

Housing & Community Safety Select Committee

A meeting of Housing & Community Safety Select Committee was held on Thursday, 10th July, 2008.

Present: Cllr Mrs Allison Trainer (Chairman), Cllr Julia Cherrett, Cllr Jackie Earl, Cllr Mrs Suzanne Fletcher, Cllr Bill Noble, Cllr Bill Woodhead

Officers: P. Mennear, M. Jones, K. Wannop (LD), J. Edmends, G. Archer, J. Higgins (DNS)

Also in attendance: R. Gibson (North Star Housing Group), I. Higginbottom (NomadE5 Housing Association), B. Carr (Housing Corporation) D. Pickard (Tristar Homes)

Apologies: Cllr Robert Gibson, Cllr Mohammed Javed, Cllr Mrs Liz Nesbitt

HCS 15/08

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Mrs Trainer declared a personal/non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item no.5 –Progress Updates on previously agreed recommendations, item no. 6 - Choice Based Lettings Review, and item no. 7 - Work programme as she was a member of the Tristar Management Board.

Councillor Cherrett declared a personal/non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item no.5 –Progress Updates on previously agreed recommendations, item no. 6 - Choice Based Lettings Review, and item no. 7 - Work programme as she was a member of the Tristar Management Board.

Councillor Woodhead declared a personal/non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item no.5 –Progress Updates on previously agreed recommendations, item no. 6 - Choice Based Lettings Review, and item no. 7 - Work programme as he was a member of the Tristar Management Board.

Councillor Noble declared a personal/non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item no.5 –Progress Updates on previously agreed recommendations, item no. 6 - Choice Based Lettings Review, and item no. 7 - Work programme as he was a tennent of Tristar Ltd.

HCS 16/08

Minutes of the Meeting held on 17th April 2008 to be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The minutes of the meeting held on 17th April 2008 was signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

HCS 17/08

Draft Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th June 2008.

Item 5: - It was requested that key contact details for services responsible for tackling anti-social behaviour be provided to Members for distribution to residents.

RESOLVED that: -

1. Contact details for ASB services would be requested.
2. the minutes of the meeting held on 12th June be forwarded to Council.

**HCS
18/08** **Choice Base Lettings Review-Update on Progress in relation to One Stop Shop Approach**

Following discussion at the last meeting of the Committee, Members were presented with an update on the progress in relation to implementation of recommendation 4 of the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) review, regarding the One Stop Shop approach to delivering CBL.

Members were informed that the Tristar Homes medium term financial plan agreed with Stockton Borough Council provided resources to deliver CBL in 2008/09 based upon a staffing structure replicating that of Homechoice in Middlesbrough and capital/revenue funding to carry out refurbishment and cover ongoing costs. These costs were based on assumptions relating to an option being considered in December 2007 on 107-108 High Street (previously Travel care).

At the beginning of 2008 the potential option (107-108 High Street) was further considered, but after some initial feasibility work progress was not possible due to planning constraints in that area of the High Street appertaining to a change in use from retail to service. Consideration of these planning restrictions had been fundamental in looking at other High Street options.

As a result of discussions with Council colleagues including Planning and involvement from the Town Centre management team an alternative location was suggested at Stratford House, Ramsgate. The lease was due to expire in June 2008.

The Committee queried whether the building had a dedicated car park, and members were informed that although it did not have its own car park, there was a public car park adjacent to the building. Members were further informed that the leasehold of the building was five years, and Tristar were in negotiations with SBC to take over the remainder of leasehold when Tristar's contract expires in 2012.

The initial project plan made reference to key milestone with the first one being implementation of CBL in January 2009. It was anticipated that occupation of the building would be available in October 2008 allowing sufficient preparation time to ensure service to customers is established before CBL implementation and ensuring joint working arrangements were embedded.

RESOLVED that the progress report in relation to the Choice Based Lettings review be accepted and that progress against recommendation 4 be signed off as complete.

**HCS
19/08** **Review of Registered Social Landlords**
- **To receive evidence from representatives of the Housing Corporation, NomadE5 Homes, and the North Star Housing Group**

The Members of the Committee received evidence for the review of registered social landlords regarding the National Affordable Housing Programme from the Housing Corporation.

The Committee were presented with the following key points:-

1. National Programme – 2008/11 Housing Corporation performance
2. Total Allocations so far - £68m allocated to 1625 new homes
3. Stockton Programme - £8.6m allocated for 2008/11 so far
4. Issues looking forward

Members had the opportunity to ask question of the Housing Corporation, NomadE5 Homes, North Star Housing Group, and the Planning Officer who were present. The issue of housing that remained empty on regeneration schemes when there were tenants living in substandard older properties in the same area was discussed, and those present noted that the regulations in place stated that those homes built for sale on Shared Ownership Schemes could not be switched to rented accommodation if the homes did not sell. It was hoped that the regulations would become more flexible so that such switches could be made, and that those who purchased shared ownership homes be offered more flexibility if they experienced financial difficulty. NomadE5 Homes noted that their current plans included building several shared ownership homes, and the board were discussing the possibility of changing these plans to build homes for affordable rent.

The specifications for new homes built for affordable rent and shared ownership, and whether the standards were too high in comparison to homes built to sell at full cost, was discussed. The Housing Corporation stated that they wished private home builder raised their standard to that which was expected from RSL's.

The affordable housing elements of Section 106 agreements were discussed. The RSL representatives commented that they would like to be involved in the process at an earlier stage. Private developers frequently approached RSL's once the planning application process for the houses had been completed. The properties offered were sometimes not up to the RSL's standards, or they could not fund the housing to the amount requested by the home builders.

It was noted that there could be a need to increase planning officers' awareness of the implications of such agreements, including the finances involved, as such deals are difficult to re-negotiate when the situation changes.

It was queried whether tenant surveys were carried out, and the Committee were informed that both RSL's and the Housing Corporation carried out such surveys. North Star Housing Group noted that their tenants were also involved in the planning of new builds and had tenant board members.

It was reported that the potential for more flexible tenure schemes were being explored to assist customers to cope with the current mortgage situation. The Committee requested an update with regard to these new ideas and also the rate of new building completions from the RSL representatives. It was suggested that October would be a suitable time for such an update.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

HCS Work Programme

- 20/08**
- **to review the project plan in respect of the current review**
 - **to discuss ideas for future review topics**

It was noted that the next meeting on 4th September 2008 would discuss the future plans for locally operating RSLs.

Members suggested the topic of 'homelessness' for the scrutiny work programme. This was regarded by Members as being an ongoing issue, and included the levels of support being offered to young people leaving local authority care.

It was noted that currently the scrutiny work programme had allocated a review of Neighbourhood Policing/Neighbourhood Watch/Outward Facing aspects of CCTV monitoring to be Housing and Community Safety Select Committee's second review of the municipal year, following the completion of the Registered Social Landlords review.

RESOLVED:

1. that the work programme be noted
2. the suggestion be noted and submitted to Scrutiny Liaison Forum in due course