

Report for Resolution

Report to Executive
7 January 2009

Report of Chief Executive

Subject Results of Investigation into Greyhound Opening /
Goldsmith Street

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Purpose

To report on the results of the investigations into how decommissioned sheltered housing units at Greyhound Opening / Goldsmith Street came to be occupied by staff of the city council, and to make recommendations as to any further action that is required to safeguard the Council and its actions in future.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- The monitoring officer's recommendations are adopted
- The council's relocation assistance scheme for new employees ceases the provision of council accommodation on a temporary basis.

Financial Consequences

The staff occupying temporary accommodation have been given notice to quit by the end of January resulting in a loss of rent to the Housing Revenue Account.

As properties are vacated they will be boarded up. When all properties are vacated they will be demolished.

Risk Assessment

This report is brought forward to minimise the risk of unsound decisions being taken in the future and to encourage the proper declaration of interests.

Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

To improve the quality of the housing stock and increase the number of affordable housing units.

Executive Member: Councillor Arthur - Housing and Adult Services

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Attached Documents

Annex A Report of the Monitoring Officer

Annex B Report of the Director of Regeneration and Development

Annex C Map of site

Annex D Executive report of 21 March 2007 (Items 12 & 14 below the line not attached)

Annex E Minutes of Executive meeting of 21 March 2007

Annex F Frequently asked questions about Greyhound Opening / Goldsmith Street.

Report

Background

I launched a full investigation following a press enquiry by the Times newspaper about a story that council staff were living in decommissioned sheltered housing who were not staff who were being temporarily housed under the Council's relocation policy.

I immediately commissioned two reports:

The first was from the monitoring officer to investigate whether appropriate safeguards are in place where there may be potential Officer conflicts of interests. I also asked him to report back with proposals to improve procedures (which protect the interests of both the Council and Officers).

The second was from the Director of Regeneration and Development to investigate the process by which staff came to be living in the properties and whether appropriate decision making processes were followed. Specifically processes which related to:

- a) declaring the sheltered units at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Road unfit for purpose;
- b) decommissioning the housing complex and resettling the residents into new homes;
- c) the occupation of the vacated units on a temporary basis, by staff employed by Norwich City Council; and
- d) identifying the development partner and scheme for the redevelopment of the sheltered housing site and neighbouring property.

These investigations have now concluded and the reports are attached at annex A and annex B.

The reports do not cover any steps that have been taken of a disciplinary nature or any specific evidence that might relate to or prejudice a disciplinary hearing.

Conclusions

Report of the Monitoring Officer

Are appropriate safeguards in place where there may be potential conflicts of interest and can we improve processes to protect the interests of the council and the staff?

Yes

The report found that adequate safeguards are in place to protect the Council and individual members of staff but they were not followed in this case.

The report found that the following procedures are in place to make staff aware of the need to declare either a financial or non-financial interest that could be seen to conflict with the Council's interests or could cause conduct to be questioned.

- Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees.
- Regular reminders are sent to staff via Innercity.
- A copy of the Code of Conduct is given to all new staff as part of their induction and is included in the Staff Handbook.
- The Code of Conduct forms part of the Council's constitution.

Copies of the Council's Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees have been provided to Heads of Service in both the Constitution, Staff Handbook and on Workforce

Code of conduct

Paragraph 10 of Appendix 14 of the Council's Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees constitution deals with Personal Interests.

Paragraph 10.1 states –

'You must declare to your Head of Service any financial or non financial interests that you consider could conflict with the Council's interests, or could cause your conduct to be questioned. Such interests must be registered with the Corporate Governance Officer.'

Paragraph 15.4 of the Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees states that interests should be registered with the Corporate Governance Officer.

In addition, some professional bodies such as the chartered institute of housing have their own code of conduct.

Paragraph 2.7 of the Institute's Code of Conduct states:-

'members must take steps to ensure that their private, personal, political and financial interests do not conflict with their professional duties. They must disclose to their employer, or if self employed to any relevant clients, any such direct or indirect interests (including those of their immediate family, i.e. parents, spouse, children and siblings), which may affect or appear to affect decisions made by their employers, clients or customers, and they must not influence, or appear to influence, such decisions'?

