

**NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY HOUSING REPAIRS**  
**TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

**Wednesday, 20 September 2006**

**PRESENT:**

Councillor Anjona Roy (Chair)  
Councillor Sally Beardsworth  
Councillor Michael Hill  
Councillor Christopher Malpas  
Councillor Elizabeth Tavener

Ann Timson NTACT Co-Optee  
Norman Adams NTACT Co-Optee

Richard Fitzhenry Property Maintenance Manager  
Bob Turrell Corporate Property Manager  
Tracy Tiff Scrutiny Officer  
Margaret Martin Consortium

**1 ELECTION OF CHAIR OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP FOR THE  
REMAINDER OF THE REVIEW**

It was proposed by Councillor Tavener, seconded by Councillor Beardsworth that Councillor Roy be elected Chair for the remainder of this Review and it was:

**AGREED:** That Councillor Roy be elected Chair for the remainder of this Review.

At this point Councillor Tavener confirmed that she would clarify with Councillor Eldred whether he had stepped down from the Group, in addition to stepping down as Chair.

**2 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Hill and Carl Grimmer (Corporate Manager).

**3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 AUGUST 2006**

Subject to the correct spelling of Ann Timson's surname, the minutes of the meeting held on 30 August 2006 were agreed.

**MATTERS ARISING**

R Fitzhenry advised that the Stock Condition Survey was now complete and he could circulate a copy, either in CD format or hard copy, to the Group.

It was suggested that the Executive Summary be circulated to the Group and the Group be asked whether they would like to receive a full copy of the Stock Condition Survey either in CD format or hard copy. Councillor Beardsworth and Norman Adam requested a copy of the CD and Ann Timson asked for a paper copy of the document.

- Agreed:**
- (1) That a copy of the Executive Summary of the Stock Condition Survey be circulated to the Task and Finish Group.
  - (2) That a copy of the Stock Condition Survey in CD format be sent to Councillor Beardsworth and N Adams and members of the Group as requested.
  - (3) That a paper copy of the Stock Condition Survey be sent to A Timson.

A Timson and N Adams expressed their disquiet regarding the manner in which the property disposal was reported at the previous meeting. This issue was dealt with later in the agenda.

A short discussion was then held regarding the condition of the seven void properties all of which have different values. Whether properties are repaired or disposed of depends upon their condition and varying states of disrepair. B Turrell confirmed that he could provide details of the seven properties.

#### **4 OFFICERS REPORTS**

##### **(A) DOOR ENTRY SYSTEM**

R Fitzhenry gave a verbal update on the progress of the recommendations in the Overview and Scrutiny Report 28 January dated 2004 on Door Entry Systems:-

**Recommendation 1 The problem of vandalism is essentially a social issue that is impacting massively on the Authority's repair resources. To formalise an effective and efficient solution not only requires a rethinking of the specification currently used for the door sets but a Policy to tackle the root cause and identify, prosecute, and where necessary, evict the persistent offenders. A joint initiative between the Policy Community Beat Officers and Architectural Liaison Officers, Tenants/Leaseholders and the Authority (Housing Officers) to share information with a view to gathering evidence for prosecutions is essential if there is to be a substantial impact on reducing the increasing repair costs.**

Update: The joint initiative was set up and meetings were held monthly. However, a meeting has not been held since 30 September 2004.

**Recommendation 2 To reduce the delay, modular doors and frames with standard size panels should be used for the repair of existing doors, with replacement units held in store in readiness for immediate fitting. Door sets can be made up from standard sized units with gaps in-filled with masonry or timber.**

Update: There is no evidence to support this has been implemented.

**Recommendation 3** A programmed replacement of existing UPVC doors and frames, and the installation of new door sets, should comprise the fitting of hardwood timber doors and frames with a continuous hinge and top-to-bottom steel cover plates. Existing electronic strike locks should be replaced with magnetic locks fitted top and bottom. Laminated glass should be installed in glazed panels.

