

MINUTES of the meeting of Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday, 10th December, 2007 at 10.00 a.m.

Present: Councillor PA Andrews (Chairman)
Councillor WLS Bowen (Vice Chairman)

Councillors: PGH Cutter, AE Gray, AT Oliver, JE Pemberton,
RV Stockton and JK Swinburne

In attendance: Councillors LO Barnett, JG Jarvis and MD Lloyd-Hayes

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors ME Cooper, H Davies, MJ Fishley, KG Grumbley and Mr R Kelly, Voluntary Sector representative.

It was noted that Councillor A Seldon had been incorrectly listed as a Member of the Committee and that Councillor AE Gray had been omitted from the list of Members.

29. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor PGH Cutter substituted for Councillor KG Grumbley.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor AE Gray declared a personal interest in respect of agenda item 6: Presentation by Registered Social Landlords, as a Council appointee to the Board of Herefordshire Housing Ltd. She also declared a personal interest in agenda item 9: Learning Disabilities Service Improvement Plan, as a provider of such services.

31. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2007 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

32. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

There were no suggestions from members of the public.

33. PRESENTATION BY REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORDS

(Councillor AE Gray declared a personal interest)

The Committee received presentations from the Marches Housing Association Limited and Herefordshire Housing Limited.

These were two of the three Registered Social Landlords with most properties in

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Herefordshire, a presentation from Festival Housing Ltd having been made to the Committee in October 2007.

Presentation by Marches Housing Association Ltd (MH)

Mr D Hinchliffe (Managing Director) and Mr C Boote (Director of Operations) gave the presentation.

MH outlined the history of the Association noting that it was part of the Jephson Housing Association (JHA) group that owed around 14,000 homes nationally. However, MH had a defined geographic area, its own financial arrangements and Board, the composition of which was described. MH managed almost 2,800 homes, with a turnover approaching £9m. It had 75 staff based in a new office in Leominster and investors in people, and investors in excellence accreditation. The links with the group in terms of shared policy work and IT were described.

Resident involvement was fundamental to the way in which MH aspired to work. A range of initiatives for engaging with tenants was outlined.

In terms of performance, in 2006, MH had been in the top quartile for voids and arrears, the second quartile for relets, 3rd & bottom for repairs – but much better in 2007 although repairs performance had hit tenant satisfaction. MH had sound finances with modest surpluses each year.

Stock investment was described noting that this was 99% decent homes compliant with continued investment planned.

The target for new development had been 70 units pa, but this was now stepping up to 100 pa in recognition of housing need. Developments under Section 106 agreements included Saxon Gate, Hereford and Kingstone. Housing Corporation developments included South Street and Middlemarsh in Leominster. Various developments were described and pictures of them shown.

In recent assessments MH had received 4 green lights from the Housing Corporation, Chartermark assessment was awaited and quality housing services accreditation was being pursued. There had been no recent Audit Commission inspection but MH had volunteered for inspection at short notice.

MH's current priorities included changes to sheltered housing, strengthening resident involvement, new customer service standards, improving the repairs service, achieving top quartile performance and growing the Association.

In response to questions the following principal points were made:

- MH confirmed that, with the exception of a very few properties reserved for people with particular needs, all of the Association's properties in Herefordshire were allocated through the Home Point choice based lettings scheme. One of the important features of this process was that, whilst applicants might not always like the outcome, the decisions made were transparent.
- Asked about design standards of buildings MH explained that where properties were being provided under a Section 106 Agreement with a Developer, such as at Saxon Court, Hereford, MH had minimal input. In those instances, properties were provided to standard designs prescribed by the developer. In contrast where MH led on the design and procurement it had the freedom to be more creative.

