Brunskill	C Ross
M Fielding	G Scott
R Hargreaves	J S Sutcliffe
K Hind	D Taylor
L Rimmer	J Waddington
M Robinson	

In attendance: Chief Executive, Director of Development Services, Environmental Health Manager, Financial Services Manager, Housing Strategy Officer and Revenue and Benefits Manager

551 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S Hirst and M Ranson

552 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2009 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

553 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

554 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

555 REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no references from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

556 HOUSING BENEFIT VERIFICATION FOR RIBBLE VALLEY HOMES

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Committee about the scheme which exists that allows registered social landlords to act on behalf of local authorities to check claims made by their tenants and verify evidence required under the Housing Tax Benefit/Council Tax Benefit Verification Framework. The Revenue and Benefits Manager informed Committee that in 2001 the Department of Work and Pensions had launched a pilot scheme to involve registered social landlords in the council tax and housing benefit process. This had proved a success with RSL, local authorities and tenants welcoming the

scheme and processing times for council tax/housing benefit claims had improved and RSLs saw improvements in their case flow as fewer tenants fell into arrears. The verification framework was the best practice approach to delivering council tax/housing benefit and was based on the premise that all information on claims for council tax/housing benefit must be verified by examining original documentation as part of a preventative approach to fraud and error. He informed Committee that historically our benefits section has had excellent results for processing times and rates of error, however the transfer of the housing stock to Ribble Valley Homes on 1 April 2008 had resulted in a significant change in how claims were processed for housing benefit for tenants of the new RSL. Since 1 April 2008 there was a requirement to verify each rent when a new claim is made in the same way as any other private landlord and that this had resulted in a significant increase in the workload to the benefit section as these cases make up approximately 40% of the total caseload.

He informed Committee that Ribble Valley Homes had expressed an interest in becoming an RSL verification framework approved landlord and that the DWP recommended, in its guidance manual, that local authorities should set up such schemes with RSLs who they have a good relationship with and that RSLs created as a result of large scale voluntary transfer should be deemed suitable for participation in the scheme. He also informed Committee that the manual lays down the processes that must be undertaken to implement the scheme along with a model contract which had been adapted and approved by the Borough Council's legal services section.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve Ribble Valley Homes as a registered social landlord for the purposes of the verification framework scheme;
2. designate Ribble Valley Homes offices for housing/council tax benefit purposes; and
3. authorise entry into the legal agreement.

557

RIBBLE VALLEY HOMES 18-MONTH PROGRESS REPORT

The Chairman welcomed Christine Grimshaw, Director of Ribble Valley Homes, to give a progress report on the activities of Ribble Valley Homes over the 18 months since the housing stock had been transferred.

Christine Grimshaw gave a presentation which covered the Ribble Valley Homes staffing and structure, promises to tenants, performance, asset management and Decent Homes Standard, customer profiling, governance and the improvement plan. Several of the slides showed pictures of new kitchens, showers, external decoration, fencing, new conservatory at Henthorn Community Centre and tenant participation projects.

The Chairman thanked Christine Grimshaw for her presentation and wished continuing success to Ribble Valley Homes.

558 RESOURCES RECYCLED FROM THE HOME BUY SCHEME

The Chief Executive submitted a report asking Committee to agree how funding recycled from the Home Buy Scheme should be allocated. The Home Buy Scheme was run in 2006 and offered first time buyers a deposit of up to £25,000. This deposit was then converted to a percentage value of the property and registered as a land charge. Four first time buyers with local connections were assisted onto the housing ladder by this scheme. It was now reported that one of these households who had been awarded £16,500 through the loan had notified the Council that they wished to sell and therefore, once the sale was complete, the recycled funding would be returned to the Council via SPACE Housing Association. Although the scheme was highly successful it was felt that it would be difficult to utilise the recycled funding to replicate the scheme due to the limited amount of funding available and the logistics of administering and marketing the scheme to make a fair opportunity for households to apply. Several options were outlined for Committee to consider.

RESOLVED: That Committee agreed to ring fence the money until the budget is set for next year.

