

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
 PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
 HELD IN THE WAYTEMORE ROOM,
 BISHOP'S STORTFORD ON TUESDAY
10 JULY 2007 AT 7.30 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs D L E Hollebon (Chairman)
 Councillors R H Beeching, N P Clark,
 A F Dearman, A D Dodd, Mrs J Mayes,
 G A McAndrew, M Wood.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors D Andrews, P Grethe, L O Haysey,
 A P Jackson, R L Parker.

Alan Dulson	- Riversmead Housing Association
Chris Ellison	- Circle Anglia Housing Association
Steve Henning	- Riversmead Housing Association
David Richardson	- Circle Anglia Housing Association

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Anne Freimanis	- Chief Executive
Claire Bennett	- Housing Strategy and Policy Manager
Lorraine Blackburn	- Committee Secretary
Martyn Dutfield	- Senior Leisure Manager
Philip Hamberger	- Director of Internal Services
Will O'Neill	- Head of Community and Cultural Services
Ceri Pettit	- Head of Strategic Direction (shared) and Performance Manager
Jackie Sayers	- Scrutiny Officer
Tracy Strange	- Head of Health and Housing

ACTION125 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors M Pope and J O Ranger.

126 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTSa) Backward Annual Efficiency Statement

It was noted that the Council had not met its efficiency target for 2006/07 and in the circumstances, Members agreed that this should be reviewed again at the next meeting of Performance Scrutiny Committee.

b) Outstanding reports

Updates were provided on four reports which should have been reported to the meeting on 10 July 2007.

c) Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of Performance Scrutiny Committee would now be held on 14 August 2007. The reasons for this were explained.

The Chairman made a number of announcements in relation to the Committee's work programme and items for scrutiny.

RESOLVED ITEMSACTION127 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

Councillor G A McAndrew was appointed as Vice-Chairman for the Civic Year 2007/08.

RESOLVED - that Councillor G A McAndrew be appointed as Vice Chairman for the Civic Year 2007/08.

ACTION128 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R H Beeching and A D Dodd declared a personal interest in the matter referred to at Minute 131 – Leisure Centre Contract Monitoring Performance. The nature of that interest was not stated.

RESOLVED - that Councillor E A McAndrew be appointed as Vice Chairman for the Civic Year 2007/08.

129 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2007 were submitted. Councillor A D Dodd requested that his apologies for that meeting be recorded.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting of Performance Scrutiny Committee held on 24 April 2007, as amended, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

130 PUBLIC HOUSING – STOCK TRANSFER UNDERTAKINGS

The Executive Member for Housing and Health submitted a report on the progress made by Riversmead and Circle Anglia Housing Associations in terms of the housing stock which was sold to them in March 2002. The report and its appendices, explained the promises made under a five year programme to improve the stock, what had been achieved and the progress to date, on undertakings which continued.

It was noted that Circle Anglia and Riversmead Housing Associations had met the majority of, and in most cases, exceeded the promises made. There were some areas where promises had not been met. This was explained in the report, now submitted.

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Clarification was sought in relation to the next five years and the work of the housing associations. The Executive Member explained that the Housing Associations were monitored by the Housing Corporation and were not obligated to report back to the Council on their future programme. The Executive Member hoped that, given the good relationship between the Associations and the Council, and the ongoing need in relation to nomination rights, there would be a regular exchange of information.

Members were informed of the 5 year environmental programme being undertaken by the Associations in the District and of their commitment to improving the community in which their tenants lived. Programmes would also be put in place to look at the concerns of residents and to apply resources to address their concerns. Chris Ellison of Circle Anglia, commented that £500,000 had been committed to a programme of environmental improvements and Steve Henning of Riversmead commented that £300,000 had been committed to environmental works from the Riversmead Housing Association. Work had been undertaken in Bengo on a garden and £600,000 had been earmarked for Sele Farm. Joint working with the Council and County Council would also be undertaken in an effort to secure joint funding.

Consultation with residents had been undertaken in relation to some garage sites which had become the source of anti-social behaviour.

The Executive Member commented that improvements in excess of £26m per Association had been spent so far on upgrading homes and that close liaison through a number of forums such as the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), enabled the Housing Associations and the Council, to work together in terms of planning future work.

Information was provided in terms of targets not met and the Associations' approach in relation to aids and adaptations.

Clarification was sought in relation to Circle Anglia's staffing

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levels and the fact that their Community Officers were “stretched” given the number of new properties being built. Circle Anglia recognised that growth in the area put pressure on their resources and neighbourhood staff, but felt that work could be accommodated within current staffing levels. There were however, plans to increase staff in August 2007.