Update: An action plan was developed and a database of all properties put together. The condition and location of properties was recorded and colour coding used. For example if a property was colour coded red it indicated that it was vandalised beyond economic repair. This programme of works has not been fully implemented.

**Recommendation 4** Only in high-risk areas should steel doors and frames be considered. The use of steel doors can create an 'institutional' feel to the area.

Update: This has been implemented and doors installed as appropriate.

**Recommendation 5** Illumination both internally and externally, should be increased. Criminals do not like to be seen in a bright environment. Better lighting would provide additional security for tenants; act as a deterrent to anti-social activities as well as providing a friendlier environment.

Update: A programme of illumination has not been developed to date.

**Recommendation 6** The introduction of defensible zones around blocks such as those installed in the CASPAR projects has proved effective in deterring criminal activity and should be considered along with the removal/pruning of trees and bushes around entrance areas.

Update: A formal programme of works has not been developed.

**Recommendation 7** That a separate investigation and feasibility study be carried out in areas which are difficult to quantify at the present time.

Update: An action plan and database has been produced. Local hotspots have been identified (on an ad hoc basis).

**Recommendation 8** That the present Working Group continues to meet at regular intervals to carry forward the recommendations and progress the implementation of approved works subject to feasibility studies and funds being available.

Update: The Working Group has not met since September 2004.

**Recommendation 9** That the existing call out procedure be enhanced by training in-house staff in advanced repair techniques thus reducing the need for expensive specialist contractors. This will also reduce the time taken in effecting repairs.

Update: A number of electricians have been trained. There are a wide range of systems.

**Recommendation 10** That consideration is given to a partner contract for

**routine annual service and maintenance on systems and equipment to provide long-term sustainability**

Update: No arrangements for a partner contract have been implemented. Repairs are carried out on an ad hoc basis with contractors.

**Recommendation 11 That the costs associated with Door Entry Systems be separated from the Repairs and Maintenance budget to provide better financial monitoring and control.**

Update: This information has not as yet been obtained. However, once issues with the Uniclass Enterprise system have been resolved the information can be retrieved. There are many IT issues with this system. Since April 2006, issues regarding individual premises have been logged.

**Recommendation 12 That the use of CCTV be further investigated as a means of identifying persistent vandals and provide evidence for prosecution and conviction.**

Update: The CCTV system – “Enigma” was identified. However, further costings have not been sought since the system was identified.

At this point the Task and Finish Group adjourned and re-convened at 5.05pm.

The Chair advised that further information was required on the above recommendations and requested that a written update be presented to the next meeting.

**AGREED: That a written update on progress to date against the 12 recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny report entitled Door Entry Systems, dated 28 January 2004, be presented to the next meeting.**

**(B) DECENT HOMES DELIVERY AND COMPLIANCE**

The Chair requested that a written update on the Decent Homes Delivery and Compliance be presented to the next meeting.

**AGREED: (1) That consideration of this item be deferred to the next meeting.  
(2) That a written update be provided to the next meeting.**

**(C) PROGRESS ON THE VOIDS REVIEW**

B Turrell, Corporate Project Manager, Voids, circulated the Voids Improvement Action Plan – 20 September 2006. The key changes to the Action Plan that had been presented to the previous meeting were:-

- Responsible officers
- Target dates
- Work in progress

The next stage was to work with the responsible officers to achieve and measure

the outcomes.

The Chair requested that B Turrell look at the scope of this review and identify the salient points of the Action Plan. Further updates could be presented to the Task and Finish Group.

A Timson advised that NTACT had produced a list of its achievements. The Chair requested that a copy of this list be obtained and circulated to the Group to ascertain if it linked to the scope of the review.

