

Agenda Item

EXECUTIVE BOARD

12 April 2006

JG/MH



Housing Project Board (Housing Overview Committee)

Summary

The recommendations that recently came forward from the Project Team working on the housing stock options appraisal proposed the establishment of a Housing Project Board (Housing Overview Committee). The main purpose of the Committee will be to keep under review the recommendation for the Council to retain its housing stock. The new body will comprise tenants, Members of the Council, and community representatives working together to oversee the Council's landlord functions. It will also have a role in monitoring performance, promoting good practice and overseeing service improvements, and promoting tenant involvement.

Recommendation

The Executive Board recommends to Council:

1. The establishment of a Housing Overview Committee with the purpose and the terms of reference set out at Annex 1.
2. A scheme for the co-option of non-Council members as set out in this report, the detail to be delegated to the Head of Legal and Member Services

a) Reasons for Recommendation

To act upon a recommendation from the Project Team who undertook the housing stock options appraisal.

b) Alternative Options

Not to establish a Housing Project Board.
Set up an informal group of tenants and Members.
Continue the work of the Project Team on the housing stock options appraisal.

c) Risk Considerations

Housing stock options appraisal not 'signed off' by Government Office.
Disappoint Project Team by not implementing its recommendation.

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

These are as set out in the report.

e) Date for Review of Decision

Review the operation of the Board/Committee after its first year of operation.

1 Main Body of the Report

- 1.1 One of the recommendations flowing from the housing stock options appraisal is the establishment of a Housing Project Board or Housing Overview Committee. This would

comprise tenants, Members, and community representatives. The main purpose of the new body will be to consider matters relating to the Council's landlord activities.

- 1.2 The idea for the Board or Overview Committee came from the housing stock options appraisal TAFF and Project Team, who have recommended that the Council retain its housing stock but keep the decision under review. It was felt that the joint working arrangements between Members, tenants and officers that contributed towards the housing stock options appraisal, could be continued and would ensure that the reasons for concluding that the Council retain the housing stock is monitored and reviewed in the light of changing circumstances.
- 1.3 The new body could also usefully fulfil other functions including performance monitoring, assessing service improvement ideas, assessing and promoting new initiatives and good practice. The approach being suggested would take forward a desire to involve tenants more in decisions affecting their homes and empower our tenants to work with us to shape future housing service provision. Draft terms of reference were considered at the March meeting of the Executive Board and have been reproduced in **Annex 1**.
- 1.4 A number of issues are already coming forward for consideration by the Housing Overview Committee such as the recent request by Government Office that we undertake a warranted stock condition survey in the next few years to supplement our existing stock condition data. Government Office also wants us to consider inviting the Audit Commission in to undertake a housing inspection. The Committee could usefully assess the merits of this approach and consider opportunities for Peer Review and Benchmarking exercises in preparation for any inspection.
- 1.5 Establishing a body of tenants working with Members and community representatives would also be useful preparation for any future significant changes in the ownership and/or management of the housing stock.
- 1.6 It was felt that in order to give the Housing Overview Committee some profile and a significant role in contributing to the management of the housing stock it would be preferable if its role and purpose was built into the Council's Constitution. This approach has a number of implications for the Council as executive arrangements are governed by the Local Government Act 2000.
- 1.7 It would seem that the best way of ensuring the level of tenant involvement we desire is to establish the Housing Project Board as an Overview and/or Scrutiny Committee approved by full Council. This would allow the new body to advise and report to the Executive Board. Co-optees may be included on the Committee, if the Council approves a scheme for co-opted members, and will need to be agreed by the Council. So tenants and leaseholders could be legitimately co-opted onto the Committee. I envisage that tenants and leaseholders will be elected through the Tenant Customer Panel, but their appointment would be subject to Council approval. Following discussions with the Head of Legal and Member Services, it is proposed that the co-opted members would receive travelling and meal expenses where applicable, but not any form of attendance allowance. This is in line with the arrangements most housing trust boards adopt for their members.
- 1.8 For Council Members places on the Committee will need to be offered to political groups on a proportional basis. I understand that Executive Board Members will not be eligible to serve on the new Committee.
- 1.9 There will be a need to have arrangements to ensure confidentiality on certain issues likely to be presented to the new Committee and a certain amount of training will be required to ensure that the Committee works efficiently and effectively.
- 1.10 There may be occasions when the Committee recommends actions that the Executive Board do not approve or support.

However, I am confident that establishing the Committee will take our tenant participation work to an improved level and present tenants with a genuine opportunity to influence the management of their homes.

Legal Implications

As indicated in the report, if the Project Board is to operate independently from the Executive Board, and make recommendations, it will need to operate as an Overview/Scrutiny committee in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000. Any co-optees will need to be approved by Council and will be required to comply with the Local Government Code of Conduct for members.

Financial Implications

There is likely to be a small additional cost to the authority. Although not specifically mentioned, the proposed Housing Revenue Account Business plan should contain sufficient financial resources to meet this cost.

Consultation on Reports to the Executive

The recommendation flows from the Project Team working on the housing stock options appraisal and has been considered by the Tenant customer Panel.

Background Papers

- Housing Stock Options Appraisal Final Report Executive Board 15th March 2006.
- Local Government Act 2000.

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Executive Board
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