

ITEM 4

Time commenced – 6.00pm
Time finished – 9:30 pm

COMMUNITY COMMISSION MONDAY 4 DECEMBER 2006

Present: Councillor Turner (in the Chair)
Councillors Afzal, Chera, Lowe, Rawson, Redfern, Samara,
Troup, Webb and Winter.

Also Present: Councillors Nath

47/06 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from

48/06 Late Items Introduced by the Chair

In accordance with Section 100(B) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair agreed to admit the following late item on the grounds that it could not wait until the next meeting.

- Housing Application Receipt

The Commission was pleased to note that everyone who submitted Housing Application Forms would now receive a receipt for their application. If any forms were subsequently lost the date on the receipt would be used for processing the replacement forms.

Resolved to welcome the distribution of receipts for Housing Application Forms

49/06 Declarations of Interest

Councillors Afzal, Lowe, Redfern and Troup declared a personal interest in minute number 48/06 and 53/06 as they are all Members on the Derby Homes Board.

Councillor Samra declared a personal interest in minute number 54/06 as he was joint owner of a privately rented property.

50/06 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2006 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

51/06 Call-in

No items were called-in by the Commission

52/06 Responses of the Council Cabinet to any reports of the Commission

There were none.

Items for Discussion

53/06 Service Charges in the Sheltered Accommodation Service

The Commission received a report from the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood, Social Cohesion and Housing Strategy which had been approved by Council Cabinet at its meeting on 28 November 2006 subject to the Commission's comments.

The Commission expressed concerns that those who were close to the threshold for receiving means tested benefits may be disadvantaged as a result of the changes to service charges.

They recognised that for a significant number of service users charges would be reduced.

Concerns were also raised about possible future reductions by the Government in the Supporting People budgets and the effect this would have on service users.

Resolved:

- 1 to recommend that Council Cabinet note that the Commission:**
 - a) welcomed the outcome of the review which would result in significantly reduced charges for many service users**
 - b) were concerned about the possible impact on residents with incomes close to the eligibility threshold for means tested benefits**
 - c) were concerned that although the new service is planned to be sustainable on the basis of known Supporting People allocations it could be vulnerable in the event of future cutbacks**
- 2 to recommend that Council Cabinet and Derby Homes should act to ensure that appropriate members of their staff ensure that each service user is offered a full benefits checked at least once per year**
- 3 to request that the Council Cabinet member monitor the Supporting People budgets and ensure that in the event of future reductions in the allocation to Derby that these Supported Living schemes are suitably protected.**

54/06 Housing Rent and Service Charges

The Commission received a report from the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood, Social Cohesion and Housing Strategy.

The Commission felt that Central Government required councils to follow two incompatible policies as they were asking Local Authorities to achieve convergence between council rents and those of Registered Social Landlords by 2012 but also to cap the percentage rate of rent increases below the rises needed.

The Commission felt it was desirable to make the increases as equal as possible to avoid rent hikes in future years.

It was noted that any additional funds raised through the increased rent and service charges would be re-invested in the Housing Revenue Account.

The Committee were concerned that those in most need receive help and support in accessing any benefits they may be entitled to in order to assist with the increased rent charges.

Resolved

- 1. to request that Council Cabinet make representations to central government to:**
 - a) clarify the government's intentions regarding i) rent convergence and ii) rent capping in subsequent years and**
 - b) seek an extension beyond the current 2012 deadline to enable convergence to be achieved through reasonable year-on-year percentage increases.**

55/06 Draft Housing Renewal Policy

The Commission received a report from the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood, Social Cohesion and Housing.

The Commission queried why Walbrook was being used to supply Building Services. It was reported that the Company had been set up in the 1980 to ensure older people were given a fair price for building works. It was reported that there were very high levels of satisfaction reported by Walbrook's customers and that contract compliance procedures were built into their contract.

It was noted that landlords who took positive steps to improve their properties could receive assistance to reach the Decent Homes Standard but that landlords would not be rewarded with assistance to meet minimum legal requirements.

