

MINUTES OF HOUSING COMMITTEE

21 January 2004 - Committee Room, Riverbank House, Bideford

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs M Brown (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs S E I Bushby (Vice Chairman)
Councillors J W E Cowle, D J Daniel, A J Eastman, Mrs P A Ferguson
(from 9.55am), Mrs S A Mounce, Mrs P J Paddon and T Sillifant

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R D Bond, G C Broyd and L S Ford.

87. MINUTES

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on the 10th December 2003 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(Vote: 8 For, 0 Against)

88. HOMELESSNESS STATISTICS

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Housing & Environmental Services relating to Homelessness Statistics for October/November 2003.

Resolved: That the report be received and noted.

(Vote: 8 For, 0 Against)

89. RENT ARREARS

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Housing & Environmental Services relating to progress in respect of the recovery of rent arrears. The graph attached to the report indicated the trend for 2001/02, 2002/03 and 2003/04 for comparative purposes.

The report also referred to the seasonal increase in the level of arrears which occurred just prior to Christmas which was almost identical to that of last year. The Director of Housing & Environmental Services confirmed that the real challenge was now to ensure that all those tenants who had missed payments were contacted promptly and pressure put upon them to make good the shortfall in the shortest possible time.

Resolved: That the report of the Director of Housing & Environmental Services with regard to rent arrears be noted.

(Vote: 8 For, 0 Against)

90. AGENDAS AND MINUTES OF THE TENANTS AND RESIDENTS ASSOCIATIONS

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Housing & Environmental Services which updated Members in connection with the meetings of Tenants and Residents Associations. It was noted that the Bideford East Residents Group had held their meeting on Monday the 15th December 2003, although a newsletter had not been produced. The remaining Tenants and Residents Associations had not held any meetings due to the Christmas period.

Resolved: That the report be received and noted.

(Vote: 8 For, 0 Against)

91. PROGRESS OF RENOVATION GRANT PROGRAMME 2003/04

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Housing & Environmental Services which provided information on the progress of the 2003/04 Renovation Grant Programme as at 14th January 2004.

The Director of Housing & Environmental Services advised that despite healthy commitment there

was some concern about the level of spend. This was attributed to the general difficulty of applicants obtaining builders estimates.

Resolved: That the progress report be noted.

(Vote: 8 For, 0 Against)

92. CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the report of Head of Financial Services relating to the 2003/04 Capital Programme which totalled £2,198,000. This was a reduction of £100,000 since the last meeting and related to expenditure on Private Sector Renewal Grants and Home Repairs Assistance Grants which had been slipped to 2004/05.

The Head of Financial Services also referred to prioritising of the potential 2004/05 Capital Programme and confirmed that a further report on this issue would be brought to Members in due course.

Resolved: That the Capital Programme for 2003/04 be noted.

(Vote: 8 For, 0 Against)

93. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2004/05 BUDGET

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services which sought approval of the Housing Revenue Account Budget and rent increases for 2004/05. Reference was made to the outturn for 2002/03 which was better than anticipated together with details of the Revised Estimate for 2003/04 resulting in an anticipated balance at 1st April 2004 of £439,000.

Estimates in respect of 2004/05 were attached to the report of the Head of Financial Services and these showed a surplus of £121,000 for 2004/05, leaving a balance of £565,000 at 31st March 2005. The logic in maintaining this balance, which was greater than the required minimum, related to the defraying of potential expenses in connection with the Option Appraisal process.

The report also detailed the contracts due to be let in 2004/05 in respect of the Planned Maintenance Programme and referred to the fact that with effect from 1st April 2004 rent rebates in respect of Council dwellings and the appropriate rent rebate subsidy would both be charged to the General Fund rather than the Housing Revenue Account. Despite this, the effect of rent rebate subsidy limitation will initially continue to fall on the Housing Revenue Account.

