

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING COMMITTEE

31st March 2004
Committee Room, Riverbank House, Bideford

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs M Brown (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs S E I Bushby (Vice Chairman) (from 9.40 am)
Councillors G C Broyd, J W E Cowle, D J Daniel, A J Eastman,
Mrs P A Ferguson (from 10.05 am), L S Ford, Mrs S A Mounce,
Mrs P J Paddon and T Sillifant

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor W W Pillman

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R D Bond and J Morrish.

114. MINUTES

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 21st February 2004 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(Vote: 9 For, 0 Against)

115. HOUSING RENEWAL GRANTS 2004/05

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Health and Housing which sought approval to make changes to the current grant programme to comply with the Regulatory Reform Order 2002. The report gave details of the current position identifying the work of the Devon Housing Sub-Group; and a grant underspend of £170,000 due to a lack of movement in the mainstream renovation grant programme.

Members were provided with details of the options available to them for Housing Renewal Grants for 2004/05; and were recommended to consider adopting a Single Repair Grant in place of Renovation Grants and Home Repairs Assistance in accordance with the recommendations listed in the Regulatory Reform Order policy.

HHH Resolved: That the new Single Repair Grant detailed at Option 2 in the report of the Head of Health and Housing be approved.

(Vote: 10 For, 0 Against)

116. HOUSING RENEWAL PROGRAMME - OUTTURN FOR 2003/04 AND APPORTIONMENT FOR 2004/05

The Committee considered the tabled report of the Head of Health and Housing which provided details of the outturn for the Housing Renewal Programme for 2003/04, together with information on grant apportionment for 2004/05.

Members noted that the underspend for 2003/04 related principally to the inability of applicants to secure the services of builders. The report also referred to the legal commitment in respect of the outstanding mainstream grants totalling £105,000, which it was hoped might be carried over to the next financial year.

The Committee gave consideration to the options detailed in the report of the Head of Health and Housing in respect of the overall programme and apportionment of grants for 2004/05.

HHH Resolved:

(1) That the outturn of the Housing Renewal Programme for 2003/04 be noted.

(2) That the apportionment of grants for 2004/05 be as follows:

<u>Grant Type</u>	<u>Budget</u>
Repair Grant	£135,000
Disabled Facilities Grant	£180,000
Empty Homes	£80,000
Houses in Multiple Occupation	£50,000
Townscape Heritage Initiative	£10,000

(Vote: 10 For, 0 Against)

117. ANCHOR STAYING PUT (HOME IMPROVEMENT AGENCY) - REVIEW OF FEE LEVEL

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Health and Housing which detailed a request received from Anchor Staying Put (Home Improvement Agency) for a standard 10% fee for services relating to Local Authority grants. The report provided details of the fee structure introduced in 1997, together with the results of a bench marking exercise against other Local Authorities in the region. Members noted that ultimately the overall funding of home improvement agencies would be the subject of further reports to Committee.

HHH Resolved: That approval be given to the request received from Anchor Staying Put to a standard 10% fee for grant related work.

(Vote: 10 For, 0 Against)

118. EMERGENCY HELP LINE PROVISION

Councillor Mrs S Bushby declared a personal interest in this item.

The Committee considered the report of the Housing Manager relating to the provision of the emergency helpline. Members were asked to review the change made to the service provider, and to consider making permanent the post of Emergency Helpline Co-ordinator. Details were provided of the role and duties of this post, and it was noted that the proposed change of status could be achieved at an increased cost of approximately £2,300 to be met from the overall savings made on the service.

HM Resolved:

- (1) That the report of the Housing Manager on the savings made in the transition from Community Alarm at Barnstaple to Deane Helpline at Taunton be noted.
- (2) That Policy & Resources Committee be recommended to approve making permanent the post of Emergency Helpline Co-ordinator, increasing the current hours from 20 to 25 hours per week at an approximate cost of £2,300 to be met from the overall savings made on the transition of the service.