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- In relation to energy efficiency, new buildings met the required national standards. Some of the latest techniques were piloted on individual properties as experiments. However, this was expensive, unless there was Housing Corporation Grant, and could not be trialled on all new properties.
- A new environmental policy had been introduced which also placed a greater emphasis on better efficiency for the existing stock.
- In relation to specific issues raised about repairs at Saxon Court, Hereford MH said that this stemmed from the fact that MH was not in sole control of the development.
- Asked about repairs generally MH explained that it had taken on a new contractor in April 2006. There were often teething troubles when this happened. These had taken longer than expected to overcome and whilst performance had now improved MH did not have confidence the contractor would achieve the standards of excellence required by MH and a new contractor was being sought.
- It was asked how many of the 100 new houses per year MH said it planned to build were to be in Herefordshire in 2008/09, whether it had identified land for development and what links there were with Parish Councils. MH said that identifying sites in Herefordshire was a problem. MH was strengthening its Development Team, noting the importance of ownership and planning permission having been secured, thereby demonstrating the capacity to deliver a scheme, in obtaining funding from the Housing Corporation. Two developments were proposed in Herefordshire in 2008/09 totalling 36 units. There were no large sites held for development. Discussions were taking place with a number of Parish Councils on possible smaller sites. The expectation was that most of the larger developments would be developer led.
- The Cabinet Member (Environment and Strategic Housing) commented on the difficulty in obtaining planning permission for affordable housing. He reported that he had held discussions with MH along with a range of organisations about how the Council might be able to help to identify sites.
- MH's plan to hold a seminar on affordable housing for Town and Parish Councils was discussed. It was suggested that it would be beneficial if invitations could also be extended to Members of Herefordshire Council.

The Chairman thanked Mr Boote and Mr Hinchliffe.

Presentation by Herefordshire Housing Association Limited (HHL)

The report of the Audit Commission's recent inspection of Herefordshire Housing Ltd had been circulated separately to Members of the Committee. The Commission had assessed HHL as providing a "poor", Zero star service that had uncertain prospects for improvement.

Mr Peter Brown, Chief Executive of Herefordshire Housing Ltd (HHL) gave the presentation. He referred to the Audit Commission inspection result and its effect but said it was important to recognise that five years on from the stock transfer from the Council to HHL all the promises made at that time had been delivered.

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He noted that HHL was the largest housing association in the area and the only one that worked solely with Herefordshire. HHL employed 215 people, and had a turnover of £18 million.

He described and praised the operation of the Careline providing hour Telephone support to 19,000 customers, employing 30 people and generating income of £735,000.

He reported on the results of the Audit Commission's other recent inspections of housing Associations (Two Rivers – 1 ★ and promising, Worcester Community – 2 ★ and promising, Gloucestershire – 0 ★ and promising, Festival – 2 ★ and promising, West Mercia – 2 ★ and promising).

He noted that the Audit Commission would revisit HHL in 12 -18 months time and he had set an ambitious target of a 1 ★ rating with excellent prospects for improvement. He intended to achieve this through improved communication with customers, improved performance management, supported by accurate, timely and localised information, developing a culture that was open to review and challenge, being self critical and learning and actively seeking out and copying the best.

He had found staff knowledgeable, strong and willing to change and he wanted to harness and release their enthusiasm and energy.

The focus on Customer Services to 2010 would involve better services with higher customer satisfaction, customer involvement being integral to the work; support for the development & improvement of Homepoint, repairs appointments offered and "right first time, in time", the second 5-years of major works completion in sight, rising quality of life with environmental works underway; anti-social behaviour tackled, more support services for the more vulnerable and careline delivering services to more people.

The action to build an excellent business by 2010 would involve multi-skilling for in-house maintenance teams, e-communication for everyone out on site, office outlets being appropriate and affordable, value for money per home improved, a wider range of customer involvement, streamlined governance and operations, Investors In People and quality accreditation, improving annual efficiency statements and all performance indicators being at the median or above.

The aim was for HHL to be a recognised and admired name in housing, playing a part in shaping regional and national agendas with an ongoing programme of development into future years, working closely with Edgar Street Grid, developing skills in a number of specialist areas and with careline continuing to develop and support the growth of HHL.

HHL had a lot of attributes with huge commitment. It had a sound long-term financial plan, was attractive to lenders and had a strong asset base. There was the potential for a huge success story. People wanted HHL to succeed.

The following quick wins had been identified: Deliver the Audit Commission Action plan, get to know customers – data gathering, be passionate about diversity, plan, organise, mobilise and deliver.

Identified challenges were to improve service delivery, develop floating support through Supporting People, resolve direction on Disraeli Court and develop a programme of affordable housing.

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He summarised his approach as being to clarify strategic direction, build unity and consensus, refresh sense of purpose, promote achievements externally, as a lot had been achieved, and mark a turning point for HHL.

In response to questions the following principal points were made.