The Task and Finish Group discussed the Action Plan: -

- Regarding 4 - Reduce use of Sitex, the use of Sitex needed to be addressed as an urgent matter, for example, safety issues, and justify why it is being used.
- Councillor Malpas gave an example of a property that the previous tenants had left equipment and soft furnishings and suggested that a possible recommendation for inclusion in the final report could be that if a previous tenant left equipment and/or soft furnishings a Policy be produced so that the succeeding tenant could be given the opportunity to purchase/keep the goods.
- Regarding 17 – Tenancy Incentives, certain legalities have to be adhered to, for example, the testing of electrical goods. A potential recommendation could be that work with partners, such as the Spencer Contact, be investigated. Organisations such as the Spencer Contact will collect electrical goods.
- Regarding 19 - Relocation of voids workforce, investigations are taking place to ascertain whether this is the right option.

**ACTION:** (1) That B Turrell, Corporate Project Manager, Voids, look at the scope of this review and identify the salient points of the Action Plan. Further updates to be presented to the Task and Finish Group.

(2) A possible recommendation for inclusion in the final report could be that if a previous tenant left equipment and/or soft furnishings a Policy be produced so that the succeeding tenant could be given the opportunity to purchase/keep the goods.

- (3) A potential recommendation of the final report could be that work with partners, such as the Spencer Contact, be investigated. Organisations such as the Spencer Contact will collect electrical goods.

#### **(D) CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND PRIORITIES**

R Fitzhenry, Property Maintenance Manager, advised that this item linked closely to agenda item 4(B) – Decent Homes Delivery and Compliance.

The Task and Finish Group heard:-

- The housing repairs service was now meeting its statutory obligations
- In response to the query regarding during 2001/02 £445,000 was spent on 846 properties, in 2002/03 £300,000 was spend on 712 properties, and how much was spent on major repairs, it was advised that further work was required to obtain this information.
- There was no upgrade replacement programme in place.
- In response to the query regarding rewiring and windows brought forward as unspent from 2005/2006, it was clarified that this was brought forward as the work had been identified but not as yet started. This was a `typical accounting process.'

The Chair suggested that two members of the Group devise a set of questions on the Capital Programme and Priorities for the next meeting. It was suggested that Councillors Beardsworth and Roy put the questions together and circulate them to R Fitzhenry in advance of the next meeting.

**ACTION:** (1) That Councillors Beardsworth and Roy devise a set of questions in respect of the Capital Programme and Priorities and circulate the list to R Fitzhenry in advance of the meeting.  
(2) That the list of questions be brought to the next meeting.

## **5 FORMAT AND PUBLICITY FOR THE PUBLIC MEETING - 15 NOVEMBER 2006**

The public meeting had previously been set for 15 November 2006, but due to the fact that the Housing Matters journal had been already been dispatched it was agreed to postpone this meeting until early in the new year.

A short poster would be devised and circulated to all Housing Offices, Sheltered Housing Community Rooms and Community Centres through the appropriate officers. The meeting would also be promoted via the Housing Matters journal and Press and PR.

Councillor Roy and T Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, would produce a draft poster for consideration at the next meeting.

**AGREED:** That Councillor Roy and T Tiff, Scrutiny Officer, produce a draft poster for consideration at the next meeting.

## **6 EVIDENCE GATHERING**

### **(A )DEFINE QUESTIONS FOR WITNESS EVIDENCE (PORTFOLIO HOLDER)**

The Task and Finish Group heard that Councillors P Flavell and Y Miah had confirmed that they were able to attend the next meeting and provide evidence.

A draft list of questions, based around the eight sections of the Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE) for stock investment and asset management was circulated and discussed:-

- There was a need to split the questions so that the relevant Portfolio Holder

received questions in respect of their portfolio only. **Councillor Roy undertook to produce this.**

- The list of questions should be circulated to the Portfolio Holders well in advance of the next meeting.
- Concerns were raised that some of the questions contained in the draft list were outside the scope of this review, such as gas servicing.
- The Chair would look at the draft questions and refine the list so that it was in accordance to the scope of the review and split the questions to the relevant portfolios.
- The updated list of questions would be emailed to the Group for comment and then forwarded to the Portfolio Holders.
- The Portfolio Holders might need to attend more than one meeting to answer the question.

