



Leicester  
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Held: THURSDAY, 11 FEBRUARY 2010 at 5.30pm

P.R.E.S.E.N.T.

Councillor Grant– Chair

Councillor Hall – In the Chair until Minute 49.

Councillor Glover

Councillor Potter

Councillor Thomas

Councillor Newcombe

Councillor Senior

Councillor Suleman

Also In Attendance

Councillor Westley

Cabinet Lead Member for Housing

\* \* \* \* \*

**143. CHAIR OF MEETING**

RESOLVED:

Under Scrutiny Procedure Rule 6c, in the absence of Councillor Grant, the meeting agreed that Councillor Hall would Chair the meeting until the arrival of Councillor Grant.

**144. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bhatti and Joshi. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Glover and Grant.

**145. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members are asked to declare any interests they may have in the business on the agenda, and/or indicate that Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applies to them.

Councillor Senior declared a personal interest in Item 6 'Tracking of Petitions – Monitoring Report' as her partner worked in Transport Strategy and had been involved in dealing with an ongoing petition listed in the report. She also

declared that she had been consulted as a Ward Councillor in respect of the petition opposed to the Spinney Hills Schools Cycle Link.

Councillor Senior declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Item 9 'Culture and Leisure Task Group Review of the Special Olympics Leicester 2009' as she was a volunteer director on the Special Olympics Board. She undertook to leave the meeting during consideration of this item.

Councillor Senior declared a personal interest in Item 10 'Local Development Scheme 2010-2013' as her partner worked in transport strategy.

Councillor Potter declared personal interests in Item 13 'Final Report of the Adults and Housing Task Group Review of HomeCome Limited' and Item 14 'Final Report of the Adults and Housing Task Group Review of Housing Repairs' as she was a Council tenant.

#### **156. FINAL REPORT OF THE ADULTS AND HOUSING TASK GROUP REVIEW OF HOMECOME LIMITED**

Councillor Potter submitted a report that provided the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board with the findings of the Adults & Housing Task Group review into 'Homecome Ltd', a social housing company.

Councillor Potter introduced the report. She spoke of concern regarding the inconsistent standard of HomeCome properties following visits to such properties by herself and other members of the Task Group. She explained that the condition of one HomeCome property visited in Netherhall was exceptional, whilst one visited in Mowmacre Hall was said to be in a far worse condition. Particular problems with this property were reported and included the conversion of a bathroom into a fourth bedroom, which was too small for use of a bedroom, had no fire escape, and still retained the bathroom pull-cord. As a Task group member who also attended the visits to HomeCome properties, Councillor Newcombe echoed the concerns outlined by Councillor Potter and further stated that other similar properties in the area used the fourth bedroom as a bathroom, and was also concerned that the extra bedroom came at an additional monthly cost of £88.

In response to these observations, Councillor Westley, Cabinet Lead Member for Housing, explained that the property had been officially classed as four-bed roomed and complied with government regulations. Ann Branson, Director, Housing Strategy and Options, further stated that the Council had approached HomeCome to ask them to reconsider listing the property as three-bed roomed but that HomeCome had rejected this. Dave Pate, Director, Housing Services, reported that the Council had been advised that the property properly complied with all Health and Safety regulations, but stated that he would be happy to look at the property again in light of the comments raised by Members. This was supported and the Board requested that all members of the Task Group be informed of what would be recommended in respect of the property once it had been looked at again.

Councillor Potter also expressed dissatisfaction around the fact that HomeCome tenants were in receipt of an extra £15 per week, though it was stated by officers present and Councillor Westley that a government review of this regulation was considering to rescind this allowance, and that this decision could not be taken locally. Councillor Potter stated that she would strongly support such a move by the government, and felt this policy was currently unfair as council tenants did not similarly benefit.

A Member of the Board was of the view that the high rents charged by HomeCome often meant that the properties became poverty traps for tenants. Councillor Westley acknowledged this view and felt that the alleviation of poverty was essential but stated that tenants were aware of the rent levels when they agreed to sign a tenancy agreement. He also reminded Members that HomeCome provided affordable housing, and if they did not provide housing in Leicester, then there would be an additional 400 people on the housing waiting list.

As part of the review, Councillor Potter explained that she interviewed several HomeCome tenants, and she was the first Task Group Chair to conduct such interviews with them. It was also agreed with them that they would meet with the Task Group Leader and officers on a six monthly basis, and officers confirmed that they would ensure that this arrangement was put in place. Councillor Potter also informed Members that many HomeCome tenants felt that housing staff were not fully aware of all the regulations that related to HomeCome properties. Councillor Westley agreed that it was vital that all staff were fully equipped to deal with the public on a face-to-face basis.

Councillor Senior, seconded by Councillor Potter, moved that as part of the the divisional response to the Task Group Report, officers be asked to look at improvements to be made to address the issues of concern highlighted by the review, in relation to:

- a) the possibilities of Homecome tenants facing financial difficulties 'the poverty trap' due to the rent levels being higher than council tenants.
- b) homecome tenants finding themselves locked into tenancy agreements and not fully understanding the procedures.
- c) homecome tenants confused about how to access customer services and repairs and maintenance services.
- d) the standard of works carried out and inspections to Homecome properties being prepared for let.

Upon being put to the vote the motion was CARRIED.

Councillor Westley thanked Councillor Potter for conducting the review and accepted all of the recommendations. He also welcomed the development of a process to regularly consult with all HomeCome tenants.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the recommendations of the Task Group be

supported.

- (2) That the report be re-submitted to the Board on 15 April 2010 to include a divisional response; and
- (3) That, as part of the response to the Task Group report, the Board ask officers to look at improvements to be made to address the issues of concern highlighted by the review, in relation to
  - a) the possibilities of Homecome tenants facing financial difficulties 'the poverty trap' due to the rent levels being higher than council tenants.
  - b) homecome tenants finding themselves locked into tenancy agreements and not fully understanding the procedures.
  - c) homecome tenants confused about how to access customer services and repairs and maintenance services.
  - d) the standard of works carried out and inspections to Homecome properties being prepared for let.
- 4) That officers be asked to look again at the four-bedroomed HomeCome property in Mowmacre Hill in light of comments raised by Members, and to report findings back to all Members of the Adults and Housing Task Group.