

Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum

A meeting of Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum was held on Tuesday, 26th September, 2006.

Present: Cllr M Frankland (Chairman), Cllr Mrs J Beaumont, Cllr K Faulks, Cllr K Leonard, Cllr W Noble, Cllr F G Salt; Mrs M Cooper (University of the Third Age), Mrs D Fairhurst (Stockton Residents & Community Groups), Mr S Neal (Teesside Pensioners), D & Mrs S Parker (Retired Members Association)

Officers: S Rogalski (DNS) and Mrs T Harrison (LD)

Also in attendance: Mr Braney

Apologies: Cllr M Cherrett, Mrs E Chapman (St John's Living Well), Mr Raj Put (Stockton International Family Centre), Mrs D Rose (Age Concern), Mr L Stanley (Royal Navy Associates), Alderman E Wood (Age Concern)

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 29th August 2006

Members considered the minutes of 29th August 2006.

CONCLUDED that the minutes be agreed as a correct record.

2 Housing Issues - Simon Rogalski (Housing Strategy Officer) and Councillor Leonard (Cabinet Member for Housing) will be attending to provide information and answer questions.

The Housing Strategy Officer and the Cabinet Member for Housing were invited to attend the meeting and provided answers to questions related to housing issues.

Members were advised that in an effort to tackle problems related to bringing Council homes up to decent standard and accessing additional support the Government came up with three options:-

1. Transference of stock to Housing Association.
2. Private Finance Initiatives where the Council would remain landlord of the housing stock.
3. Arms Length Management Organisation. The Council would still be the landlord but the management of stock would be taken over by organisations such as Tristar Homes. The organisation would have its own board which consisted of tenants, elected members and appointed independent members. The Chair of the board would generally and ideally be an independent Chair.

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council chose option three.

Members were advised that a review had been undertaken in relation to the Council's sheltered housing with the proposal that the ownership of the sheltered housing would be transferred to a Registered Social Landlord by the name of Erimus Housing Association.

Tenants had been consulted throughout the review, had been actively involved in the selection of Erimus despite some tenant's initial concern at the beginning. The final decision would be made by tenants in the form of a ballot.

Erimus had proved themselves to be in other areas such as Middlesbrough (Middlesbrough's Council homes had been transferred to Erimus in 2004) and maintained a high standard in housing and service.

If Erimus were successful in becoming the landlord for the sheltered housing then the wardens that spend the majority of their time working with sheltered housing tenants would transfer to Erimus.

A Member queried how Tristar were doing in the programme they set up to bring all Tristar housing stock up to decent standard. The Cabinet Member advised that they were on track and it was hoped to accelerate the work so that it would all be completed by the end of the 2007 municipal year. If this was achieved it would provide big savings which would be put towards replacement of windows.

A Member observed that Tristar moved people into empty properties before needed work was done, which would result in the new tenant being required to move out again until the work was completed which did not seem to make sense.

Members' were advised that there were cost implication in leaving the properties empty for periods of time. Tristar had experienced situations when new heating was put in prior to a tenant moving in but the property was broken into and the heating system was stolen. However, in high demand areas, they often carried out the work prior to tenants moving in.

Members' were advised that there was a shortage of affordable properties within Stockton Borough Council with a particular shortage of larger family houses and 2 bedroomed bungalows. Due to the shortages the housing department were hoping to encourage developers and Housing Associations, to build such properties.

Members' observed that many houses had been demolished in the Stockton area due to the fact that they were in areas in which people did not wish to live due to issues such as anti social behaviour.

The Housing Department/Tristar had strong procedures for dealing with tenants who did not look after the properties. All tenants were required to sign a tenancy agreement which clearly laid out the expectations and things which would not be tolerated.

A Member queried whether the Housing Benefit Officers, who attended the previous meeting, had provided the paragraph regarding Housing and Council Tax Benefit information.

The information had not been received.

CONCLUDED that:

1. The report be noted.
2. Mrs Harrison would follow up with Housing Benefits to obtain the paragraph which would inform people of the relevant information regarding Housing and Council Tax Benefits, which Ward Councillors could include in their ward newsletters.

