

**CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL**  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE**  
**HOUSING POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**  
**MONDAY 10 OCTOBER, 2011 AT 4.00 P.M.**  
**IN THE CIVIC CENTRE, BEECROFT ROAD, CANNOCK**  
**PART 1**

PRESENT: Councillors:

Holder, M.J. (Chairman)  
Bernard, J.D. (Vice-Chairman)

Allen, F.W.C.	Grocott, M.R.
Beddows, J.	Jones, Ms. J.L.
Cartwright, Mrs. S.M.	Williams, Mrs. P.

**10. Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor B. Williams.

**11. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members**

There were no declarations of interests declared.

**12. Minutes**

AGREED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 August, 2011 be approved as a correct record.

At this point the Chairman agreed to change the order of the Agenda.

**13. Private Sector Housing Strategy 2011-2015**

Consideration was given to the Briefing Note of the Head of Environmental Health (Enclosure 6.1 – 6.2 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

A presentation was given by Mr. D. Chaplin, Manager with regard to the Private Sector Housing Strategy 2011-2015.

A Member referred to the new initiatives particularly the support thermal comfort initiatives and asked about illnesses associated with cold properties Mr. Chaplin advised that children and the

elderly could become cold due to inadequate heating and this could lead to health problems. He indicated that visits could be undertaken to properties where the risks could be assessed. With regard to owner occupiers, advice and support could be offered on how improvements could be made. Concern was raised by Members that owner occupiers would need to fund any alterations through releasing equity from their property or taking out a loan if they did not have the money to fund changes.

Members discussed how the elderly were cared for and what the Council were doing to help. Mr. Chaplin advised that he was more than happy to visit groups, particularly those of vulnerable people in order to provide information and advice. Members asked if contact could also be made with groups. Mr Chaplin advised that groups such as Healthnet and occupational therapists were already contacted. The Head of Housing advised that he would raise this matter with the Leadership Team.

A Member referred to the Spirita Home Improvement Agency and the contractors used to undertake work and were keen to see that local companies were being used. Mr. Chaplin advised that local contractors could be used but would also need to show that they were capable and also had sufficient finances.

AGREED:

That the contents of the proposed strategy be noted and that the document be presented to Cabinet on 17 November, 2011 for approval.

#### **14. Vine Court Extra Care Scheme**

A Member discussed the dissatisfaction amongst people in her ward in respect of costs being changed following enquiries regarding the scheme. A Member asked at what stage assistance was provided by the Advisor at Vine Court to people interested in the Scheme. Mr. N. Haywood, Tenancy Services Manager discussed this issue and advised that the process for offering advice at the scheme was now more efficient.

Members also talked about publicity of the scheme especially with regard to the part buy part rent option that was available.

AGREED:

That Housing Plus be requested to consider additional publicity to promote the housing service provided by Vine Court.

#### **14. A New Mandatory Power of Possession for Anti-Social Behaviour Consultation Paper**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing (Enclosure 5.1 – 5.11 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

Mr. I. Tennant, Head of Housing presented the report and advised that following discussion with Members, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee and Housing Portfolio Leader, a response would be formulated for submission to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Members discussed the Government's proposals with regard to the proposed mandatory power of possession and changes to the discretionary power and raised concern that a whole family could be evicted due to one persons actions.

Members asked where families would be housed if the Council evicted them under the new power. The Head of Housing confirmed that the Council could choose to exercise the power and evict a whole family which would also include those tenants with introductory tenancies. He gave an example that if a family was evicted from the Wolverhampton area, Cannock Chase Council could have duty to consider them for housing under the homelessness legislation if they had a local connection with the area.

There appeared to be a general consensus amongst Members that whilst the new mandatory power should be supported, the proposed changes to the existing discretionary power were of concern.

The Head of Housing commented that there had been Council tenants who were evicted for either non payment of rent or other problems; however it was much more difficult to gain possession of a property for anti-social behaviour and was difficult to prove.

The Head of Housing referred to the letter which had been received from the Minister for Housing and Local Government and the consultation questions and comments and asked Members for their views.

Members discussed the questions referred to in Enclosure 5.10 and it was agreed unanimously that Members did not support question 2.

