

HOUSING COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 24 November 1999 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Byrd (Chair); Councillors Boad, Cleaver, Cockburn, Doody, Dray, Evans, Mrs Evans, Gifford, Golby, Harris, Kent, Kohler, MacKay, Talbot, Wooller.
Mr J Roscoe) - Tenants and Leaseholders User Group
Mrs J Atkins)

486. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 1999, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Councillor Talbot in the list of those Members present.

PART I

(Matters not the subject of powers delegated to the Committee by the Council)

487. REFUGEES FROM KOSOVO

The Head of Housing reported orally at the meeting that he had received a letter that day, from the West Midlands Local Government Association on the current situation involving refugees from Kosovo. Due to the large numbers of refugees in the southern part of England, the Home Office and the Local Government Association had agreed to a voluntary dispersal of refugees over the country. The first families were due to arrive on 3 January 2000. The Home Office was seeking furnished accommodation only and, therefore, Warwickshire County Council had been contacted. The Head of Housing would be meeting with the Housing Directors Group and would be co-ordinating information over the next few days. The Chair advised the Committee that the West Midlands Local Government Association were recommending that any costs incurred by local authorities should be reimbursed.

RECOMMENDED that authority be delegated to the Head of Housing, together with Housing Committee spokespersons, to determine any action to be taken in respect of refugees from Kosovo.

488. NOTICE OF MOTION

The Committee considered the following Notice of Motion in the name of Councillor Doody:-

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"That Warwick District Council feels that provision of the VAT Regulations which require owners or tenants of private dwellings, but not Council tenants, to pay VAT on the rent for a Council garage is unfair. It calls on the Government, therefore, to make changes to the Regulations so that owners or tenants of private dwellings are treated in the same way as Council tenants in not having to pay VAT on the rent of a Council garage."

RECOMMENDED that this Notice of Motion be debated at the next Council meeting.

(Councillor Wooller declared a pecuniary and substantial interest in the above item and left the room for its consideration.)

489. **PETITION**

The Committee considered the following petition sponsored by Councillor Gifford:-

"We the undersigned feel that given the increasing number of young children in New Brook Street that there is a real and urgent need for a small playground at New Brook Street suitable for the young children who at the moment have nowhere to play."

RECOMMENDED that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee on this issue.

490. **REVENUE ESTIMATES 2000/2001**

A report from Finance and Housing was submitted on the detailed revenue estimate proposals for 1999/2000 and 2000/2001.

In September 1999, the Strategy Committee had formulated the Council's financial strategy for the year 2000/2001. This had been prepared on the assumption that there would be a potential growth in 2000/2001 of £900,000. Final decisions on the use of the potential growth would be made by the Strategy Committee in February 2000.

The effects of applying the Financial Strategy to the services covered by this Committee had produced a target budget of £282,900 for 2000/2001. An analysis of the budget for each service was appended to the report and identified the main groups of expenditure and income. The approved Service Plan reduction for Year 3 of £4,000 on Bed and Breakfast Expenses had been included in the budgets for Homelessness in 2000/2001 as required. The achieving of this saving was dependant on the anticipated delivery of substantial numbers of new social housing dwellings by Registered Social Landlords which had been delayed in the current year, and the situation would be closely monitored. There were currently no bids for additional resources for 2000/2001 identified in the service plan.

Details of the revised estimates for 1999/2000, totalling £274,700, and the

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estimates for 2000/2001 of £282,900 were set out in the report.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the revenue estimates for 2000/2001 amounting to £282,900 be approved and referred to the Strategy Committee; and
- (2) the revised estimates for 1999/2000 amounting to £274,700 be approved and referred to the Resources Sub-Committee.

PART II

(Matters delegated to the Committee by the Council)

491. **TENANT SATISFACTION SURVEY**

The Committee considered a written report from Housing on the principle findings from the Council's 1999 Tenants Satisfaction Survey and compared those findings with the results of the survey undertaken by Marketing Opinion Research International (MORI) in 1990.

A summary of the findings of the survey, which used a representative sample of 800 addressees across the district, together with a full action plan, were appended to the report. The action plan dealt with information strategy, service review strategy, participation strategy and performance. The report pointed out that over the last nine years tenants' satisfaction with their home neighbourhood and housing services had increased. Satisfaction with housing services had increased to 81% and dissatisfaction had declined significantly from 16% to only 4%. A Best Value comparison had highlighted areas as the "targets" for Fundamental Review that would yield maximum increased satisfaction from their uses. These areas included responsive housing repairs, major repairs and maintenance programmes, help with neighbourhood security, advice on rent payment difficulties and help with neighbour problems.

During the discussion at the meeting, Members placed particular emphasis on repairs and the methodology in respect of repairs.

RESOLVED that approval be given to the action plan as set out in Appendix 2 to the report and the significant improvements made be welcomed.

