

HOUSING PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE**13 July 2004****Attendance:**

Councillors:

Coates (Chairman) (P)

Berry (P)
Clohosey (P)
Higgins
Hoare (P)
MaynardNunn
Oxley
Pines (P)
Steel (P)
Tait (P)**Deputy Members:**Councillor Love (Standing Deputy for Councillor Nunn)
Councillor Allgood (Standing Deputy for Councillor Oxley)**TACT:**

Mr Rickman and Mr Gilbert-Wood

Others in attendance who addressed the meeting:

Councillor Davies

Others attending who did not address the meeting:

Councillor Hiscock (Portfolio Holder for Housing)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Nunn, Oxley, Higgins and Maynard.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE 2004/05 MUNICIPAL YEAR

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Clohosey be appointed Vice-Chairman for the 2004/05 Municipal Year.

3. APPOINTMENT OF TACT CO-OPTEEES

RESOLVED:

That Mr Gilbert-Wood and Mr A Rickman (Deputies Ms H Dewdney and Mr B Whitfield) be appointed as TACT co-optees on the Committee for the 2004/05 Municipal Year.

4. **TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

RESOLVED:

That meetings of the Committee commence at 6.30pm for the 2004/05 Municipal Year.

5. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 16 March 2004 be approved and adopted.

6. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no questions asked or statements made.

7. **APPOINTMENTS TO INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUPS**

(Report HO38 refers)

The Director of Health and Housing advised that the Council was sponsoring research work to establish 'best practice' for the development of Supported Housing initiatives in the community. The findings would be reported to the Supported Housing Informal Scrutiny Group in the autumn.

Members discussed proposals for an in-depth study of internal information systems within the Housing Department. A Member was concerned that there may be some confusion and inefficiencies regarding the operation of, for example, waiting lists and sharing of information across the department.

RESOLVED:

1. That the following appointments be made to the Supported Housing Informal Scrutiny Group:

Councillors Maynard, Nunn, Pines, Tait and Mr Rickman
(TACT)

2. That subject to the approval of Cabinet and Principal Scrutiny Committee, the establishment of a Housing Information Systems Informal Scrutiny Group be made with the following appointments:

Councillors Coates, Hoare, Pines, Steel and Mr Gilbert- Wood
(TACT)

8. **HOUSING GENERAL FUND 2003/04 FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE OUT-TURN**

(Report HO35 refers)

The Director of Health and Housing explained the reasons for budget variation for the Housing General Fund as set out in paragraph 2 of the report.

Further to questions, the Director of Finance confirmed that although the capital financing provision for Housing Enablement was not utilised during the current year, provision was made within the capital programme to carry forward the full amount. The underspend on Renovation grants related to capital funding provision that had

not been spent due to a number of projects not being completed within the current financial year.

RESOLVED:

That Cabinet be recommended to approve a carry-forward of £48,000 within the Housing General Fund as identified in paragraph 3 of the report for the reasons stated in the report.

9. **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2003/04 FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE OUT-TURN**

(Report HO36 refers)

The Director of Health and Housing explained the reasons for budget variation for the Housing Revenue Account as set out in paragraph 2.4 of the report.

It was noted that management overheads had continued to rise despite a gradual decrease of the numbers of Council houses. It was explained that this was due to a number of factors including increases in administration costs, changes in subsidy arrangements and improvements to the general level of service to tenants as well as costs related to initiatives such as the 'Supporting People' agenda. Members noted that the recent Best Value Review had concluded that the costs of Housing Services at the Council were comparable to other similar local authorities.

A Member suggested that the Council's approved contractors should be scrutinised regarding accountability of their costs and quality of delivery of their services. In reply, the Director of Health and Housing reminded Members that the Council complied with Contracts and Financial Procedure Rules regarding the procurement of services. It was confirmed that the majority of contracted services were put out to tender. Furthermore, this Committee monitored the quarterly financial out-turn of the Department's maintenance programme.

Members were reminded that in relation to quality, tenants were encouraged to utilise the pre-paid customer care return cards issued as part of the works order progress. Any adverse comments received from tenants were followed up with contractors concerned.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Rickman (TACT), referred to the comments made by TACT regarding SERCO performance as set out in report HO39 (elsewhere in these Minutes). The Director of Health and Housing advised that increased overhead costs had been a consequence of increased work levels and internal staffing issues.

The Committee discussed garage rents variance and it was agreed that there should continue to be concerted efforts by officers to re-let voids throughout the District. Mr Gilbert Wood (TACT) and, at the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Davies spoke in support of this proposal. The Director of Health and Housing reminded Members that staff had successfully re-let a number of garages in addition to concentrating on the re-letting of vacant homes quickly and carrying out repairs.

Further to a question, the Director of Health and Housing confirmed that officers would, in future, provide a further breakdown of the Housing Management - General budget as set out at Line A of the service summary (Appendix 1 of the report refers).

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted.

10. **HOUSING BEST VALUE REVIEW PROGRESS**

(Report HO37 refers)

The improvements to 'sign-up process' for new tenants was discussed and it was agreed as important for the overall improvement of customer service and for tenants to be aware of their obligations and expectations and also those of the Council as their landlord. Mr Gilbert-Wood (TACT) referred to the comments made by TACT as set out in report HO39 (elsewhere in these Minutes). Mr Gilbert-Wood requested that there continue to be progress in the implementation of the 'sign-up process'. The Director of Health and Housing confirmed that Members would be advised of the launch of the service via the Members' Bulletin.

The Director responded to a number of questions regarding the Summary Improvement Plan as appended to the report. It was confirmed that the on-line rent payments facility should be operational in the autumn and that it would be preferable for the continuation of quarterly (rather than monthly) reporting of void management to this Committee.

It was noted that there was some general updating required of out of date information (such as implementation dates) contained in the Improvement Action Plan.

RESOLVED

That the progress against the Improvement Action Plan be noted and that the revised target dates proposed in paragraph 2.2 of the report be approved.

11. **TACT COMMENTS ON REPORTS HO36 AND HO37**

(Report HO39 refers)

The above report had not been made available for publication within the statutory deadline. The Chairman agreed to accept the item onto the agenda as a matter requiring urgent consideration in order to inform the Committee of the views of TACT following its meeting held on 5 July 2004.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and the views of TACT be taken into consideration.

12. **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME AND MATTERS ARISING**

The Committee agreed that the additional business items be added to the Scrutiny Work Programme (in addition to the Informal Scrutiny Groups already detailed and a future report on the Transfer of Non-Operational Properties), with appropriate target dates for their reporting to Committee.

RESOLVED:

That Subject to the approval of Cabinet and Principal Scrutiny Committee, the following additional Business Items be added to the Work Programme:

- (i) Sheltered Services Management Review
- (ii) Review of Leasehold Management
- (iii) Review of Lettings Process

- (iv) Sheltered Housing – Homelessness Hard-to-Let Trial.

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and concluded at 8.20pm.

Chairman