(Vote: 11 For, 0 Against)

119. HOUSING OPTION APPRAISAL - RETAINED FUNCTIONS

The Committee considered the report of the Housing Manager relating to retained functions under the Housing Option Appraisal Process. He advised that it was necessary to consider the possible structure of housing within the Authority in the eventuality of loss of the landlord function either by way of Stock Transfer or creation of an Arms Length Management Organisation. Consideration of this issue now would allow any comparative modelling to be undertaken on a consistent basis. Attached to the report was a list of functions that were not considered to be landlord functions, and it was noted that in practice the split related to functions currently carried out by the Housing Services Section as opposed to the Housing Management Section.

The report advised that it was the Officer's view that those functions detailed in the Appendix represented a positive mix of functions for a post transfer Authority. Attention was also drawn to the fact that post transfer the Authority would not have a Housing Revenue Account and all costs would have to be met from the General Fund.

The Housing Manager confirmed that a decision made at this stage would not be binding on the Authority. The purpose of the decision now was to give clear guidance to those involved in the Option Appraisal Process and there still remained the opportunity to review the list in future

should it prove expedient to do so.

HM Resolved: That the Appendix attached to the report of the Housing Manager be approved as being the functions envisaged being retained by the Council should Stock Transfer, or the establishment of an Arms Length Management Organisation, be the outcome of the Option Appraisal Process.

(Vote: 11 For, 0 Against)

120. VOID PROPERTIES

The Committee considered the report of the Housing Manager relating to the standard to which void properties should be repaired prior to being let to new tenants. In this connection Members had circulated to them for information purposes, a copy of the "Tenants Information and Repair Manual".

The report detailed the current position in respect of responsive repairs, together with information on the categorisation of the work. Attached to the report for Members information was the page relating to emergencies contained within the Tenants Manual. Subject to Members agreeing the standard of work detailed in the report to be carried out on void properties, it was proposed to commence the introduction of the whole range of changes within the current and the previously approved report on this topic.

HM Resolved: That the list of emergencies, as detailed in the Tenants Information and Repair Manual, be approved as being the basic standard of repair that will apply to all void properties prior to them being let.

(Vote: 11 For, 0 Against)

121. AGENDAS AND MINUTES OF THE TENANTS AND RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION

The Committee considered the report of the Housing Manager which included agendas/minutes from the Bideford East Residents Group, the Morwenna Area Tenant Residents Association and the Ethelwynne Brown Club.

The report also gave details of the efforts being made to form a tenant/resident association at Holsworthy.

The Committee discussed the contents of the newsletters particularly that relating to the Ethelwynne Brown Club. It was noted that this newsletter contained reference to slippery moss and the danger of falling, and concern was expressed about the liability of the District Council. Officers advised that the tenants newsletter was prepared by the tenants for the tenants and placed no legal obligation upon the Authority. It was also confirmed that the District Council recognised their moral obligation and that following the report in the newsletter the site had been inspected by Housing staff. The Head of Finance & IT confirmed that Insurance Companies would generally honour any claim providing it could be proved that the Local Authority had in place a regular inspection regime.

Resolved: That the report be received and noted.

(Vote: 11 For, 0 Against)

122. WINKLEIGH HOUSING NEEDS SURVEY 2003

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Health & Housing which sought to advise Members of the results of the Winkleigh Housing Needs Survey carried out during 2003 and sought approval of the forecast of affordable housing derived from that Survey. Attached to the report was a copy of the survey results.

Members noted that report has already been presented as a draft to Winkleigh Parish Council and had been generally well received. Notes of the questions raised at that meeting were attached to the report of the Head of Health & Housing.

From the results of the survey a 10 year forecast of affordable housing need had been developed and this was detailed in paragraphs 4.0 and 4.1 of the survey report. It was noted that the forecast identified a net affordable housing need of 63 units over 10 years.

HHH/
HDS

Resolved:

- (1) That the revised affordable housing forecast for Winkleigh as outlined in paragraphs 4.0 and 4.1 of annex A of the report of Head of Health & Housing be approved.
- (2) That Development & Trading Services Committee be asked to incorporate this forecast into their draft supplementary planning guidance on affordable housing.

