



COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK WORKING PARTY

17TH NOVEMBER 2008

The Meeting commenced at 4.00p.m. and finished at 5.10p.m.

Present

Councillors Ms Atkinson, Brooke, Bulteel, Trent and Mrs Walton

Mr B Constance
Mr L James
Mr A Khan
Ms H Ross

Officers attending

Mr D Mullany (Project Manager Housing & Communities Services)
Mr A Richens (Financial Services)
Mr S Cattle (Legal and Democratic Services)
Mr R Ingleton (Head of Finance PHP Limited)
Mr M Harrison (Head of Technical Services PHP Limited)
Ms C Brown (Head of Housing Management PHP Limited)
Mr B Shaw Head of Performance & Best Value (PHP Limited)
Ms K Ansell (Acting Head of Housing and Community Services)
Mr J Logan (Chief Executive, PHP Limited)
Ms J Thurgood (Strategic Director)

Members of the present:

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Councillor Ms Atkinson be elected Chairman of the Council Housing Stock Working Party for the ensuing Municipal Year.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that the election of Vice-Chairman of the Council Housing Stock Working Party be considered at the next meeting after the Residents' Representatives have been appointed to the Working Party.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

4. CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bulteel declared a personal interest in various matters arising on the Agenda as a Director of Poole Housing Partnership Limited (PHP).

Councillor Trent declared a personal interest in various items arising on the Agenda as a Council House Tenant.

5. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

The Chairman asked Joe Logan, Chief Executive, PHP Limited and Jan Thurgood, Strategic Director to give some background on the Project.

Joe Logan stated that funding was in place to meet the Decent Homes Standards until 2010 and that ongoing investment was required after that time. There would be shortfalls in the Housing Revenue Account from 2011/12 and the shortfall was likely to increase sharply over the 30 year Business Plan. In addition, there would be a shortfall in other areas of Capital such as:-

- Tower block refurbishment
- Roof replacements
- Large scale replastering
- Underground (drainage, water supply)
- Boundary walls
- Neighbourhood improvements

Furthermore, non-Decent Homes investment was needed for:-

- Remodelling of stock (such as bedsits and poorly performing stock)
- Aids and adaptations for far more elderly and very elderly residents
- Garages
- Designing out crime

The Meeting was advised of the key stages of the process which were to:-

- (i) Establish a Working Party
- (ii) Set up processes and resources to ensure all Residents had a strong voice and were fully kept informed
- (iii) Establish the views of Residents on the standards for the condition of the stock and the services they received
- (iv) Update the information on the condition of the Housing Stock
- (v) Consider all possible options for financing in the future to see if they met Residents' expectations and were financially sound
- (vi) Produced a document for consultation with Residents and Stakeholders which set out an assessment of the Options and made recommendations for the future

- (vii) Report to Cabinet on the findings of the Working Party and to make recommendations, this would then be referred to Council for a final decision.

It was important to note that there was a National Context to the work and that Government were currently reviewing Housing Subsidy but that there was also an impact by way of the Credit Crunch and that Political Parties Policies on Housing has to be considered.

The Chairman thanked Joe Logan and Jan Thurgood for their Presentation.

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND PROJECT TIMETABLE

Jan Thurgood, Strategic Director presented a report on the reasons for and the process of the Options Appraisal of the Council's housing stock and sought approval of the Terms of Reference for the Working Party.

The Working Party was advised that Poole Housing Partnership Limited had a proven track record of high performance as was evidenced by the Audit Commission Inspection Report which was published in October 2008 which judged Poole Partnership Limited to be delivering excellent services with excellent prospects for improvement. As had been explained in the previous item, additional funding provided by Government through the mechanism of approved borrowing to deliver Decent Homes Standards across Poole's Council Housing Stock were set to expire in 2010. Financial forecasts currently showed that in the following years, the Housing Revenue Account would have insufficient funds to manage and maintain the stock to current standards and therefore there would be a shortfall in the capital required for investment.

The Working Party would be the process by which Residents, Poole Housing Partnership Ltd and elected Members of the Council examined Options for the future financing of the Council's Housing Stock. The Working Party would work in a Select Committee style and take expert and stakeholders evidence. It would examine all the possible Options for future financing in the light of the views of Residents on the standards of housing and services they wished to receive in the future. It would then produce a Report outlining the process of evaluation of all the Options and would make recommendations to Cabinet on the best Option or Options for the future financing of the Housing Stock. Depending on the Options proposed by the Working Party and agreed by the Council, a further formal process of consultation with and decision-making by residents would be required.

The Meeting was advised that the work of the Housing Options Appraisal Working Party would run for up to a year and the Key Stages of the appraisal process would be:-

- Project design
- Evidence gathering
- Production of a formal consultation document
- Formal consultation with Residents and Stakeholders
- A report to Cabinet

Members of the Working Party considered the proposed Terms of Reference which set out:-

- The role of the Working Party
- Membership of the Working Party
- How the Working Party would work

As an addition, Jan Thurgood, Strategic Director, reported that at its meeting on 5th November 2008 the Housing Strategy Panel had proposed that the Resident Representation on the Working Party be set at 5. This proposal had been included in the Terms of Reference.

Part of the work of the Working Party would be appoint a Specialist Adviser with specialist expertise in options appraisal and extensive knowledge of the national context to support the Working Party and the Project Officer Group. Mr Partridge had been appointed as the Specialist Adviser and had been involved with the Borough of Poole in the past in the preparation of its Business Plan and the introduction of resource accounting. He was a specialist in Housing Finance with Housing Quality Network (HQN) and advisor to the Government and Officers were pleased that he was able to assist in this process.