Members noted that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was once again limiting rent rebate subsidy with the limit for 2004/05 representing an increase of £1.98 per week. The effect of this limitation meant that for every additional £1.00 increase in rent, £88,000 would be generated but, after subsidy adjustment, only £36,000 would be received by this Authority.

HFS Resolved:

- (1) That an average rent increase of £2.00 per week be approved for dwellings for 2004/05.
- (2) That a rent increase of 30p per week be approved for garages for 2004/05.
- (3) That the Housing Revenue Account Revised Estimate for 2003/04 be approved at a total deficit of £19,190 and the Estimate for 2004/05 at a total of £121,470.

(Vote: 9 For, 0 Against)

94. HOUSING/COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT ADMINISTRATION

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Financial Services which provided an update on the progress of the Benefits Service for the quarters ended 30th June 2003 and 30th December 2003.

The report provided details of response times, staffing, discretionary hardship payment, performance standards, fraud, weekly incorrect benefit, and joint working initiatives with Job Centre Plus.

The Committee discussed in particular staffing issues and the payment of authorised overtime.

Members also received a quarterly report issued by the Department of Work and Pensions relating to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management and noted that further analysis, comparisons and reports would be presented to future meetings.

HFS Resolved:

- (1) That the report of the Head of Financial Services be noted.
- (2) That approval be given for the use of authorised overtime payments to help clear the backlog to be met from existing salary budgets or the income received from the Benefit Agency, in respect of Joint Working Initiatives as detailed by the Head of Financial Services.

(Vote: 9 For, 0 Against)

95. LAND AT NEWTON ST PETROCK

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive relating to the acquisition of an area of land at Newton St Petrock by the Parish Council. Attached to the report was a plan showing the area of land in question.

The Committee noted that the Parish Council had maintained the land marked "A" on the plan for many years, and hoped to acquire this through the Statutory Declaration process. The small area of land marked "B" was owned by the District Council and was surplus to requirements, and Members were asked to consider transferring this land to the Parish Council for a nominal consideration.

DSS Resolved: That Policy & Resources Committee be recommended that the said area of land marked "B" on the plan attached to the report of the Chief Executive be transferred to the Newton St Petrock Parish Council for a nominal sum.

(Vote: 9 For, 0 Against)

96. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 (AS AMENDED)

Resolved: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

(Vote: 9 For, 0 Against)

97. REVIEW OF COMMON HOUSING REGISTER APPLICATION CH/229

The Committee considered the confidential report of the Director of Housing & Environmental Services in respect of Common Housing Register Application CH/229. The report provided full details of the case and asked Members to determine the applicant's request for increased priority.

DHES Resolved:

- (1) That applicant CH/229 be made one offer of the next suitable flat to become vacant.
- (2) That in the event of the offer being declined, Officers pursue the normal legal process to obtain a Possession Order in respect of the property in which they now reside.

(Vote: 8 For, 1 Against)

98. OCCUPATION OF SHELTERED SCHEME PROPERTY

The Committee considered the confidential report of the Director of Housing & Environmental Services relating to the occupation of a sheltered scheme property. The report provided full details of the case and asked Members to consider whether to offer alternative accommodation to the current occupier.

DHES Resolved:

- (1) That the occupier of the sheltered scheme property be given notice, and rent in advance and deposit be offered to assist the family in finding private sector accommodation.
- (2) That if necessary appropriate legal action be pursued to gain vacant possession.

(Vote: 8 For, 1 Against)

99. TENANCY OF 22 GLEBELANDS, HOLSWORTHY

The Committee considered the confidential report of the Director of Housing & Environmental Services relating to the tenancy of 22 Glebelands, Holsworthy. The report provided full details of the case and sought Members views on whether efforts should be made to repossess the property.

DHES Resolved: That approval be given to proceed with County Court action against the current tenants for possession of the property.

(Vote: 9 For, 0 Against)

The meeting commenced at 9.30am and ended at 10.40am.

Date

Chairman