

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet - 22nd July 2008

The Future for Tenant Participation in Cheltenham - Progress Report

Report of the Cabinet Member Community Development and Housing

1. Executive Summary and recommendation

1.1 The issue

At their meeting on 11th March 2008 the then Cabinet requested that the recommendations within the consultants report "Future Developments for Tenant Involvement in Cheltenham" be progressed with tenant and leaseholder representatives and stakeholders and a further report brought to Cabinet in July 2008.

1.2 I therefore recommend that:

1.2.1 The progress made to date and further recommendations for progressing this issue be noted and the report referred to Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their considerations and recommendations.

1.3 Summary of implications

1.3.1 Financial

£20,000 was made available from the Housing Revenue Account to facilitate the first stages of this work. It was also stated that when a new sustainable structure is evidenced the then running costs should be revisited.

An additional £6,500 has been recovered from the failed previous Tenants Federation grant which can contribute towards future work in this area.

Indicative costs of establishing a new centre are outlined within 3.4 of this report and would need to be built back into the base budget within the Housing Revenue Account if approved.

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1.3.2 Legal

When the payment of a grant to the new organisation has been agreed, documentation can be produced setting out the terms and conditions of the grant. This will be done using one of the council's new standard forms of grant documentation. Additionally, the terms of occupation of any premises to be used by the new organisation will need to be properly documented.

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1.4 Implications on corporate and community plan priorities

1.4.1 None as a direct result of this report

1.5 Statement on Risk

CS 2.3	The council's long term funding ability of key VCS infrastructure organisations	12
CS 2.11	On going corporate budgetary cuts	16

2. Introduction

2.1 In the period January to June 2008 there have been a number of meetings, facilitated by the independent consultant Ian McDougal, with tenant and resident representatives and a range of stakeholders. Examples of tenant organisations have been looked at and a site visit to Bristol have also taken place. This report is based on the notes and feedback from those events.

2.2 The tenant and leaseholder representatives have elected an interim subcommittee to act on their behalf.

3. Progress Report

3.1 At an initial meeting it was agreed to:

- Form a new group in Cheltenham which will replace the CFTL
- Develop costed and budget proposals in an outline business plan
- Develop the goals and objectives of the new group
- Ensure the new group receives support and guidance

- Recognise that the group will evolve over a period of time.

3.2 There was general agreement around the following aims:

- start small with clearly agreed realistic goals and measures and be clear about what is to be achieved
- should operate from central premises. These would be equipped with PC's/internet access, administration support, training/meeting facilities. (It emerged a similar centre operates in Bristol so a research visit was arranged for May 30)
- recognises achieving it's goals and objectives will take some years
- avoid mistakes by careful selection and capacity building
- aim to provide resources and help for the Community as a whole
- should continue to research and visit examples of best practise relevant to Cheltenham
- would work closely with the CBH and Council officers, but still be able to express independent views
- Work with CBH to assist in the development of new initiatives such as mystery shopping, resident auditors and resident scrutiny groups.

3.3 The aspirational milestones that have been agreed are:

July/August

- a new representative at Social and Community O & S committee. (Karl Hemming was nominated)
- detailed business plan and priorities agreed
- working party to draft terms of reference, person specifications, expenses policy, development programme and recruitment approach etc
- capacity building programme arranged
- agree a monitoring and evaluation criteria
- Identify location for new centre

September

- Form new group and elect officers
- Run publicity campaign on new approach/centre

October

- Open new centre that would:
 - Offer a Cheltenham wide service to tenants/leaseholders other groups
 - Increase resident, tenant and leaseholder involvement and participation
 - Focus on increasing the level of involvement of hard to reach groups
 - Provide information and training to increase skills aimed at “back to work opportunities”
 - Provide a signposting service particularly on key issues such as Choice based lettings
 - Grow and foster links with other Community based organisations
 - Provide equipment and facilities to assist Residents on key issues such as telephone, internet, and photocopying for community issues
 - Become a reference point and library on key Community issues
 - Provide opportunities for Volunteering within the community
 - “Coffee and friendly chat”- The visit to Bristol highlighted that this seemingly low value activity if done well is seen as a vital start point in establishing the value of the centre and identifying new recruits. They did make the point however it took them 3 to 4 years to build up and put real value into this approach.

3.4 Based on the Bristol model an initial indicative annual budget has been developed:

Lease/utilities/insurance	£15,000	Higher than High street as training room larger
Telecoms/internet/photocopying	£3,000	This excludes the purchase of PC's etc as equipment may be available internally
Print/leaflets/publicity material	£5,000	Essential at launch
Refreshments/non recoverable expenses	£2,000	Tea and travel
Training development and capacity building	£3,000	Assuming a new group of 6/12 this is not unreasonable in the first 18 months. Much development work can be integrated with CBH.
The figures at this early stage are approximate and are dependant on the premises and approach selected. It may be possible that a combined centre with choice based lettings or tenant participation staff would create synergy and reduce costs.	Total £28,000	

- 3.5** Cheltenham Borough Homes are concerned that the timetable for implementation may be unrealistic. They believe that capacity and organisation building will, and should, take longer if a skilled and sustainable representative organisation is to be developed.

CBH are also of the opinion that economies could be made by utilising existing buildings rather than leasing a new one, that costings for printing and training, outlined in 3.4, should be alternated and PC costs should be incorporated.

4. Consultation

- 4.1** Tenant and leaseholder representatives and stakeholders have been involved in the full process and have been consulted on the content of this report. It has also been considered by Cheltenham Borough Homes.

Background Papers

Cabinet Report "The Future for Tenant Involvement in Cheltenham" 11th March 2008.

Also reports to Cabinet on 18th December 2007

and 30th October 2007.

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Accountability

Cllr John Webster

Scrutiny Function

Social and Community