

Housing Transfer Committee

Tuesday, 5 December 2006

Present: Councillor Francis Culshaw and Peter Malpas

Chorley Borough Officers: Colin Campbell (Executive Director - Environment and Community), Gary Hall (Director of Finance), Helen Schofield (Corporate Transfer Project Officer), Roger Handscombe (Director of Property Services), Tony Uren (Democratic Services Officer), Alan Johnson (Enterprise BWNL) and Mr M Gaskell (Trowers and Hamlins)

06.HTC.30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of the Chairman (Councillor P Goldsworthy).

In the Chairman's absence, Councillor F Culshaw assumed the Chair for the meeting.

06.HTC.31 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest by Members of the Committee in any of the agenda items.

06.HTC.32 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing Transfer Committee held on 7 November 2006 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

06.HTC.33 HOUSING STOCK TRANSFER PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

The Corporate Transfer Project Officer presented the updated highlight report on the transfer process for the period from September to November 2006.

The report summarised the developments and tasks completed since the last meeting of the Committee, outlined the current work of the three Sub-Groups and indicated the outstanding matters still under consideration. Chorley Community Housing (CCH) was proposing to retain the current telephone system installed in the Gillibrand Street Offices, which would necessitate a new contract with Telewest.

The report revealed that both the budget and the housing transfer project remained on track for completion in March 2007.

The Members congratulated the Executive Director – Environment and Community and all the staff involved in the stock transfer process on the encouraging progress on the project.

RESOLVED – That the project highlight report be noted.

06.HTC.34 UPDATED FORWARD PLAN

The Executive Director – Environment and Community presented, for information, an updated Forward Plan for the Committee and project, which identified the various elements of the transfer process and matters on which decisions would be requested up to the completion of the transfer arrangements.

The Executive Director intimated that the plan would need to be altered to include provision for the 6 February 2007 meeting of the Committee to determine the future of the homeless facility at Cotswold House.

RESOLVED – That the updated Forward Plan be noted.

06.HTC.35 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the ground that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

06.HTC.36 DRAFT TRANSFER AGREEMENT - UPDATE

Mr M Gaskell from the Council's Legal Consultants, Trowers and Hamlins, presented a briefing note on the progress of negotiations on the Transfer Contract.

The first draft of the contract for the sale of the Council's housing and related assets to Chorley Community Housing had been prepared and presented to CCH and its Solicitors for consideration. Mr Gaskell reported on the initial feedback and highlighted the principal areas identified for continuing regulations. While the majority of covenants related to standard commercial consideration, a number of issues surrounding warranties and comments to be made by the Council and CCH would require further discussion.

Mr Gaskell confirmed that the Consultants would continue to provide the Committee with regular updates on their negotiations with CCH and its Solicitors before the final draft Contract was ready for approval.

RESOLVED – That the progress report be noted.

06.HTC.37 HOUSING TRANSFER - PROGRESS REPORT

The Director of Finance circulated a report which consolidated into one report the following three agenda items which were discussed and determined separately:

- Progress on Service Level Agreements;
- Transfer of support staff to Chorley Community Housing;
- Homelessness and Allocations Service Review.

06.HTC.38 SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS - PROGRESS REPORT

The Director of Finance's submitted report confirmed that negotiations were continuing on the Service Level Agreements that would define the type and level of services to be provided by the Council to Chorley Community Housing after the transfer of the housing stock (ie Ground Maintenance for sheltered accommodation; Use of Council's Network, Contact Centre, payroll services, cash receipting and facilities management at Gillibrand Street). It was envisaged that the provision of the services would generate an annual income for the Council in the region of £145,000.

The Director expected that the Service Level Agreements would be finalised by January 2007.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

06.HTC.39 TRANSFER OF SUPPORT STAFF TO CHORLEY COMMUNITY HOUSING

The Director of Finance's combined report identified six support service posts that would need to transfer to Chorley Community Housing upon the transfer of the housing stock, in addition to five other posts currently engaged in the delivery of the Homelessness and Allocations service.

While agreement had been reached on the transfer of five of the six support service staff, negotiations were continuing around issues relating to the remaining sixth post.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

06.HTC.40 HOMELESSNESS AND ALLOCATIONS SERVICE REVIEW

The Director of Finance's composite report contained a summary of the type and level of Homelessness and Allocations service which Chorley Community Housing were prepared to provide on behalf of the Council for an annual cost of £130,000.

The offer from CCH was favoured by the Council's Officers as a means of ensuring a continuity of service and delivery by experienced and knowledgeable staff.

The Committee's attention was drawn, in particular, to the Government's target to eradicate homelessness by 2010 and to introduce choice based lettings for social housing. Therefore, CCH would need to work objectively with the Council to ensure that resources were targeted at the achievement of these two objectives.

RESOLVED – That the proposal to transfer the Homelessness and Allocation undertaking to Chorley Community Housing on the terms outlined in the Director of Finance's submitted report, together with the commencement of discussions regarding the transfer of Cotswold House to CCH (subject to agreement of acceptable terms), be approved for consultation with staff and trade unions.

06.HTC.41 TERMS FOR LEASE OF GILLIBRAND STREET OFFICES

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Property Services on the provisional terms that had been agreed with Chorley Community Housing for its 3 year lease of vacated Council offices at Gillibrand Street and Bengal Street, together with the shared use of storage and depot facilities at the Bengal Street Depot. The lease would generate an annual rental income for the Council of £125,000.

The rationalisation of the Council's accommodation would allow Chorley Community Housing to occupy the vacated offices on a medium term basis pending clarification of its long term accommodation needs.

RESOLVED – That approval be given to the 3 year lease of the Gillibrand Street and Bengal Street accommodation to Chorley Community Housing on the recommended negotiated terms.

Chair