

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING BEST VALUE REFERENCE GROUP MEETING held on 16 OCTOBER 2000

Members in attendance:- Councillor Mrs S Flack, M Hibbs and R Stone.

Tenant Representative:- Mrs J Bolvig-Hanson.

Officers in attendance:- B D Perkins, R Chamberlain, R Goodey, D Demery, E Petrie and A Dellow.

- 1 Notes of previous meeting held on 7 September 2000 were agreed.
- 2 A report was submitted to the Reference Group which outlined a number of issues that had emerged for consideration following the detailed work which had been carried out by a number of review teams looking at the landlord functions of the Housing Service.
- 3 Following detailed consideration of the issues concerned the following options were accepted in principle by the Reference Group:

(a) Right to Buy

- * Continue with existing arrangements and improve efficiency.
- * Consider the implications of being more proactive in promoting the uptake of Right to Buy.

(b) Leaseholders

- * Encourage, in principle, leaseholders to participate in Tenant Participation arrangements.

(c) Rents

- * Carry out a full consultation with the customers of the service (arrangements in hand).
- * To consider further expanding the service in a further way of reducing rent arrears.
- * Make proposal to address rent levels at the next rent setting series of meetings in late 2000.
- * Consider amending the rent arrears write off procedures to permit the writing off of current tenant arrears in exceptional circumstances where it would be inappropriate to pursue.

(d) Allocations

- * Existing arrangements to be reviewed.
- * Consider proposals to extend the allocation of some bungalows to other age groups, which may entail the loss of some bungalow stock via Right to Buy.
- * Consider the redevelopment of bungalow sites if appropriate.
- * Consider proposals to provide applicants on the Housing Register with more choices of area as to where they would like to be considered for rehousing.

- * Consider proposals to review the criteria for placing applicants on the Housing Register and when applications are actively considered for housing.
- * Discontinue the policy of providing tenants with a grant when they move to smaller accommodation.
- * Embark on open advertising of difficult to let sheltered units.
- * Introduce a policy to gradually eliminate bedsit sheltered units over a long time subject to funding.
- * Carry out a review of garage letting policy.
- * Consider the potential of garage sites if the need for garages, for Council tenants, does not exist.

(e) Estate Management

- * Review the Conditions of Tenancy at an appropriate time after a decision has been taken by the Council, and its tenants, on the stock ownership question.
- * Produce a handbook, in conjunction with the review of the Conditions of Tenancy, at an appropriate time after a decision has been taken by the Council and its tenants on the stock ownership question.
- * Maintain the current new service of estate checks by Housing Staff ensuring Conditions of Tenancy are enforced and review the need for the service in due course.
- * Review what type of welfare work and the amount that should qualify for assistance for approved tenants.
- * Consider limiting the annual budget for welfare related work, which could create waiting lists.
- * Review the criteria as to who qualifies for welfare assistance.

(f) Repairs and Planned Improvements

- * Extend existing contracts for a further two years in view of uncertainty regarding future management of the stock.
- * Review the Council requirements from contractors and consider the introduction of partnership arrangements with contractors.

- 4 The Reference Group noted that the final report from the Stock Options Appraisal Consultant had now been received. Copies were distributed to Members.
- 5 It was agreed that the Council will need time to consider the conclusions of the report and, in addition, further information on housing issues were still awaited from Government.
- 6 It was reported that the landlord options report, with the initial views of the Reference Group, will be submitted to a special joint Tenant Panel meeting on 2 November 2000 and the comments from that meeting will be reported back the Reference Group.

- 7 It was agreed that the main business of the next meeting will be to consider the final report to the Best Value Sub-Committee.
- 8 Next meeting 7.00 pm Monday, 13 November 2000, in the Staff Room at the Saffron Walden Council Offices.