Resolved to recommend that Council Cabinet:

- 1. approve the recommendations at paragraph 2 of the Cabinet Member's Report and:**
- 2. note the Community Commission welcomes**
 - a) the proposals contained in the policy**
 - b) the Council's commitment to the Disabled Facilities Grant, as shown by the substantial financial support to that budget and**
 - c) the development of a landlord accreditation scheme, as previously requested by the Commission**

56/06 The Percentage of Allocations Awarded to each band in the new Housing Allocations Policy

The Commission received a report from the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood, Social Inclusion and Housing Strategy.

The Commission noted that the Waltham Forest Court case forced Local Authorities to take into account multiple needs when determining a person's housing needs. Member's queried whether this would lead to people 'chasing bands'. It was felt that people may claim they have multiple needs but that greater verification of needs led claims was to be requested.

It was noted that whilst Landlords could choose who to advertise their properties to, the scheme would self regulate effectively.

It was noted that the percentage of houses allocated to each band would be monitored quarterly and that the Cabinet Member would have delegated powers to alter the percentile bandings by +/- 10%.

It was noted that the new policy would come into force when a new IT system was put into use in February 2007.

Resolved to recommend that Council Cabinet:

- 1. approve the proposed initial percentages to bands**
- 2. note the Community Commission:**

- i) whole heartedly welcome this response to the former Community Regeneration Commission's previous recommendations
- ii) consider the new 4 band system and percentage of allocations to each should offer much better chances for current social housing tenants seeking to move
- iii) intend to monitor performance to ensure that existing tenants actually do benefit from greater opportunities to move
- iv) hope that over the time the trend should be for the percentage allocated to the emergency band to diminish with the dividend that higher percentages can be awarded to the other bands
- v) may want to explore at a future point the process for verification of applicants' circumstances
- vi) thank the previous Commission for its work and Cllr Nath and his staff for their co-operation and;
- vii) offer best wishes to all the staff who will operate the new system given the context that social housing is a scarce resource

57/06 Performance Eye

- i) 2nd Quarter Performance Data for Indicators within the Commission's Portfolio

The Commission examined the Performance Eye data relating to indicators within the Commissions portfolio.

Resolved to examine Performance indicator BV212 – Average time to re-let local authority housing at a future meeting.

- ii) Details of Indicators BV76a, BV76d and HCOP6.1

The commission noted that the targets for performance indicators BV76a and BV76d had been increased for 2006/7 to measure service improvement. This explained why the indicator showed as reducing. It was noted that Housing Benefit had received 4 stars under the CPA Assessment.

It was noted that indicator HCOP6.1 had decreased as the year 2005/06 was the year of the volunteer so a higher number of volunteers had been recruited than normal. This year's figures therefore did not compare favourably. It was noted that work would be undertaken with the volunteer bureau to improve this target.

Resolved a) to note the explanations for the indicator changes and b) to request details about future proposed changes relating to performance

indicators so that the Commission have a prior understanding as to why performance appears to be affected.

58/06 Section 30 Order and Alcohol Free Zones

The Commission received a draft report from the Director of Corporate and Adult Social Services setting out the findings and recommendations from the focussed scrutiny review held on 16 October 2006.

Resolved to approve the report for submission to Council Cabinet.

59/06 Focussed Scrutiny

- i) Oral update regarding Homefinder Application Form

The Commission noted that 2 Members had completed the revised forms and comments had been passed to relevant officers.

Resolved to note the oral update

- ii) Oral report on 30 November meeting on Supplementary Planning Guidance on Affordable Housing

Resolved that draft recommendations will be circulated by email for approval.

- iii) To consider the Chair's suggestion that the Commission may wish to scrutinise the Spatial Strategy

The Commission noted that the deadline for consultation was 20 December 2006.

Resolved to ask Members of the Commission to look at the strategy on the internet and to send in their individual comments by 20 December 2006.

- iv) Other Member proposals for Focussed Scrutiny

Resolved to ask Members to contact the Overview and Scrutiny Team with any suggestions for Focussed Scrutiny.

60/06 Retrospective Scrutiny

Resolved to ask Members to contact the Overview and Scrutiny Team with any suggestions for Retrospective Scrutiny.

Council Cabinet Forward Plan

61/06 Identification of items on the Forward Plan for consideration at future meetings.

Resolved to note the reports on the Forward Plan that would be coming to a future meeting.

63/06 Matters referred to the Commission by Council Cabinet

There were no items.

MINUTES END