

Gloucester City Council

COMMITTEE	: CABINET CONSTITUTIONAL & ELECTORAL WORKING GROUP COUNCIL
DATE	: 8TH JUNE 2011 20TH JULY 2011 19TH JANUARY 2012
SUBJECT	: HOUSING CONSULTATION
DECISION TYPE	: NON-KEY
WARD	: ALL
REPORT BY	: CORPORATE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES
NO. OF APPENDICES	: NONE
REFERENCE NO.	:

1.0 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To recommend amendments to the Constitution to reflect changes to the Council's strategic housing consultation arrangements.

2.0 Recommendations

Council is asked to **RESOLVE** that

- (1) The revised approach to strategic housing consultation for the City be supported.
- (2) The Housing Forum be replaced with more flexible arrangements, responsive to the requirements of local communities.
- (3) It be noted that the scrutiny role of Registered Housing Providers (RHP's) is not a function of the Council but new consultation arrangements for RHP's will deal with scrutiny issues through the newly designed 'Tenant Panels' as explained at paragraph 4.4 of the report.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The need to consult on strategic housing issues has been based on guidance from the Audit Commission and builds on good practice that has been developed around the following principles:-

- How effectively do the Council and its partners strategically plan work to balance the housing market and develop sustainable communities.
- Whether there is an overarching and shared vision for housing which is linked to wider ambitions for the community and is championed effectively.
- Whether key stakeholders, partners and the wider community are actively involved in the strategic approach to housing.

- 3.2 In the past, housing consultation took place by means of a Tenants Forum, and in April 2007, a review was undertaken by Council officers where it was

decided to make changes and create a Housing Forum. It was anticipated that such a change would improve consultation with City residents and gain broader appeal, regardless of the tenure of the home in which they lived.

3.3 The remit of the Housing Forum was to act as a vehicle for tenant and resident representatives, statutory and voluntary agencies and interested individuals to come together to:

- Contribute to debates and discussions on Council policies, strategies and performance including the Housing and Community strategies.
- To enhance and improve housing conditions in the City, provide greater access to affordable housing and to share good practice and experience in the field of housing across all tenures.
- Ensure that areas of concern are identified and included in programmes for future action.

3.4 One of the objectives for the Housing Forum included the scrutiny of RHPs in the City despite this being outside of the remit of the Councils powers.

4.0 PROGRESS

4.1 Since the creation of Housing Forum, other changes haven't taken place that mean the full remit of the Forum isn't required, these include:-

- Gloucester City Homes (GCH) have increased their resources and effectiveness of consultation with residents on service related matters.
- The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) was created and took on the role of regulating RHPs and so minimised the level of scrutiny required by Local Authorities.

4.2 Housing Forum operated until early 2010, and in addition to the changes above, attendance at the Forum was frequently low and didn't effectively engage the wider target audience tending to attract a limited number of regular attendees who were not representative of any communities. Feedback from some attendees suggested that the 'committee style' environment was off-putting, stifled dialogue and the Forum failed to appeal to a wide cross-section of the community and failed to operate as an effective decision making forum.

4.3 Members will already be aware of proposals for the development of the Local Plan and the Community Strategy, and through this report it is proposed that strategic housing consultation be aligned with the consultation on these. The advantage of this will be a more comprehensive approach to developing neighbourhood plans, with the ability to include detail regarding housing initiatives or investment and providing better outcomes.

4.4 Members may wish to note, that in relation to the scrutiny role played by the previous forum, a CLG review of social housing regulation, 'proposes the transfer of the TSA to the 'Homes and Communities Agency' (April 2012 subject to legislation). In relation to consumer regulation, it is that body that will then undertake regulation of providers and a new initiative of identifying 'Tenant Panels' will create an enhanced role for elected Members and MPs: "It will be for each landlord to work with its tenants to constitute a panel (or

other scrutiny structure) in whatever way they think most appropriate.” As the CLG report rejected calls for local authority scrutiny committees to be used for Registered Provider scrutiny, to avoid confusion, it is now appropriate for any scrutiny role of the previous forum to cease, in favour of the Panel approach.

- 4.5 Cabinet considered this report on 8th June 2011 and recommended to the Constitution and Electoral Working Group that the Housing Forum be replaced with more flexible arrangements, responsive to the requirements of local communities, as at Recommendation 2 above. The Constitution and Electoral Working Group endorsed this recommendation at its meeting on 20 July 2011. If the recommendations are approved by Council, the Constitution will be amended to delete the Housing Forum as one of the Council’s Committees.