AGREED:

- (A) That the Government's proposals be noted (as set out in the consultation paper and supplementary letter) regarding:-
  - (a) A new mandatory power of possession for housing related anti-social behaviour
  - (b) The extension of the existing discretionary ground for possession for anti-social behaviour to include tenants or family members convicted of the type of criminality which took place during the August riots, regardless of whenever that criminality took place.
- (B) That the Head of Housing following consultation with the Chairman and the Housing Portfolio Leader and other Members of the Housing Policy Development Committee formulate a response to the questions contained within the Consultation Paper for submission to the Department for Communities and Local Government by 7 November, 2011.
- (C) That the Housing Policy Development Committee receives a further report on the revised toolkit of anti-social behaviour powers, following publication by the Homes Office.

## **15. Housing Priority Delivery Plan 2011-12**

Consideration was given to the Housing Priority Delivery Plan 2011-12.

Members received the Housing Priority Delivery Plan 2011-12, which was noted.

**16. Leave it Clean Scheme**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing (Enclosure 8.1 – 8.5 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

AGREED:

That Cabinet on 17 November, 2011 be recommended to discontinue the Council's "Leave it Clean" scheme with effect from 5 December, 2011.

**17. Estate Walks Programme Review**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing (Enclosure 9.1 – 9.18 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

Mr. N. Haywood, Tenancy Services Manager presented the report and advised that the aim of the programme was to identify and resolve problems at an early stage, and each estate was 'walked' at least twice a year. He indicated that Members were also welcome to join the estate walks with residents.

A Member referred to the walks around the Springfields Estate, Rugeley and advised that generally it was the same residents on the walks. He also commented that on one occasion residents had turned up for a walk and the day had been changed.

A Member referred to the estate walk in her area and advised that the Officer on the walk did not take into account any comments made by the residents with regard to areas of the estate that needed work undertaking.

In response to a question raised by a Member, the Head of Housing advised that feedback was provided to residents on a quarterly basis and could also be provided to Members.

AGREED:

That the Estate Walks Programme Review be noted.

**18. Revised Work Programme – 2011-12 Municipal Year**

Consideration was given to the Revised Work Programme – 2011-12 Municipal Year.

Members received the Revised Work Programme - 2011-12, which was noted.

**19. Christmas Tea with the Residents of the Grace Moore Court Sheltered Housing Scheme**

The Head of Housing reported that a number of improvements had been made to Grace Moore Court which included refurbishment of the lift, renewal of the communal bathrooms and sliding doors installed between the kitchen and the living areas of each flat.

He reported that the Committee may wish to view the improvements and have Christmas tea with the residents on Wednesday 7 December, 2011 at 3.00 p.m.

AGREED:

That the Housing Policy Development Committee visit Grace Moore Court on 7 December, 2011 at 3.00 p.m.

**20. Exclusion of the Public**

That the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting because of the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3, Part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

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**PART 2**

**21. Gas and Solid Fuel Maintenance Contract**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Housing (Enclosure 13.1 – 13.4 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

A presentation was given to Members of the Committee from Mr. G. Wignall, Head of Service Delivery, British Gas Community Energy and Ms. Y. Keay, Regional Operations Manager, PH Jones.

Members discussed how the service would be improved and asked what would make the service different from last year particularly in view of the high turnover of employees at PH Jones. Ms. Keay informed the Committee that employees did not previously have adequate training or expertise in certain areas, but that considerable training had now been undertaken. She also advised that a number of sub-contractors had previously been used but the contract would now be based on employing direct labour.

A Member enquired about the administration staff and asked how many more telephonists had been employed. Ms. Keay advised the Committee that whilst additional staff had not been recruited, administrative functions were being handled better and staff were being utilised more efficiently.

Members asked what changes would be made given tenants current perception of PH Jones. Ms. Keay informed the Committee that there would be a new logo which would brand PH Jones "as part of British Gas". In addition, there would be more publicity and good news stories could be placed in 'Hometalk'.

A Member referred to the problems experienced by tenants over the Christmas period last year where engineers had been to tenants' homes but could not obtain parts. Mr. Wignall advised Members that British Gas owned a distribution centre in Leicester which would be utilised by PH Jones if normal suppliers did not have parts.

In response to a question from a Member regarding missed calls and appointments, Ms. Keay informed the Committee that this was the biggest complaint received. However, they were fully aware of this and revised procedures were now in place to address this.

AGREED:

(A) That the present and future actions of PH Jones and British Gas with regard to improving

gas maintenance services are noted.

- (B) That the Committee receive a further report regarding the future performance of PH Jones.

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CHAIRMAN

(The meeting closed at 6.35 p.m.)