

**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