- Asked about an apparent contradiction in the Audit Commission report about rent collection and rent arrears, Mr Brown said that rent collection at 99% was high performance but rent arrears at 4.8% compared poorly with performance for the Region.
- Mr Brown confirmed the level of the Association's capital borrowing and that it was able to repay this debt.
- Attention was drawn to a number of difficulties being experienced in Ross-on-Wye relating to repairs and anti-social behaviour. It was asked whether external consultants were to be appointed to resolve these issues. Mr Brown replied that because of the new perspective he himself was bringing to the organisation he could fulfil the role of a consultant, without incurring additional costs.
- In terms of repairs there was a dilemma in that the Association employed a direct labour force that was highly thought of and had good response times. However, the service did not represent good value for money. He expected it would take 6-9 months for him to analyse this issue and decide what action to take.
- The Association had a dedicated team to deal with antisocial behaviour issues and it would be important to ensure that that too delivered.
- It was asked whether Herefordshire Housing would be involved in the seminar on affordable housing being proposed by MH. Mr Brown said that the Council needed to work with all the Housing Associations in the County and that this was achieved through the Housing Association Forum.
- Mr Brown advised that although affordable housing developments were in the pipeline his priority was to ensure that existing services were being delivered to the standard he expected.
- The efficiency of the pre-cast reinforced concrete stock was questioned. PB said that whilst relatively spacious his understanding was that these buildings did suffer to an extent from heat loss.

The Chairman thanked Mr Brown, wished him success in his endeavours and noted his willingness to provide a progress report to the Committee.

RESOLVED: That Herefordshire Housing be invited to provide a further update to the Committee in six months time.

34. REVENUE BUDGET 2007/08

The Committee considered an update on the projected outturn on the 2007/08 revenue budget for Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing as at the end of October 2007.

The Head of Financial Services presented the report. The projected overspend on

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adult social care was £3.93 million. Allowing for the fact that Invest to Save Monies allocated in the budget for 2007/08 would not now be spent and an allocation for adult social care from the centrally held contingency the projected overspend reduced to between £1.7-£2 million.

A number of risks that might have a bearing on this projection were set out in the report together with progress on remedial actions.

The projected overspend on Strategic Housing had increased to £100,000 principally because of the demand for temporary accommodation for homeless people.

In response to questions the following principal points were made:

- The Head of Financial Services confirmed that the invest to save monies formed part of the base budget and would be required in future years. It was only proposed to use the unspent sum in the 2007/08 budget to offset the overspend in the current year.
- The Director of Adult and Community Services reinforced the need for the invest to save monies to remain in the base budget. There was a lead in time for a number of initiatives to remodel services to take effect. It was therefore proposed to manage resources available in the adult social care budget as a whole to offset the overspend in the current year.
- The projected underspending on commissioning and improvement was in part attributed to recruitment. A question was asked about progress in addressing this and the impact on the service. The Head of Social Care (Adults) said that options were being considered but these were limited. It was difficult to recruit people with the desired experience.
- The potential additional costs associated with the opening of Leadon Bank home for older people were raised. The Head of Social Care (Adults) explained that it had been expected when the contract with Shaw Homes had been let that those resident at the time would take the new accommodation. However, for a variety of reasons this had not proved to be the case, potentially leaving a number of vacancies for which the Council would have to pay the contractor for a period. She noted that there was a difficult balance to be struck in ensuring all places in a new facility would be taken up. Factors to be taken into account included the timing of needs assessments and resolution of various financial issues. She outlined action being taken to try to fill the vacant places expressing confidence that once families and carers realised the quality of the facility.
- It was proposed that a report should be prepared on the lessons learned from the Leadon Bank experience and how this might bear on the Extra Care Housing project at Rose Bank, Hereford.
- The high number of expressions of interest in a place at Rose Bank was noted whilst recognising that not all applicants would meet the eligibility criteria.
- A question was asked about discussions with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) the funding of free nursing care and their potential impact. It was reported that the service was provided under a Section 75 Agreement between the Council and the PCT. Discussions were continuing over the respective responsibilities of the two organisations. The cost to the Council depending on the outcome might be up to £100,000 - 150,000.

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- The Head of Strategic Housing commented on the factors contributing to the pressure on the strategic housing budget. These included a number of early releases from prison and evictions as a consequence of raising rent. There also negotiations over a number of families with a history of rent arrears or antisocial behaviour.

RESOLVED: That having regard to the potential additional costs associated with the opening of Leadon Bank Home for Older People consideration be given by the Executive to how such contracts can be more proactively monitored and the Executive's response reported to the Committee's next meeting, this report to include lessons learned from the Leadon Bank experience and how this might bear on the Extra Care Housing project at Rose Bank, Hereford.

35. ADULT SERVICES AND STRATEGIC HOUSING PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Committee considered the national performance indicators position and other performance management information for the Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing Divisions within the Adult and Community Services Directorate.

A page of adult social indicators inadvertently omitted from the printed agenda papers was circulated.