5.0 FUTURE WORK

- 5.1 Current estimates indicate that ‘City Plan’ documents for Gloucester are to be drafted for ‘formal consultation’ in late 2011, early 2012. In parallel with this process, a Housing Strategy for Gloucester needs to be prepared which dovetails with the Plan, setting out the approach to housing growth; meeting the needs of the vulnerable and the growing ‘older’ population; and seeking improvements in housing conditions.
- 5.2 In developing these plans and strategies a revised approach to consultation is now being proposed, whereby debate and consultation takes place within communities via Community meetings, residents groups, Neighbourhood Partnerships, the Parish Council, Neighbourhood Management meetings or any other recognised group.
- 5.3 Many of the Chair’s of the Neighbourhood Partnerships have now been contacted about the approach and the idea has received some qualified and welcome support.
- 5.4 It is envisaged that the role of Members within these new arrangements, will be to support discussions in their locality.
- 5.5 If Members are minded to approve this new approach to consultation, a detailed timetable will be developed to engage with communities over the coming months. Initially such a timetable will be concerned with the development of the Housing Strategy, the Local Plan and the newly required ‘strategic tenancy policy’.
- 5.6 It is proposed that the strategic housing consultation will be undertaken in a range of ways to influence the development of strategic documents and action plans, these may include: -
- Web based material, including explanatory documents and consultation forms
 - Discussion and questionnaires used at Community days.
 - Public displays to stimulate interest
 - GCC or GCH or other organisational mailings to residents
 - Use of social media such as Facebook to encourage input from young people

- Resident group meetings
- E Citizen Panel
- Attending group meetings of those typically under-represented e.g. disability/race or faith groups.

5.7 In addition to the resident focused discussion, it is proposed that a more formal meeting is held annually to liaise with professional stakeholders, and statutory bodies such as County, Police, Health; Registered Providers; HCA, Community Safety leads; Estate Agents; Building Societies; Housing Organisations, House-builders; Private Landlords and GAVCA voluntary sector representatives. Such meetings will be lead by Housing Strategy, but supported where necessary by other Services.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The requirements set out by the Audit Commission for strategic housing consultation in most respects still accord with the requirements of the new localism agenda. It remains as important as ever that we are able to demonstrate that we develop our Housing Strategy and Plans together with residents, and that they are provided with information on which to make informed contributions to decisions about housing priorities in Gloucester.

6.2 The revised approach is deliberately flexible in order to be responsive to the wishes of communities as far as is possible. It is important that residents are empowered to shape plans and are involved from the outset, rather than merely commenting on detailed draft proposals. It is hoped Members will support this new approach.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Any consultation can prove resource intensive, however the joined-up approach by Council Services will be more cost-effective than would be achieved by individual service consultation and is likely to stimulate a more comprehensive dialogue and hopefully enhanced participation.

7.2 Consultation events will be structured to be 'proportionate' to the nature of the matter under consideration and avoid elongated discussions on matters over which none of the parties can influence.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Localism Act 2011 is now in force and envisages greater public involvement in decision-making processes. The full implications of and changes required by the Act are still being considered and any issues arising from the Act relating to strategic housing consultation will be referred to the appropriate decision-making part of the Council.

9.0 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The failure to engage with residents sufficiently, will risk misunderstanding where the community wishes to see housing delivery, investment or other initiatives. This in turn could lead to dissatisfaction in communities and a lack of public confidence in the council's consultation processes.

10.0 PEOPLE IMPACT ASSESSMENTS (EQUALITIES)

Is a PIA required?	Yes	No	Explanation:
	Yes		The report contains recommendations to change the way we consult, therefore consideration about the way this may adversely affects residents needs to be ascertained
Has an initial PIA screening been completed?	Yes	No	Explanation:
	Yes		
Has a full PIA been completed?	Yes	No	Explanation:
	Yes		Yes, it was found to not disadvantage any of the equality strand groups and expected to enhance access to policy development.
Is the PIA available?	Yes	No	Explanation:
	Yes		
Has the PIA identified any negative impacts on any protected characteristic or community cohesion?	Yes*	No	*Please ensure PIA is available
		No	

10.1 An indicative People Impact Assessment (PIA) has been undertaken and no negative impacts were found, so a detailed assessment has not been undertaken.

10.2 The approach is intended to be inclusive and will work with local communities via recognised groups, and will seek to target harder to reach groups, such as older, vulnerable residents or those from some minority groups by holding discussions with smaller groups on some issues, or finding environments where they may feel more comfortable to be involved.

11.0 OTHER CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

1. Community Safety – It is hoped that by drawing up strategies, or sharing plans and proposals with residents, they will be best placed to comment on weaknesses in community safety as they see them and solutions found.
2. Environmental – these issues are fundamental for Planning, Economic and Housing Purposes and will be explored with communities to achieve best possible outcomes.

3. Staffing – Officers are required to consult on the development of plans and strategies; a collective approach it is hoped will create some efficiencies and advantages for residents by drawing on wider expertise.
4. Trade Union (TU to complete)

Not applicable.

Background Papers :

Published Papers :

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