

**MINUTES OF: THE CABINET**

**Date of Meeting: Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2005**

**PRESENT: Councillor Ruddick (in the Chair)  
Councillors Challinor, Driver, Farquharson and  
Graham**

**IN ATTENDANCE: Owen Williams, Chief Executive  
Carolyn Wilkins, Deputy Chief Executive  
George Graham, Executive Director of Resources  
Lynn Hurrell, Director of Housing Management Services  
Angela Parkinson, Legal Services Manager  
Heather Moore, Executive Office Manager**

**ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Entwistle, Hancock, Lamb, Neal, Sandiford  
and Starkey  
1 representative from the Press**

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**1. BUSINESS MATTERS**

**1.1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Ormerod.

**1.2. MINUTES**

**Resolved:**

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on the 14<sup>th</sup> September be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

**1.3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

**2. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

2.1 Councillor Neal enquired about information published on the website in respect of the Neighbourhood Environmental Action Teams. He pointed out that there was no reference to the Whitworth area. The Chair reported that the matter would be forwarded to the Council's webmaster for action.

### **3. STRATEGIC MATTERS**

#### **3.1 PROPOSED VOLUNTARY TRANSFER OF THE HOUSING STOCK**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Housing Management Services in respect of the progress to date on the Stock Transfer process.

The Director of Housing Management Services outlined the comprehensive consultation undertaken with council housing tenants and leaseholders in respect of the proposed large scale voluntary transfer of the housing stock.

She outlined the purpose of the consultation as detailed below.

1. To make tenants and leaseholders aware of the proposed transfer and provide opportunity to voice opinions, concerns and queries;
2. To gauge an expressed preference of tenants and leaseholders so the Council can decide whether to proceed to formally ballot tenants;
3. To establish if there are terms of the proposals in the offer document which should and can be amended to clarify the proposal or make the proposal more acceptable.

She outlined the results of the formal consultation (stage 1) offer document and reported that whilst indicative figures should be viewed with caution it appeared that there was significant support from tenants for transfer.

The Cabinet discussed the responses of the tenants set out in the report and gave consideration to proceeding to stage 2 of the consultation process.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Entwistle, the Executive Director of Resources reported that the Medium Term Financial Strategy made assumptions about stock transfer for the Council in its future financial planning and management. He informed the Cabinet that a firm financial position would be available prior to members determining the budget.

In response to a question from Councillor Starkey, the Leader of the Council reported that there was contingency detailed in the Medium Term Financial Strategy should the transfer not proceed.

Councillor Hancock supported the need for a positive campaign to ensure the transfer proceeded. He outlined his support for the process which he considered to be in the best interest of tenants.

The Chief Executive reported that the Council had to present a balanced view to ensure that tenants understood the implications of either a no or a yes vote. He recommended that elected members engaged with tenants should encourage them to use their vote.

Councillor Driver commended the hard work of staff, the estate management boards, trade unions and elected members involved in the transfer process to date. She highlighted the positive approach that had been taken to achieve the best outcome for tenants.

**Decisions made:**

1. That the responses of the tenants as set out in the report be noted.
2. That a formal stage 2 letter be issued to the Council's secure tenants confirming the terms of the Council's offer as set out in the formal (stage 1) consultation document.
3. That the tenant's right to communicate objections to the Council's proposals to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister within 28 days from the stage 2 letter be noted.
4. That the ability of the Deputy Prime Minister as First Secretary of State to withhold consent if a majority of tenants do not wish the transfer to proceed be noted.
5. That the Electoral Reform Ballot Services Ltd be commissioned to carry out a formal ballot of tenants in respect of a transfer to Green Vale Homes.

**Reasons for the Decisions:**

In October 2004 the Council endorsed the Home Choice Stock Options Steering Group recommendation to proceed with voluntary stock transfer as the preferred option for the future of its Council housing. The decisions detailed above are required before a formal ballot of the Council's tenants can be undertaken.

**Alternative options considered and rejected:**

The Council undertook a formal options appraisal on the future of its Council housing which identified stock transfer as the preferred option for the future of the Council's housing stock. This was completed in line with Government guidelines and formally approved by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in January 2005.

**3.2 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Executive Director of Resources together with the recommendations of the Policy Development Overview and Scrutiny in respect of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Executive Director of Resources made a presentation on the purpose of adopting a financial strategy. He informed the Cabinet that the production of the Strategy was both a key task within the Corporate Plan and a significant element in the Council's improvement agenda.

He highlighted the importance of the Council adopting a robust financial strategy in order to allow it to maintain the financial stability which it had recently achieved.

He further outlined the need for members to understand the level of resources they were likely to be able to direct towards their priorities over the planning period and the nature of the policy decisions they could be faced with in order to deliver their aspirations for the Borough.

He reported that the Strategy set out a framework of rules within which budget decisions could be made together with a number of planning assumptions, and provided early information as to the nature of the resource equation facing the Council over the planning period.

He informed the meeting that the Strategy would be updated in the light of the proposals made by the Cabinet for the Council's 2006/07 budget. Thereafter the update would be presented for approval alongside the budget at the Council meeting in February.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Entwistle, the Executive Director of Resources agreed through the budget setting process to provide information relating to grants and equity release schemes as used within the private sector housing programme.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Neal, the Leader of the Council reported that as part of the budget process Members would review the corporate priorities and ensure that resources were directed into the achievement of those priorities.

**Decision Made:**

That it be recommended to the Council that the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2006/07 – 2008/09 be approved.

**Reasons for the Decision:**

The production of the strategy is both a key task within the Corporate Plan and a significant element in the Council's improvement agenda. It is important for the Council to adopt a robust financial strategy in order to maintain financial stability. The Strategy will also provide members with greater clarity around future prospects within which to frame their policy aspirations.

**Alternative options considered and rejected:**

None.

**(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.40 pm)**