(Vote: 11 For, 0 Against)

123. REPOSSESSION ACTIONS AT BARTON AND CROMLECH HOUSES

The Committee considered the report before them which sought approval for delegated authority to be given to the Head of Health & Housing to instruct possession action up to and including eviction in respect of households temporarily accommodated at the Council's homeless units, together with agreement that Housing Officers might conduct County Court possession proceedings in respect of such accommodation.

HHH | Recommended: That delegated authority be given to the Head of Health & Housing to authorise repossession action up to and including eviction in the case of the Council's homeless units at Barton and Cromlech Houses.

(Vote: 11 For, 0 Against)

Resolved: That approval be given to Housing Officers conducting County Court proceedings in respect of the repossession of homeless accommodation at Cromlech and Barton Houses.

(Vote: 11 For, 0 Against)

124. JOINT HOMELESSNESS OFFICER

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Health & Housing which advised Members of funding allocated to both Torridge District and North Devon District Councils in respect of the appointment of a joint Homelessness Officer. The report before Members provided background information in respect of the ODPM bid for funding for the post, together with information relating to the context within which it was anticipated the officer would operate and a copy of the draft job description.

Information was also provided relating to the timetable for filling the post which was currently funded for one year only, although it was hoped that further funding would be made available from the ODPM for a second and possibly subsequent years.

HHH | Resolved: That the report of the Head of Health & Housing be noted.

(Vote: 11 For, 0 Against)

125. HOUSING ADVICE AND HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Health & Housing relating to proposals for improving the Council's housing advice and homelessness prevention work. The report provided information relating to staffing and projects to support housing advice and homelessness prevention, together with proposals to amend the Deposit and Rent in Advance Loan Scheme in accordance with advice which had stemmed from the ODPM.

HHH | Resolved:

- (1) That approval be given to the Housing Officers and Housing Benefit Officers working closely together to develop means for using housing benefit, and discretionary housing payment, to prevent incidents of homelessness.
- (2) That approval be given to the changes to the deposit and rent in advance scheme as detailed in the report of the Head of Health & Housing.

(Vote: 11 For, 0 Against)

126. AFFORDABLE HOUSING - CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Health & Housing which sought to update Members on the current position regarding both the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme (ADP) and those sites where private development is proposed and affordable shares will be a requirement. Attached to the report as Appendix A was a copy of the 5 year programme previously approved updated to reflect subsequent decisions and progress. Also attached to the report was Appendix B which indicated the most recent developments in respect of a range of sites within the District where negotiations were being undertaken for affordable shares in keeping with the Authority's Local Plans Policy.

HHH Resolved: That the progress of affordable housing development in the District be noted, and the priorities as listed at Appendix A in the report of the Head of Health & Housing be reaffirmed.

(Vote: 11 For, 0 Against)

127. TORRIDGE HOUSING SURVEY 2004

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Health & Housing which advised Members of the intended timetable in respect of the Torridge Housing Survey 2004, and confirmed that an advertisement inviting expressions of interest from suitable contractors had been placed. In this respect it was noted that the advertisement had been placed in "Inside Housing", at an estimated cost of £1,200, which was to be funded from the capital allocation for the survey.

HHH Resolved: That the report of the Head of Health & Housing be noted.

(Vote: 8 For, 0 Against & 3 out of the room)

128. CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance & IT relating to the 2003/04 Capital Programme which totalled £2,229,000, which showed a decrease of £69,000 since the last meeting, arising from slippage to 2004/05. Details were also provided of the 2004/05 Capital Programme which totalled £1,717,000, which was increased since the last meeting arising from the 2003/04 slippage previously referred to.

HFIT Resolved: That the Capital Programmes for 2003/04 and 2004/05 be noted.

(Vote: 8 For, 0 Against & 3 out of the room)

129. 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 item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

(Vote: 8 For, 0 Against & 3 out of the room)

130. RENT ARREARS

The Committee considered the confidential report of the Housing Manager relating to progress in respect of the recovery of rent arrears. The report provided full details of the recovery process up to and after the court hearing date.

Members also had circulated to them a confidential report relating to tenant arrears over £500.

HM Resolved: That the reports of the Housing Manager relating to rent arrears be noted.

(Vote: 11 For, 0 Against)

The meeting commenced at 9.30am and ended at 11.15am.

Date
Chairman