Furthermore, all Members of the Working Party would have voting rights and would therefore need to abide by the National Code of Conduct that covered the work of elected Members.

Steve Cattle, Legal and Democratic Services gave an overview of the details of the Code of Conduct which applied to elected Members and the need for Members of the Working Party who had full voting rights to abide by the Code.

Finally, Members of the Working Party were asked to consider details of the outline Project Plan and in response to a question on the timescales being realistic, Joe Logan, Chief Executive of PHP Limited stated that from experience of other projects the timescale of one year was realistic taking into account the fact that a great deal of the background information was already available.

Jan Thurgood, Strategic Director felt that account might need to be taken of the national context which could affect the timescales involved in the process but that Mr Steve Partridge would be able to give advice on this at a later stage.

AGREED that

- (i) the Terms of Reference as set out in Appendix 1 to the Report be agreed; and
- (ii) the Working Party notes the outline timetable for the Options Appraisal process.

7. DRAFT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Bill Shaw, PHP Limited presented a report on the Draft Communication Strategy which made sure that all Residents and Stakeholders received, and had the chance to consider, all the necessary information to make an informed choice about the best option for future investment in the Housing Stock. The Strategy would make sure that Residents in particular, were at the heart of the process. The Strategy would ensure that:-

- information was communicated in the most appropriate and inclusive way to all residents and other Stakeholders;
- that all Residents and Stakeholders were given the opportunity to contribute; and
- that as far as possible a balanced view was representative of Residents and Stakeholders, including hard to reach groups.

The Key Objectives were therefore to:-

1. Maximise the awareness of Residents and Stakeholders of why the Options Appraisal was necessary;
2. Obtain from Residents and Stakeholders their views on priorities for the Housing Service and their aspirations;
3. Communicate these findings, together with the findings from detailed analysis of the financial position and its implications for stock investment, to Residents and Stakeholders;
4. Produce clear information, tailored to meet the diverse and individual needs of all Residents and Stakeholder groups, on the various options and their implications and undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment for the Strategy and processes;
5. Obtain the views of Residents and Stakeholder groups on the various options to report back to the Officer Support Group; and
6. Communicate the outcome of that consultation to all Stakeholders.

The Meeting was advised that it was important that communications were geared to different audiences, Residents and some Stakeholders had a direct interest; other stakeholders would be less directly affected but might wish to express their views or just need to be kept informed.

A key element was to obtain from Residents and Stakeholders their priorities and aspirations for the future as this would drive the Project and it was important that key messages were explained. In addition, other issues considered were:-

- Key communication channels;
- Equality and Diversity issues;
- The overall timescales and milestones for the Communications Strategy.

RECOMMENDED that the Draft Communication Strategy be noted and approved.

8. DRAFT RESIDENT EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY

Carmelina Brown, Poole Housing Partnership Limited presented a Report on a Draft Resident Empowerment Strategy which was essential to make sure that engagement with Residents and prospective Residents during the Options Appraisal was as effective as possible and took the opportunity, through the Options Appraisal Project, to increase the effectiveness of resident engagement in the longer term. The key objectives were to:-

1. Enable Residents, and prospective Residents, to give an informed view on:
 - The type and quality of Housing Services being provided;
 - The type and quality of Housing Services they would like to see provided; and
 - The various Options which might affect these.
2. To enable Residents and prospective Residents to make an informed, timely and constructive input to the Council's decision on the preferred Option; and
3. Strengthen the involvement of Residents in constructive decision making on Housing issues in the Borough

The key objectives which needed to be explained were:-

- a) The key drivers for the Project and the implications of the 'status quo' Option in terms of finance, stock investment and service delivery;
- b) The Options and opportunities that existed;
- c) The implications of each of these;
- d) This was an opportunity for Residents to submit their views on their priorities and aspirations for the future; and
- e) That there were various Options which might meet some or all of these issues and that Residents had a genuine opportunity to influence the future ownership and management arrangements for their home.

In response to a question on the appointment of a Specialist Resident Adviser, David Mullany (Project Manager) responded by stating that it would be necessary to develop a short list of prospective Specialist Resident Advisers and then a tendering process would follow so that 5 or 6 prospective Advisers would be asked to submit their proposals for consideration. Training for Resident Representatives on this process was essential and it was emphasised that involved Residents had already a good track record on selection and recruitment processes.

RECOMMENDED that the Draft Resident Empowerment Strategy be noted and approved.

9. NEXT STEPS AND FORWARD PLAN

Members of the Working Party were supplied with details of the Forward Plan which included possible dates of future meetings of the Working Party and a draft training programme. The next steps in the process were:-

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| Appointment of Specialist Advisor | November 2008 |
| Recruitment of Residents' Panel | November 2008 |
| Issue tender for appointment of Specialist Resident Advisor | December 2008 |
| Training day for staff on the detail of options appraisal | December 2008 |
| Analysis of recent residents' survey and any other Existing information on tenants' views | December 2008 |
| Analysis of housing needs and other related strategies | December 2008 |
| Completion of stock condition survey and validation | December 2008 |
| Organisation of first training day for Working Party | January 2009 |
| Completion of financial analysis | January 2009 |
| Organisation of first phase of consultation phase | January 2009 |

AGREED that details of the Forward Plan be noted.

10. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

The Chairman stated that the suggested future meeting dates as outlined on the Agenda should be reconsidered as these were all due to be held on Friday afternoons. It was felt that Friday afternoons were not appropriate for meetings and therefore it was suggested that further options for dates be re-considered.

AGREED that options for dates of future meetings of the Working Party be re-considered and circulated to the Working Party in due course.

CHAIRMAN