In terms of the next five years, it was reiterated that the Council could not impose its will on the Housing Associations as they were regulated by the Housing Corporation. Housing Associations had to publish certain indicators and a Business Plan annually which was circulated to tenants. It was hoped that the spirit of good relations would prevail and that the Housing Associations would continue to make improvements. There would continue to be close liaison between the Council and the Associations in terms of monitoring and nominations. Any fall in standards could be raised within the context of community forums such as the LSP.

The Leader confirmed that the Associations had fulfilled their commitment under the Transfer of Stock Contract and expressed his confidence in the work of the Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) for the years ahead. He commented that the transfer of stock had been successful and this should be given due recognition.

Members felt that it would be useful to receive a copy of both Housing Associations’ Annual Report at Council each year.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members thanked representatives of the Housing Associations for attending.

RESOLVED – that (A) the action plan be noted; and

(B) the Housing Associations be requested to present their Annual Report to Council each year.

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ACTION131 LEISURE CENTRE CONTRACT MONITORING
PERFORMANCE

The Senior Leisure Manager submitted a report providing performance information on the leisure management contract with Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL). Figurative updates within the appendices were provided.

It was noted that the Leisure Client continued to operate a system which monitored contract outputs in relation to health and safety, marketing and service delivery and this information was fed back to monthly monitoring meetings with SLL. Specific performance indicators were set out in the report now submitted and from this, a number of conclusions could be drawn, the detail of which was set out in the report now submitted. It was recognised however, that information had not been received from Aspire in relation to levels of income and that this impacted on the ability to provide comparative information from the previous year. Direct Debit income from gym membership was a noticeable revenue generator between December 2006 and June 2007.

Members expressed concern that, from the information provided, there was insufficient detail to enable a conclusion to be drawn in terms of a previous decision to close Leventhorpe Swimming Pool to casual swimming at weekends. A Member referred to statistical information which had been provided to him for Leventhorpe Pool in relation to the usage of the pool and gym at peak and off peak times.

Clarification was sought in relation to the figures provided, the opportunities for "fun swims" and what was being done to address the decline in casual swimming at Hartham Pool (37%) and the June Direct Debit figures. The Senior Leisure Manager commented that Hartham had been identified as the largest in terms of decline and of issues around maintenance and appearance. Officers continued to work with SLL to address such issues. Reference was made to the recent levels of Council investment such as ongoing

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improvements to the changing rooms. The basis of Direct Debit timeframes were explained and the impact this had on budgets when direct debits were cancelled and then restarted.

The Leader noted the information provided, but felt that Members should await information generated by SLL.

The role of the task and finish group in terms of leisure provision for 2007/08 was outlined and clarification was also sought on the performance indicators in relation to employee and expenditure ratios which would provide insight and information for Members.

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received; and

(B) Members' views be used to inform the Task and Finish Group.

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132 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chief Executive submitted a report detailing the work of Performance Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the 2006/07 Civic Year. The Scrutiny Officer provided updates on the potential topics for scrutiny and the work programme was amended according to Member's wishes.

RESOLVED - that the work programme, as amended be approved.

133 HOUSING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN MONITORING – INFORMATION REPORT

A report was submitted which set out the successful performance on the Council's Housing Strategy 2006 -2007 Action Plan. A number of partner organisations had contributed to the strategy's performance and these organisations had been consulted on an ongoing basis. It was noted that 33 of the 35 actions in the Action Plan had been achieved and completed, or were achieved and ongoing. Where action had not been progressed, the report

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recommended appropriate action.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

134 HOUSING REVIEW ACTION PLAN MONITORING – INFORMATION REPORT

A report was submitted which set out the progress made against the Housing Inspection Improvement Plan agreed by Performance Scrutiny Committee on 14 November 2006. The report detailed what improvements had not been fully achieved, the progress made and action being taken. The Housing Service Improvement Plan showed that 30 of the 44 improvements had either been completed or were completed and ongoing. Two actions were not applicable and would be addressed within the context of the next Housing Strategy Action Plan.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

135 ANNUAL OMBUDSMAN LETTER 2006/07

The Chief Executive submitted a report on the content of the annual letter from the Local Government Ombudsman. It was noted that there had been 13 complaints to the Ombudsman which was a continuing downward trend. The largest group of complaints had been about Development Control.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 9.07. pm.

Chairman
Date