The monitoring officer has made a number of recommendations as follows:

- That paragraph 10.1 of the Code of Conduct be amended to include the Chief Executive Officer and Directors.
- That the Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees be amended to include reference to the Chief Executive Officer, Directors and Head of Services' personal relationship with staff being recorded in the Register of Interests.
- Staff should sign to abide by the Code of Conduct when accepting a new position.

- The process of all staff acknowledging and confirming they have read key policies of the Council be reviewed.
- Consideration to be given to formal probity training to all staff.
- The process of recording 1:1 supervision sessions be reviewed.

Report of the Director of Regeneration and Development

Were appropriate decision-making processes followed in relation to:

a) the declaration of the sheltered units at Greyhound Opening / Goldsmith Road as unfit for purpose

Yes

Although there is no written policy or procedure to provide a framework to identify properties that are not fit for purpose, the process followed at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street included an evaluation process and was approved by the Executive.

b) decommissioning the housing complex and the resettlement of residents to new homes.

Yes

The process was adequately resourced, properly managed, well documented and sensitive to the vulnerable circumstances of the tenants. The decision to decommission the sheltered units was approved by the Executive.

The investigation has, however, highlighted that there was no written policy on decommissioning to provide a framework for subsequent implementation of this decision by officers.

c) the occupation of the vacated units on a temporary basis by staff employed by Norwich City Council.

No

The investigation has identified that the decision to use the vacated housing on a temporary letting arrangement for staff was not documented, did not adequately assess the risks and failed to appreciate the full implications of the departure from the approved and very specific policy of providing accommodation to staff joining the authority from outside the City.

The decision was based on an officer assessment of the options including an appraisal of their potential impact on residents during a decommissioning

process estimated to take 2 years as well as a general assessment of the associated financial costs.

The investigation has highlighted that of all the factors considered by officers the overriding consideration was the protection of vulnerable and elderly residents during a period of significant change and uncertainty.

d) the identification of the development partner and the scheme for redevelopment of the sheltered housing site and neighbouring property.

Yes

This process accords with exemplary practice, is well documented and was approved by the Executive. All the land owning, development partner and design procurement arrangements are clearly documented, procedurally sound and have been approved by the Executive. Overall, the approach to the redevelopment of this site could be considered to be an example of exemplary practice.

Report of the Monitoring Officer

I have been asked by the Chief Executive Officer to conduct an investigation as the Councils Monitoring Officer and report back to her within 10 working days.

I have been asked to investigate the following:-

- (1) Were appropriate decision making processes followed which led to Council Officers occupying sheltered housing accommodation at Greyhound Opening?
- (2) Are there appropriate safeguards in place where there may be potential Officer conflicts of interests?
- (3) Report back with proposals to improve procedures (which protect the interests of both the Council and Officers).

With regard to (1) above, subsequently to being requested to undertake this investigation, it was agreed with the Chief Executive Officer that as this part of the investigation was also included within the Terms of Reference of the investigation being undertaken by the Director of Regeneration and Development that I would not report on it.

I have not included in the report any specific evidence in the application or lack of application of the Council's policies and procedures as they might form part of a disciplinary process.

Paragraph 10 of Appendix 14 of the Council's Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees constitution deals with Personal Interests.

Paragraph 10.1 states –

'You must declare to your Head of Service any financial or non financial interests that you consider could conflict with the Council's interests, or could cause your conduct to be questioned. Such interests must be registered with the Corporate Governance Officer.'

This paragraph of the Code of Conduct refers to staff reporting interests to a Head of Service. It is my view that where a Head of Service has an interest, the Code of Conduct should be interpreted that a Head of Service must declare an interest to his/her Corporate Director or Chief Executive Officer. Similarly, Corporate Directors must report their interest to the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer would be expected to report his/her interest to the Monitoring Officer.

Paragraph 15.4 of the Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees states that interests should be registered with the Corporate Governance Officer.

Updated copies of the Constitution were last provided to all Heads of Service by the Democratic Services Team of the Legal and Democratic Service in August 2008.

Reminders about the Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees are published twice a year in InnerCity. Such reminders were last published on 18 February and 23 June 2008.

The Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees is drawn to the attention of all staff as part of their induction process and is included in the Staff Handbook which has been issued to all staff in 2007.

Individual Contracts of Employment for all staff refer to the terms and conditions covered by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services.

Included in the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (Green Book) is the following paragraph:-

2. Official Conduct

2.1 Employees will maintain conduct of the highest standard such that public confidence in their integrity is sustained'.