HOUSING COMMITTEE (Continued)

492. **PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

Members considered a written report from Housing on the contractor's performance for the year to date on key performance indicators and the comments of the Tenant and Leaseholders User Group on that performance. The report set out details of actual performance in respect of voids, repairs, rent arrears, homelessness and use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

493. **POLICY SCHEDULE**

The Committee considered a written report from Housing which proposed a rolling programme for the review of housing policies over the next two years in accordance with the requirement of the Service Plan. This exercise was essential to ensure that the housing policies were kept up to date and relevant to the circumstances of the Council. The proposed schedule for review of housing policies, which had been broken down into the main broad policy areas, was appended to the report. Also appended to the report was the proposed schedule for review of housing policies and suggested timescales for rolling reviews. Members were reminded that the Housing Business Unit Fundamental Review had been brought forward to 2000/2001, which would undoubtedly have an impact on the review of policies.

RESOLVED that the list of policies and the proposed Rolling Review Schedule be approved, subject to any changes arising from the Fundamental Review.

494. **LOCAL AUTHORITY SOCIAL HOUSING GRANT - S106 SITE**

The Committee considered a written report from Housing on proposals to commit Local Authority Social Housing Grant for the provision of affordable housing to Phase 1 of the Warwick Gates Development (Heathcote Hospital site).

The report pointed out that the Warwick Gates site would provide a total of 1,100 dwellings, of which approximately 221 would be for Social housing. Construction of the Social housing would take place in two phases - Phase 1 would provide 131 units and Phase 2 would provide 90 units. The report set out details of Phase 1, but details of Phase 2 were not yet known and a planning application had not yet been submitted.

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The available budget within the 1999/2000 HIP was £1,303,680 which was made up of £375,000 Council's contribution to S106 sites and £928,680 Capital Receipt Initiative monies. This was insufficient to accommodate the 80% acquisition and start on site tranches of grant payable which was £2,140,685. The final 20% was payable after completion of this phase. As stage 2 was not expected to commence until 2000/2001, it was expected that the balance of £837,000 from the anticipated Basic Credit Approval for 2000/2001 from Central Government, together with the £1,303,680, carried forward into 2000/2001 would enable this acquisition/start on site stage to be financed. These arrangements were subject to either:-

- (1) confirmation from DETR that the Council would be allowed to carry over £928,680 CRI monies from 1999/2000 into 2000/2001, or failing such approval,
- (2) that the Council utilise CRI monies on its own stock in 1999/2000, thereby releasing other resources to carry forward.

The report set out the financing options if the Council was not in a position to carry over £928,680 in resources.

The report referred to a request from Whitnash Town Council in respect of allocation priority, together with the Head of Housing's response.

RESOLVED that

- (1) the proposals as set out in the report be approved;
- (2) approval be given to a letter of strong support for future grant funding being provided in respect to future years, for Phase I, if resources were limited for 2000/2001; and
- (3) nominations be made from the Common Housing Register under the Council's normal policy.

495. **GENERAL REPORT**

(A) RENEWAL OF DOOR ENTRY SYSTEM - RADCLIFFE GARDENS - HIGH RISE BLOCK

A written report from Property Services was submitted on proposals for the renewal of the door entry system and communal entrance doors to the high rise flats at Radcliffe Gardens, Leamington Spa at an estimated cost of £15,000.

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RESOLVED that

- (1) the proposals as set out in the report be approved; and
- (2) the Head of Property Services be authorised to seek tenders for the work and that he, in consultation with the Chair of Housing Committee, be authorised to accept the lowest tender.

(B) PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT - CHARLES GARDNER ROAD

Members considered a written report from Property Services on the proposed layout for the communal facility for Charles Gardner Road.

RESOLVED that the scheme be approved.

(C) EXTERNAL PAINTING PROGRAMME 2000/2001

A written report from Property Services was submitted on proposals for the pre-painting joinery repairs and the external painting programme for 2000/2001 for dwellings in the district, at an estimated cost of £250,000.

RESOLVED that

- (1) subject to approval of the 2000/2001 HRA budget estimates, the proposals as set out in the report be approved; and
- (2) the Head of Property Services be authorised to seek tenders for the work and that he, in consultation with the Chair of Housing Committee, be authorised to accept the lowest tender.

(D) ENABLING SOCIAL/AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

A written report from Housing and Planning was submitted informing Members of how Housing and Planning Officers endeavour to achieve social/affordable housing through the negotiation process.

RESOLVED that this Committee supports the approaches currently being undertaken to deliver social/affordable housing within the district.

(E) RESPONSE REPAIRS EXPENDITURE MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered a written report from Housing on financial expenditure in relation to Routine Repairs, Voids, Out of Hours Repairs, Gas and Electric Contract Budgets for the first half of 1999/2000.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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(F) HOMELESS STATISTICS

The Housing Needs Manager submitted a written report which provided homeless statistical information for September and October 1999.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

496. **PUBLIC AND PRESS**

RESOLVED under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

497. **FORMER TENANT ARREARS**

The Head of Housing submitted a written report which provided details of rent arrears.

RESOLVED that former tenancy rent arrears of £16,651.42, as detailed in the report, be written-off.

(The meeting ended at 7.20 pm)

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