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NOTICE OF MEETING
HOUSING STEERING GROUP

21 FEBRUARY 2006

TO: ALL MEMBERS OF THE HOUSING STEERING GROUP

You are requested to attend a meeting of the Housing Steering Group on **21 February 2006 at 7.00 pm** in the Easthampstead Baptist Church, to transact the business set out in the attached agenda.

Chris Herbert
Acting Director of Corporate Services & Resources

Members of the Housing Steering Group

Independent Chairman: Revd David Osborn

Tenants' and Leaseholders' representatives: Jacki Brundish, Richard Ireland, Linda Coyle and George Kidd

Sounding Board members: *(names to be confirmed)*

Councillors: Paul Bettison, Dale Birch, Shelagh Pile, Anne Shillcock, Cliff Thompson, Bob Wade and Alan Ward

Staff representatives: Henry Bone, Robert Clarke, Elise Stocker

Trades union representative: Simon Sellick

EMERGENCY EVACUATION INSTRUCTIONS

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- 1 Leave the building immediately**
- 2 Follow the green signs**
- 3 Use the stairs not the lifts**
- 4 Do not re-enter the building until told to do so**

**THE HOUSING STEERING GROUP
21 February 2006 (7.00 pm)
Easthampstead Baptist Church.**

AGENDA

	Page No
1. APOLOGIES	
2. MINUTES: 12 JANUARY 2006	1 - 4
3. COTTSWAY HOMES	
4. QUESTIONS TO SIMON MARTIN FROM THE TENANT PARTICIPATION AND ADVISORY SERVICE Simon Martin from the TPAS will attend to respond to questions on tenant representation on Housing Associations.	
5. FEEDBACK FROM VISIT TO CHELMER HOUSING PARTNERSHIP To consider any feedback from the Housing Steering Group's visit to Chelmer Housing Partnership, Chelmsford, on Thursday 16 February.	
6. INITIAL FEEDBACK FROM THE GRANGE HOTEL EVENT To consider any initial feedback from Housing Steering Group Members on the consultation event held at the Grange Hotel on 25 January 2006.	
7. INITIAL FEEDBACK FROM HOUSING SOUNDING BOARD To consider the report (attached) on the findings from the initial telephone survey of Housing Sounding Board members.	5 - 8
8. HOUSING SOUNDING BOARD REPRESENTATIVES ON THE HOUSING STEERING GROUP	
9. VISIT TO PEERLESS (SURREY HEATH) HOUSING ASSOCIATION To consider an invitation to visit Surrey Heath Housing Association, including sheltered scheme.	
10. UPDATE ON 'YOUR HOMES' PROJECT	
11. ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING	

**HOUSING STEERING GROUP
THURSDAY, 12 JANUARY 2006
Easthampstead Baptist Church,
South Hill Road, Bracknell**

(7.00 - 8.30 pm)

Present: **Members of the Steering Group**

Independent Chairman
David Osborn

Tenant/Leaseholder Representatives
Jacki Brundish, Linda Coyle, Richard Ireland, George Kidd

Borough Councillors
Dale Birch, Anne Shillcock, Bob Wade, Alan Ward

Staff Representatives
Henry Bone, Robert Clarke, Elise Stocker

Trade Unions Representative
Simon Sellick

Apologies for absence were received from:
Councillor Thompson

9. MINUTES : 13 DECEMBER 2005

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2005 were approved as a correct record.

10. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT - UPDATE

The Steering Group had received a presentation at its first meeting concerning the Housing Revenue Account and its projected cash-flow over future years. It was noted that the information had been based on the Government's draft determination. However, the final subsidy determination received from the Government in late December placed the HRA in a worse position than anticipated, being reduced by a further £170,000 p.a, on top of the predicted £400,000 reduction. This would directly impact the budget for April 2006 onwards and officers were reviewing the accounts to identify how this additional £170,000 saving could be found.

The longer-term implication of this change was to bring forward to 2011 the date at which the HRA would become non-viable. The ability of the Government to adjust the formula annually in this way made it extremely difficult for the Council to plan for the future of its housing services.

11. CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES - UPDATE

The Steering Group received an update from Ilona Cowe on the consultation activities that were underway with tenants and leaseholders, in addition to the normal communications through the Tenants' Newsletter.

Door knocking

15 housing officers were involved in visiting individual homes on the estates and speaking with tenants, taking time to inform them about the options and answer any questions. Staff had all been trained and briefed for this exercise and information on frequently asked questions was being fed back to the Project Team. This was proving a very effective way to communicate with tenants and to address any particular concerns face-to-face.

Any Housing Steering Group members who were interested would be welcome to join a door-knocking team, as observers.

