

Time commenced - 6.00pm
Time finished - 8.32pm

**COMMUNITY COMMISSION
21 JULY 2008**

Present: Councillor Nath (Chair)
Councillors Bayliss, Banwait, Redfern, Chera, Richards and Lowe.

13/08 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Leeming.

14/08 Late items introduced by the Chair

There were no late items.

15/08 Declarations of Interest

Councillors Bayliss, Nath and Redfern declared a personal interest as they sat on the Derby Homes Board.

16/08 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2008 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair subject to noting that Councillor Lowe was in attendance and that Councillor Redfern had declared a personal interest as she sat on the Derby Homes Board.

17/08 Call-in

There were no items called in.

18/08 Responses of the Council Cabinet to any reports of the Commission

There were no responses to consider.

Items for Discussion

19/08 Housing Allocation Policy, including the Use of Temporary Accommodation

The Commission received a presentation from Lisa Callow, Housing Options Manager, on the Housing Allocation Policy. The current policy had been adopted following two concurrent reviews undertaken in 2005/06. It had been successful in reducing the

numbers processed as homeless and increasing the opportunity to move for existing tenants. It was reported that the policy would now be reviewed in August, to take account of developing case law, with the recommendations put forward to Cabinet in September/October 2008. The review would include a consultation with stakeholders and members of the commission. The eligibility table would also be looked at, including the option of allocating three bedroom properties to one child households because of the shortage of two bedroom properties. The revised policy would also address the need to institute a right of review by individual applicants regarding adverse decisions eg by-passing due to rent arrears.

It was noted that a review of the housing register had been carried out recently and although this had cut the list down, it still stood at over 10,000 people waiting for accommodation.

Ms Callow also updated members on the usage made of temporary accommodation. Over recent months numbers had reduced from 77 family units to 45 and the Department for Communities and Local Government, CLG, had set a target of no more than 35 by 2010. Of the current 45, 24 were housed by Derby Homes in properties designated for temporary use, with the remaining 21 being accommodated in bed and breakfast. The standards were legal but basic, which was why Housing Options wished to avoid using B&B. Derby Homes were to be asked to increase the number of ring-fenced housing units from 24 so as to reduce the usage of B&B. In terms of duration Ms Callow explained that families with children and pregnant single women should be moved to permanent accommodation within 6 weeks. This was monitored by CLG and generally achieved although occasionally complex cases took longer.

Resolved to note the presentation.

20/08 Housing and Council Tax Benefit

The Commission considered a report from the Assistant Director of Customer Services on Housing and Council Tax Benefit. Two additional reports were also tabled with the meeting's agreement, one of which addressed the Commission's request, at its June meeting, as to how the service might prioritise the most vulnerable customers. Mark Holmes, Benefits Manager, presented the reports and responded to members' questions. The Commission noted the workload priorities that were within the current resources, how the department were addressing the shortfall in the establishment and the future developments of the service.

Resolved:

- 1. to note and endorse the workload priorities and plans for resource allocation.**
- 2. to note the planned initiatives for improvements to the Benefits Service.**

21/08 Private Sector Housing – An Overview

The Commission received a presentation from Martin Gadsby, Private Sector Housing Manager that gave a brief overview of private sector housing.

Members raised concerns that in the City there were currently only 80 landlords with multiple occupancy houses that had been registered with the Authority, whereas it was estimated there may be about 300 that fell into the statutory criteria. It was noted that a more pro-active way forward should be introduced in the future, to encourage landlords to register with the Council. Mr Gadsby reported that currently officers were reliant on landlords engaging with the Council, although the government publications were initially good, there were further resources needed for further council publications. It was suggested that officers would contact other local authorities to borrow areas of good practice for gaining landlords on the register.

Members asked why the block home improvements had been restricted to the Rosehill area. It was noted that the Council were targeting the worst areas in the city for houses that had fallen into disrepair and did not meet the decent homes standards.

Mr Gadsby explained about the Disabled Facilities Grant, which funded about 200 adaptations per year. Although the Council's own resources were used to top up the Government's allocation, this was still less than the demand and so there was a waiting list. The problem was exacerbated as Registered Social Landlords were now increasingly approaching the Council in respect of adaptations for their own tenants.

In terms of empty homes, there were about 4,000 properties in Derby of which 2,000 had been unoccupied long term. He completed his presentation by explaining the work of Derby Home Energy Advice Service

Resolved:

- 1. that officers be requested to contact other Local Authority's to borrow areas of good practice with regard to the number of multiple occupancy landlords;**
- 2. to note the presentation.**

22/08 Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2008-2011

The Commission considered a report from the Director of Corporate and Adult Services which introduced the Private Sector Empty Homes Strategy 2008-2011. Members were very supportive of the proposals but wished to request that all capital receipts arising from the sales of the acquired properties would be ring-fenced for the purchase of further empty properties. If this was not agreed 50% of the capital receipts would have to be paid to central government under the "pooling" rules but it would be prudent to keep the full 100% of receipts for use in the City and so maximise the amount of activity under the Empty Homes Strategy. As Derby Homes now had a subsidiary company that can own property, as distinct from its core business of managing council-owned stock, the Commission therefore proposed that consideration be given to the back to back onward sale of acquired properties to that subsidiary company. This would have the benefit of the accommodation, when renovated, being available for allocation to individuals on the housing register. The agreement of Derby Homes would be necessary and factors for consideration would be a willingness to pay the market rate to maximise the capital receipt and the availability of funds to restore/improve the property to be suitable for occupation.

Resolved:

- 1. to ask Council Cabinet to adopt the Empty Homes Strategy 2008-2011;**
- 2. to ask Council Cabinet to approve the use of all capital receipts arising from sales of properties acquired under the Empty Homes Strategy for further purchase of such properties.**

23/08 Derby Accredited Property Scheme

The Commission considered a report from the Director of Corporate and Adult Services which introduced the Derby Accredited Property Scheme for private rented properties. Members concluded that the proposal provided a means of raising standards in the private rented housing market. They also recognised the importance of registering the logo as a trade mark so as to protect the integrity of the Scheme.

Resolved:

- 1. to ask Council Cabinet to approve the attached Standards for the Derby Accredited Property Scheme;**
- 2. to ask Council Cabinet to authorise the entering into of an agreement with the scheme logo designer in the terms detailed in Appendix 3;**
- 3. to ask Council Cabinet to authorise the registration of the scheme logo as a trade mark.**

24/08 Work Programme

The Commission considered a report from the Director of Corporate and Adult Services on Work Programme. This report was intended to allow the Commission to finalise a work programme for the municipal year 2008/09.

Resolved to approve the proposed course of actions at Appendix Two.

25/08 Retrospective Scrutiny

There were no items identified.

26/08 Council Cabinet Forward Plan

There were no items.

27/08 Matters referred to the Commission by Council Cabinet

There were no items.

MINUTES END