

Housing Transfer Committee

Tuesday, 9 January 2007

Present: Councillors Peter Malpas and Francis Culshaw

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

07.HTC.01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of the Chairman (Councillor P Goldsworthy) and Mr R Bailey (Trowers and Hamlins).

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

07.HTC.02 DECLARATIONS OF ANY INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest by any Members in any of the meeting's agenda items.

07.HTC.03 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting of the Housing Transfer Committee on 5 December 2006 were confirmed as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

07.HTC.04 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 required up to the completion of the transfer arrangements.

The Executive Director reminded the Members of the significant issues that might need to be determined by the Committee at its next two scheduled meetings, culminating in the Committee's approval of the draft Transfer Contract for recommendation to the Council.

RESOLVED – that the updated Forward Plan be noted.

07.HTC.05 HOUSING STOCK TRANSFER - PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS REPORT

The Corporate Transfer Project Officer presented the updated highlights report on the transfer process for the period of up to the end of December 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.

The Committee noted that Marsh Limited had been appointed as the environmental risk management consultants for the Council and that the requisite Section 25 consent had been granted by the Secretary of State to the Council's loan to Chorley Community Housing to cover its set up costs. The report also confirmed the positive feedback that had been received to the Housing Corporation's visit to Chorley on 5 and 6 December 2006, and an expectation that Chorley Community Housing would achieve registration by the Housing Corporation.

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

RESOLVED – That the project highlight report be noted.

07.HTC.06 EXCLUSION OF 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.

07.HTC.07 UPDATE ON FINANCIAL ISSUES

Mr A Johnson from the Council's Lead Consultant, Enterprise BWNL, and the Council's Officers updated the Committee on the current position in relation to the financial negotiations.

Mr Johnson indicated that agreement had been reached with Chorley Community Housing (CCH) on the stock valuation figure.

The Committee were also advised that negotiations were continuing with CCH on the use of the proceeds of the VAT shelter arrangements and the future of the homeless facility at Cotswold House. The Officer advised that CCH had declined to offer the Council an indemnity for any overspend on the Housing Revenue and Capital budgets, regarding it as a matter for the Council to control. Accordingly, the Director of Finance would take any appropriate action to minimise any financial risk to the Council.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

07.HTC.08 SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS - PROGRESS REPORT

The Director of Finance drew attention to a few elements of the Service Level Agreements that were still under negotiation. The Agreements 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.

The Officers had clarified the Council's expectation that the current advice service provided through the Contact Centre should not be eroded following the stock transfer, but the terms for the Council's provision of a grounds maintenance service for sheltered accommodation still required agreement.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

07.HTC.09 UPDATE ON DRAFT TRANSFER AGREEMENT

Mr M Gaskell, from the Council's Legal Consultants, Trowers and Hamlin, reported that good progress was being made on the negotiation of terms of the final draft contract for the sale of the Council's housing and related assets to Chorley Community Housing (CCH).

While CCH's Solicitors had presented their initial reaction to the first draft Transfer Contract, Mr Gaskell intimated that the lawyers acting on behalf of CCH's funders had not yet commented on the draft Contract.

The Committee's attention was drawn, in particular, to the engagement of Consultants to assess the level of an environmental risk in the assets to be transferred. It would

be necessary to ensure that Chorley Community Housing's Business Plan included adequate provision to cover any costs that would need to be incurred to mitigate any identified risks.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

Chair