The report noted in its annual judgment the Commission for Social Care Inspection had concluded that adult social care was delivering adequate services with uncertain prospects for improvement. The Service had retained its one star rating.

The Director of Adult and Community Services commented that he had had concerns about the implications of the unfavourable inspection of Learning Disability Services. The judgment recognised the way in which the Council had accepted the criticisms and acted to address them and improved performance against performance indicators. The Council was one of 28 authorities with a one star rating. The initial aim was to achieve a two star rating in the next period.

He advised that the Council had not been notified of any further inspections in the current financial year.

In response to questions the following principal points were made:

- It was asked what action was being taken to address the findings of the satisfaction survey of people receiving home care services. Particular concern was expressed over the finding that only 35 % of service users felt in control of their daily life.
- The Head of Social Care (Adults) said that consideration was being given to action that could be taken in particular ways of making the service more flexible within the existing budget. She noted difficulties some Independent Sector Providers were having in retaining staff adding that the Council was seeking to help them to do so.

RESOLVED:

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- That (a) the report on Adult Social Care and Strategic Housing performance be noted;
- (b) areas of concern continue to be monitored; and
- (c) a more detailed report on the findings of the satisfaction survey of people receiving home care services be made to the next meeting.

36. LEARNING DISABILITIES SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN - PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received an update on the Council's response to the Commission for Social Care (CSCI) report on the Learning Disability Service.

This commented on progress since the report to the Committee in October.

The Learning Disabilities Accommodation and Support Project Manager presented the report. She also outlined the future challenges facing the service including an increasing number of people requiring services, many with complex social care and health needs. It was important that the steps taken to modernise the service were communicated to service users and staff and were clearly understood.

It was noted that overall progress was good with all actions on target.

It was requested that a briefing note be circulated to the Committee giving an analysis of the categories of people for whom learning disability services were being provided, including in-county and out county provision.

A further monitoring report was requested to confirm completion of the action plan. It was also requested that this report should include comment on the strategy to meet the future challenges.

RESOLVED: That a further monitoring report be provided to the next meeting to confirm completion of the action plan, together with comment on the strategy to meet the future challenges to the service.

37. LEARNING DISABILITY SERVICES – TENDER FOR ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT PARTNER

(Councillor AE Gray declared a personal interest)

The Committee considered progress with the tendering exercise for learning disability accommodation and support services.

The Accommodation and Support Project Manager presented the report. This explained that the proposal was to transfer the management and development of the Council's directly operated learning disability residential services at Ivy Close and Southbank Close and the running of five group homes and the intensive supported living service currently provided as part of block contracts within the independent sector.

The tendering process was described reporting that it had been audited by the Council's audit services and found to be satisfactory. Legal Services had also approved the process.

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The report also briefly set out the agreed principles upon which negotiations with the preferred provider (Focus Futures) would be conducted and some of the specific objectives and targets and some other elements on which the contract would be based.

The Accommodation and Support Project Manager said that the preferred provider had demonstrated a commitment to delivering Best Value, had substantial experience of running transferred services and had been the preferred choice of service users.

It was intended that a decision on the award of the contract would be taken by Cabinet in January 2008 with a view to the contract commencing on 1 April 2008.

Members expressed a wish to look in more detail at the proposals, including for example the financial model upon which the contract was based.

The Committee was advised that consideration would need to be given to how the Committee could appropriately contribute to this process having regard to the position on the contractual negotiations and that it might be appropriate to seek legal advice.

Members agreed that there should be a seminar, to which all Members of the Council should be invited and that there should also be a special meeting of the Committee to formally scrutinise the issues before a final decision on whether to award the Contract was taken by Cabinet.

RESOLVED: That, subject to legal advice, a seminar on the proposals for learning disability services be arranged for all Members of the Council and that, a meeting of the Committee also be held to scrutinise the proposals before a final decision on whether to award the Contract was taken by Cabinet.

38. WIDEMARSH WORKSHOP - UPDATE

The Committee received an update on progress in developing the site of Widemarsh workshops and relocating the present services.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

39. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme.

The following additional items were identified further to discussion of previous items on the agenda:

- Contract Monitoring Arrangements – Executive's Report
- Detail of Satisfaction Survey of people receiving home care services
- Learning Disabilities Service Improvement Plan – Progress Report
- Herefordshire Housing Ltd – Progress Report

RESOLVED: That the work programme as amended be approved and reported to the Strategic Monitoring Committee.

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The meeting ended at 1.00 p.m.
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CHAIRMAN