**ACTIONS:** (1) **The Chair would look at the draft questions and refine the list so that it was in accordance to the scope of the review and split the questions to the relevant portfolios.**  
(2) **That the updated list of questions would be emailed to the Group for comment and then forwarded to the Portfolio Holders.**

#### **(B) DESKTOP RESEARCH - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Task and Finish Group was advised that the following Local Authorities had been identified as best practice for their housing repairs service: -

- Leicester City Council
- Warwick District Council
- Derby Homes (run by an ALMO)
- Charnwood District Council
- Ipswich City Council

Desktop research would be carried out on the above and the findings submitted to the next meeting.

**AGREED:** **That the findings of the desktop research be submitted to the next meeting.**

#### **(C) VISIT TO BEST PRACTICE COUNCIL - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Task and Finish Group heard that the contact had been made with Leicester City Council (LCC) regarding a possible best practice visit. It was noted however, that LCC would charge £75 per attendee for such a visit.

The Group also heard that Derby Homes, run by an ALMO, was noted for best practice but again a charge would be made for a best practice visit.

The Group suggested that contact be made with Charnwood District Council or a London Borough regarding a possible best practice visit. Following consultation with the Chair, a visit to a best practice Council would then be arranged.

### **(C) VISIT TO VOID PROPERTIES - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Task and Finish Group was reminded that the visit to void properties had been arranged for Thursday 5 October 2006 meeting at the Guildhall at 9.45am.

The two co-opted members had suggested that the following void properties be visited:-

2 St Lukes House  
14 St Stephen House  
58 St Stephen House  
Bungalow in Redruth Close

The Chair requested that properties listed above, that are in the same location, should be visited.

In addition, two void properties that the council had just received the keys back and one or two properties that were ready to be let would be visited.

**AGREED:** (1) That a site visit to void properties take place on Thursday 5 October, meeting at the Guildhall at 9.45am  
(2) That properties suggested by the co-optees in the same locality be visited.  
(3) That two void properties that the Council has just received the keys back and one or two properties that are ready to be let be visited.

### **(D) EXTERNAL RESEARCH - PROGRESS REPORT**

The Task and Finish Group was informed that contact had been made with the University of Northampton regarding an undergraduate providing information to inform this review. A reply was awaited.

R Fitzhenry advised that De Montfort University in Leicester had a specialist housing department and suggested that contact was made with Leicester.

**AGREED:** That contact be made with the Housing Department of De Montfort University, Leicester regarding an undergraduate providing information to inform this review.

At this point a discussion was held regarding the concern and disquiet expressed by the co-opted members regarding the reporting of property disposal. It was agreed that property disposal was outside the scope of this review, however, the Chair would write to the Portfolio Holder informing him of that this issue had been raised at a meeting of this Task and Finish Group and that disquiet had been expressed. The Portfolio Holder would be asked to ensure that when a Strategy in this respect was due to be presented to Cabinet, NTACTION would be informed so that tenants could have the opportunity to relay their comments to Cabinet.

**AGREED:** That the Chair writes to the Portfolio Holder as detailed above.



## **7 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS**

A discussion was held regarding the schedule of meetings.

It was suggested that the meeting set for October 19 2006 be cancelled and that all agenda items move forward to the meeting on 15 November. As Housing Matters has been published, it suggested that the public meeting be scheduled for the new year, a provisional date would be circulated to the Group.

It was suggested that briefing notes and reports that were requested for the next meeting be circulated in advance of the meeting.

### **AGREED:-**

- (1) That the meeting set for 19 October 2006 be cancelled and all agenda items item move forward to the meeting on 15 November.**
- (2) That 15 November meeting be evidence gathering rather than the public meeting.**
- (3) That 13 December meeting be evidence gathering**
- (4) That the public meeting be set for the new year and a provisional date be circulated to the Task and Finish Group.**
- (5) That briefing notes and reports that were requested for the next meeting be circulated in advance of the meeting.**

The meeting concluded at 6.20pm