559 PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee of a proposed amendment to the adopted Affordable Housing Memorandum of Understanding within the agreed Memorandum for any proposed private rented developments, the accepted rent level to ensure the rented accommodation is affordable, is the local housing allowance rate applicable for that area. The Housing Strategy Officer informed Committee that the local housing allowance rate differs significantly for Longridge as this area is covered by the Central Lancs rate. She also informed Committee that accepting the local housing allowance for Central Lancs would render the rented accommodation unaffordable to 50% of households who responded to the Longridge Housing Needs Survey and it was therefore recommended for the Memorandum to be amended to reflect the variation of LHA rates in the Central Lancs area. This matter had been discussed by the Strategic Housing Working Group and it was felt that a rent level of Central Lancs LHA minus 10% be acceptable for affordable developments in the Longridge area.

RESOLVED: That Committee accept the proposal of private developments of rented accommodation in Longridge being set at LHA minus 10% and the Affordable Housing Memorandum of Understanding be amended to reflect this.

560 FOOD SERVICE PLAN 2009-10

The Director of Development Services submitted the Ribble Valley Borough Council Food Service Plan 2009-10 for Committee to consider and approve. He drew particular attention to the contents which reviewed the performance of the service against last year's performance and also set out the proposed areas for

improvement in the forthcoming year. He was again pleased to report that no complaints had been received against the delivery of the service. He highlighted changes with regard to the way inspections of food premises were undertaken and reminded Committee that any premises not inspected in the programme this year would be taken forward into the next year's programme and that, in the event of experiencing anticipated problems, priority would be given to inspecting high risk premises.

RESOLVED: That Committee

1. approve the Ribble Valley Borough Council Food Service Plan 2009-10 for implementation in the current financial year;
2. note the satisfactory performance in relation to the identified areas for improvement in the previous year's food safety plan; and
3. reconfirm the continuing priority of food premises inspection for environmental health service provision.

561 REVENUE MONITORING 2009-10

The Director of Resources submitted a report informing Committee on the progress of revenue expenditure and income for the period 1 April to 30 September 2009.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

562 CAPITAL MONITORING 2009-10

The Director of Resources submitted a report for Committee's information on the progress to date on the capital programme for this Committee for the first quarter of the current financial year. The Financial Services Manager reminded Committee that a further scheme had been added to the capital programme for this Committee in respect of the Clitheroe Cemetery extension for initial investigative work to assess the suitability of the proposed site.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

563 AFFORDABLE HOUSING UPDATE

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee of the achievements made in the delivery of affordable housing and updated them on completed affordable housing units, affordable housing sites which had been granted planning permission, numbers of households given housing advice and assistance and households assisted by the Tenancy Protection Scheme, Mortgage Rescue Scheme and Repossession Prevention Fund.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

564 OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENTS FOR PENNINE LANCS

The Chief Executive submitted a report informing Committee of a recent report commissioned by Elevate undertaken by Nevin Leather Associates. The report documents that Ribble Valley have by far the highest level of projected population growth at 27.7% between 2006 and 2031 and this growth was due to migration from other parts of Britain rather than abroad. The report outlined the findings extracted from the local housing market assessments relating to estimated affordable housing requirements which were of key policy significance for both housing and planning.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

565 GENERAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

The Director of Development Services submitted a report for Committee's information which included an update on pandemic flu, improvement of Slaidburn concessionary water supply, Hanson Cement Liaison Meeting minutes, Clitheroe Market and the success of informing the public in relation to flooding.

566 REPORTS OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor Stella Brunskill reported that at a recent meeting of the Children's Trust seminar days for On Fuel Poverty had been highlighted.

Councillor Doreen Taylor reported that she had recently attended a meeting of the Oral Health Committee and visited the Dentist School in Hyndburn.

Councillor Hilton reported upon health and equalities and particularly upon the call for health action across Lancashire. She also suggested to Committee that in the light of the new Clitheroe Hospital development being put on hold perhaps an invitation to the PCT to discuss this should be made for them to attend the next meeting of Committee.

Members agreed with Councillor Hilton's suggestion.

567 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That by virtue of the fact that the following items of business be Exempt Information Under Categories 7 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting.

568 GENERAL REPORT – GRANTS

The Chief Executive submitted details of three disabled facility grants and one landlord tenant grant which had been approved.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

569

STRATEGIC HOUSING WORKING GROUP MINUTES

The Chief Executive submitted a report for Committee's information on the progress of affordable housing, affordable developments and the decisions made by the Strategic Housing Working Group. The report included the minutes from meetings held on 5 October 2009 and 4 November 2009.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.05pm.

If you have any queries on these minutes please contact Marshal Scott (414400).

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