Roadshows

Information roadshows were planned to be held in Princess Square shopping centre, Bracknell on Saturday 11 February, Friday 10 March and Friday 7 April, all from 10.00 until 15.00 (post minute note: now 09.00 to 17.00). Housing Steering Group Members were invited to attend.

Telephone Questionnaire

Over 800 tenants and leaseholders had now agreed to be members of the Housing Sounding Board. An initial telephone questionnaire was being conducted to ascertain a baseline level of awareness; respondents would be asked whether they received and read the Newsletters, whether they received and responded to the test of opinion and their current views on whether they would prefer to transfer or stay with the council. Tenant Members reported positively on their experience as recipients of the telephone questionnaire.

Grange Event

The event on 25 January was already over-subscribed. All Housing Sounding Board members had been offered a place, provided they responded by the deadline.

Timescale

It was confirmed that the consultation exercises were planned to conclude in time to inform a decision by the Executive in May 2006 as to whether it was appropriate to ballot tenants on the possibility of a stock transfer. The overall aim was to have direct contact with up to 2,000 tenants through the various consultation activities - about one third of all tenants.

All Sounding Board Members were being invited to express interest in:

- Being involved on the Housing Steering Group (A pool of volunteers would sit in rotation)
- Joining the Tenants & Leaseholders Panel
- Participating in focus groups

The Steering Group thanked Ilona Cowe and the team for the excellent progress being made with contacting such a wide range of tenants and leaseholders.

12. HOUSING ASSOCIATION VISITS

An invitation had been received from Chelmer Housing Partnership (a local transfer Housing Association in Essex) for the Housing Steering Group to visit their premises in Chelmsford. Alternative dates had been offered, the most convenient of which was Thursday 16 February.

It was agreed to accept the invitation and that Peter Driver would ascertain the availability of Steering Group members and make the necessary arrangements.

The Steering Group also noted that representatives of Cottsway Housing Association (West Oxfordshire) would attend the next meeting, on 21 February, to speak from their experience.

It was agreed that Steering Group members would consider what questions they would wish to put to Cottsway, and that Tenant and Leaseholder representatives should seek questions from other T&L Panel members and submit them in advance.

13. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

21 February 2006, 7.00pm at Easthampstead Baptist Church.

NOTE: following the meeting, the Members of the Steering Group were briefed on preparations for the tenant and leaseholder consultation event at the Grange Hotel on 25 January 2006.

CHAIRMAN

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Agenda Item 7

Bracknell Forest Borough Council Sounding Board Telephone Survey No 1

Topline Findings based on 542 Respondents

Hello can I speak to

I'm calling on behalf of Bracknell Forest Borough Council. I'm from NWA Research. You recently agreed to join the Housing Sounding Board and take part in our housing consultation. We are carrying out the first survey by phone. It will take about 7 to 8 minutes and you will receive a £5 shopping voucher for taking part. All your answers will be treated in confidence. Would this be a convenient time to ask you a few questions?

Thank you very much.

We want to find out your views about the 'Your Homes' project, which used to be known as the Better Homes project. It's about the options for the future of housing and whether management of the housing stays with the council or transfers to a new local housing association.

First of all, can I just check what you recall about the Better Homes project –

Q1 Are you aware that the Council has to bring all its homes up to the Government's 'Decent Homes Standard' by 2010, and we have to find a way of funding this?

Yes..... 88% No.....12%

Q2 a) Do you remember receiving the 'Better Homes Newsletters' which explained the project ? (The last one was sent out in August)

Yes.....84.1% No.....8.5% Not sure.....7.4%

b) (If yes) How often do you read them? (Sample base: 456)

Always.....75.2% Sometimes.....23.2% Never.....1.5%

Q3 a) As you may know, the Council is consulting with tenants and leaseholders about whether homes should stay with the Council or transfer to a non profit making Bracknell Forest based housing association. Last April tenants and leaseholders were sent questionnaires called 'Test of Opinion' which asked which option they preferred. Can you recall receiving your questionnaire?

Yes.....85.6% No.....14.4%

b) (If yes) Did you fill in your questionnaire and return it ? (Sample base: 464)

Yes.....88.6% No.....4.3% Can't remember.....7.1%

ASK ALL

Q4 Can you recall/ are you aware what the outcome was, and what the Council decided?

Yes.....52.8% No.....32.5% Not sure.....14.8%

READ OUT:

The Council decided homes should stay with the Council, but also to let tenants and leaseholders know more about the option to transfer to a non profit making Bracknell Forest based housing association.

