

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CALL
IN SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN
THE WAYTEMORE ROOM, COUNCIL
OFFICES, THE CAUSEWAY, BISHOP'S
STORTFORD ON WEDNESDAY,
27 OCTOBER 2004 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M Wood (Chairman).
Councillors A M Graham, D E Mayes,
Mrs S Newton, P A Ruffles, S Rutland-Barsby,
J P Warren.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor R L Parker.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Heather Farrelly	- Homelessness and Monitoring Officer
Jeff Hughes	- Head of Democratic Services
Will O'Neil	- Head of Housing and Community Planning
Mary Orton	- Assistant Director (Policy and Performance)

HOUSING ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVES

Steve Henning	- Chief Executive, Riversmead Housing Association
Dale Walker	- Head of Asset Management and Regeneration, Anglia Housing Association

330 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of
Councillors R Conway, Mrs M H Goldspink, D M Hone and

H Penson.

RECOMMENDED ITEM

ACTION

**331 LARGE SCALE VOLUNTARY TRANSFER (LSVT)
PROMISES**

The Assistant Directors (Law and Control) and (Policy and Performance) submitted a report advising that, in accordance with the Council's constitution, a request had been received from several Members for a meeting of the Call In Scrutiny Committee to be convened. The Members concerned had requested that the Executive Member for Community and the Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) appear before the Call In Scrutiny Committee to explain what monitoring had been carried out of Stort Valley and Riversmead Housing Associations since the housing stock transfer and if the performance targets set at that time had been achieved. Furthermore, the Members concerned had enquired whether or not the improvements to the transfer stock had been carried out as outlined at the time of the transfer.

The Committee recalled that the Authority had sold its housing stock to Stort Valley and Riversmead Housing Associations in March 2002. The sale agreement required the Associations to achieve certain targets in relation to investment in stock, rent increases, right to buy sales and allocations.

The Committee further noted that, whilst most of these targets were scheduled to be met at the end of five years, the Council's Homelessness and Performance Monitoring Officer undertook quarterly monitoring of progress. In addition, an annual inspection of files and invoices was undertaken.

The Committee's intention was drawn to an appendix to the joint report which detailed the targets for the Housing Associations and their performance for the years 2002/03 and 2003/04.

ACTION

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Steve Henning and Dale Walker, representatives of the two Housing Associations.

The Housing Association representatives explained their respective organisations' approaches to meeting the targets identified for the first five years following the LSVT of the Council's housing stock.

Mr Walker highlighted, in particular, the approach taken by Stort Valley Housing Association in relation to a number of the targets. He explained that, initially, his Association had concentrated on "wind and weather" repairs to properties and had worked to put in place partnership arrangements to undertake the various works identified. The Committee noted that Stort Valley Housing Association were on target to deliver all the undertakings identified at the time of LSVT within the five year timescale.

Mr Walker stated that, in the current year, Stort Valley Housing Association would be spending £7.2m on repairs and would spend £7.3m next year. He detailed the current levels of performance and confirmed that Stort Valley Housing Association was ahead of its overall target for "delivering decent homes".

In response to questions from Members, Mr Walker explained, in detail, the rationale behind Stort Valley Housing Association's approach to achieving its targets. He highlighted that in the first year following the LSVT, Stort Valley Housing Association had undertaken a survey of all properties to produce a schedule of works. Mr Walker further highlighted his Association's commitment to disseminating information to all residents regarding the Association's programme of major repairs etc.

Mr Henning, of Riversmead Housing Association, explained the rationale behind his Association's

ACTION

approach to meeting the targets set at the time of the LSVT. He stressed that whilst the targets now under discussion related to a five year period, both Housing Associations needed to take a “long term” approach to repair and maintenance issues. Any “profit” element of a Housing Association’s activities was reinvested in order to achieve their overall objective of providing and maintaining social housing.

The Committee questioned the Housing Association representatives and the Executive Member for Community on how monitoring of the targets was undertaken. The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) confirmed that regular monitoring reports were submitted to the Performance Scrutiny Committee. In addition, various informal and formal mechanisms were in place. The Committee noted the details of these mechanisms.

In terms of prioritising repairs works, the Committee noted that decisions were taken at Board level by the two Housing Associations. Housing Association Boards comprised representatives of the Council and also tenants.

The Committee welcomed the fact that Housing Associations were working with other agencies through the Local Strategic Partnership for the area, particularly in terms of addressing issues such as vandalism within Housing Association estates.

The Committee also welcomed the important role that local members had to play in drawing the Housing Associations’ attention to repair and maintenance matters. The Housing Association representatives undertook to look to develop common protocols for addressing Members’ concerns on repair issues, particularly where such repairs related to structures such as gates and fences which had a visual impact on an area.

ACTION

The Assistant Director (Policy and Performance) advised of a number of proposed information seminars for Members on the Council's housing services that would be held during the period February to April 2005.

The Committee agreed that information regarding the progress of performance targets up to the end of the current five year period should be made available to all Members who require such information.

RECOMMENDED – that (A) the joint report now submitted be noted, and

(B) more detailed reports regarding the progress of performance targets up to 2006/07 in relation to LSVT promises and undertakings be made available to all Members who require such information.

APP

RESOLVED ITEM332 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the Call In Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 2 December 2003 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 8.38 pm