Q5 What , if anything, do you know about housing associations? (DO NOT PROMPT)

	Column %	
Q5. What, if anything do you know about housing associations?	Better services/housing experience	3.1%
	Good personal experience/exp. family/friends	4.2%
	Other positive comments	1.3%
	Rents are/will be higher	14.4%
	Bad personal experience/exp. friends/family	6.3%
	Services not as good as Council	3.7%
	Don't believe non-for-profit	1.1%
	Other negative comments	4.8%
	General comments on history/structure of HA	8.9%
	Personal experience/ exp. friends/family	4.6%
	Other neutral comments	3.0%
	Not a lot/very little	3.0%
	Nothing	52.4%
	Total	100.0%

READ TO ALL :

Can I give you some basic information about housing associations?

If tenants voted in favour of a transfer, a new local housing association or an existing housing association would own and manage rented housing without making a profit.

Housing Associations are not private organisations: they are regulated by the Housing Corporation which is government regulated.

If we transfer to a housing association your rent would be no higher than it would have been with the council.

Tenants have more of a say with representation on the management board. Existing tenants keep their 'right to buy' with the same discount entitlement.

Tenants have representatives on the Association's management board.

However, the council is also represented on the managing board but is not in control. The Council would no longer be your landlord.

Q6 What concerns, if any, do you have about transferring to a housing association? (PROBE FULLY) Anything else?
(DO NOT PROMPT. RECORD CONCERNS)

Rent increases	30.1%
Repairs might not get done	22.9%
Improvements might not get done	11.6%
My rights as a tenant may be weakened	4.1%
I could lose my right to buy.....	3.3%
I just prefer the Council as my landlord	20.5%
It might affect my Housing Benefit.....	2.0%
I don't like change	7.0%
I won't know who to complain to.....	1.3%
It's like privatisation	0.7%
Council staff losing their jobs.....	0.6%
Not dealing with the same staff that I like/feel secure with...	4.4%
Maintenance fees/service charges	1.7%
Used to Council as landlord.....	0.7%
HA not as accountable/same standard as Council	2.6%
Don't trust HA/idea	0.6%
Personal past experience/experience family/friends.....	2.0%
Other (WRITE IN).....	11.8%
Don't know	3.3%
No concerns.....	23.6%

Q7 Can I just check that you are aware of some of the main factors regarding the option of whether or not to transfer? Did you know -

a) **The Council currently has to give the government £9M each year from the money it collects from rents to pay for the cost of council housing in other towns and cities.**
Yes.....44.6% No.....55.4%

b) **If homes transferred to a non profit making Bracknell Forest based Housing Association, none of the money collected from rents would have to go to the government and all your rent money would be invested in improving homes and services to tenants in Bracknell.**
Yes.....32.3% No.....67.7%

c) **If homes stay with the Council, the Council will need to cut its budgets for other things such as schools and roads and redirect that money towards housing so it can carry out the improvements needed.**
Yes..... 58.1% No.....41.9%

d) **Transfer would mean improvements could be made to homes and services without affecting other Council services.**
Yes.....42.4% No.....57.6%

Q8 Can you tell me what your views are at the moment – do you think that housing should stay with the Council, transfer to a non profit making Bracknell Forest based housing association or have you not decided yet?

Stay with Council 34.9% – GO TO Q9
 Transfer to a Housing Association 32.8% - GO TO Q9
 Not decided yet..... 32.3%

Q8a ('IF NOT DECIDED YET, ASK)
What would help you to make that decision? (DO NOT PROMPT) (Sample base: 175)

q8a.coded

		Percent
Valid	More information	13.1
	Reassurance things not change/improvements made	5.2
	Attend meetings to ask questions/for tenants to talk	1.1
	Time to think	1.1
	Explain in deapth e.g. costs/timetables	1.1
	Specific question asked	1.5
	other	4.8
	DK/Not sure	4.4
	Total	32.3
Missing	System	67.7
Total		100.0

Q9 Finally, can I ask you two questions about your current housing service. Taking everything into account how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall service provided by your landlord?

READ OUT -

Very satisfied 43.2%
 Fairly satisfied 37.1%
 Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 7.4%
 Fairly dissatisfied..... 5.0%
 Very dissatisfied 6.5%
 (Not sure/ don't know) 0.9%

Q10 Thinking about the housing services that your landlord provides, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the opportunities for participation in management and decision-making?

READ OUT -

Very satisfied 26.6%
 Fairly satisfied 41.9%
 Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 13.8%
 Fairly dissatisfied..... 7.2%
 Very dissatisfied 3.7%
 (Not sure/ don't know) 6.8%

Thank you very much for talking to us today and for being part of the Housing Sounding Board. Which voucher would you like

A Sainsbury's voucher.....77.9%
 A WH Smiths voucher.....22.1%

Rec'd		
Check		
Ent'd		
QC'd		

Your voucher will be sent to you within the next 4 weeks.
 Thank you and goodbye.

Please note down any additional issues raised by respondent overleaf :