All staff are expected to confirm on their individual online Workforce record that they have read and understood the responsibilities of a range of policies. The Code of Conduct for Local Government employees is one of the policies listed. Guidelines are located on Workforce for employees, on how to record personal details, update contact information and acknowledge that corporate policies have been read and understood.

Most professional bodies have their own Code of Conduct, for example the Chartered Institute of Housing paragraph 2.7 states:-

'members must take steps to ensure that their private, personal, political and financial interests do not conflict with their professional duties. They must disclose to their employer, or if self employed to any relevant clients, any such direct or indirect interests (including those of their immediate family, i.e. parents, spouse, children and siblings), which may affect or appear to affect decisions made by their employers, clients or customers, and they must not influence, or appear to influence, such decisions'

Appendix 20A of the Constitution sets out the Council's Code of Governance which is about how the Council ensures it is doing the right things, the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. Two of the principles of good governance are –

- Promoting values for the Council and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.

- Taking informal and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk.

A requirement of the Code of Governance is to develop and maintain open and effective mechanisms for documenting evidence for decisions and recording the criteria, rationale and considerations on which decisions are based.

Anti Fraud and Corruption Strategy

This strategy covers 'the requirement to disclose an interest in order to gain financial or other pecuniary benefit.' This policy was revised in November 2008 and adopted by the Audit Committee on 28 November 2008.

Summary

The following procedures are in place to make staff aware of the need to declare either a financial or non-financial interest that could be seen to conflict with the Council's interests or could cause conduct to be questioned.

- Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees.
- Regular reminders are sent to staff via Innercity.
- A copy of the Code of Conduct is given to all new staff as part of their induction and is included in the Staff Handbook.
- The Code of Conduct forms part of the Council's constitution.

Copies of the Council's Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees have been provided to Heads of Service in both the Constitution, Staff Handbook and on Workforce.

It is HR and Learning's normal practice to provide a copy of the Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees with a Contract of Employment.

Conclusion

Adequate safeguards are in place to protect the Council and individual members of staff but they were not followed in this case.

Recommendations

- That paragraph 10.1 of the Code of Conduct be amended to include the Chief Executive Officer and Directors.
- That the Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees be amended to include reference to the Chief Executive Officer, Directors and Head of Services' personal relationship with staff being recorded in the Register of Interests.

- Staff should sign to abide by the Code of Conduct when accepting a new position.
- The process of all staff acknowledging and confirming they have read key policies of the Council be reviewed.
- Consideration to be given to formal probity training to all staff.
- The process of recording 1:1 supervision sessions be reviewed.

John Jones
Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Monitoring Officer

Report of the Director of Regeneration and Development

1 Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to record the decision making process that was followed to:

- declare the sheltered units at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Road unfit for purpose;
- decommission the housing complex and resettle the residents into new homes;
- occupy the vacated units on a temporary basis by staff employed by Norwich City Council; and
- identify the development partner and scheme for the redevelopment of the sheltered housing site and neighbouring property.

This report has been prepared at the request of the Chief Executive following a disclosure that a senior member of staff had moved in to a vacant unit on a temporary letting arrangement.

1.2 Current employees and staff who have left the organisation, with responsibility for this service area and the relevant current and previous portfolio holder have been interviewed as part of this investigation.

1.3 Based on the assessment of the above matters the main conclusions of this investigation are as follows:

1.4 Section 2 of this report assesses the process leading to the recommendation to decommission and redevelop the sheltered housing units at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street and together with the surrounding commercial units owned by the City Council and with residential property owned by the County Council, for a mixed tenure housing scheme. It concludes that although there is no written policy or procedure to provide a framework to identify properties that are not fit for purpose, the process followed at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street included an evaluation process and was approved by the Executive.

1.5 Section 3 of this report assesses the process followed to resettle the residents into new homes. It concludes that it was adequately resourced, properly managed, well documented and sensitive to the vulnerable circumstances of the tenants. The decision to decommission the sheltered units was approved by the Executive. The investigation has, however, highlighted that there was no written policy on decommissioning to provide a framework for subsequent implementation of this decision by officers.

1.6 Section 4 of this report assesses the process followed for the temporary occupation of the vacant housing units by staff. It concludes that it was based on an officer assessment of the options including an appraisal of their potential impact on residents during a decommissioning process estimated to take 2 years as well as a general assessment of the associated financial

costs.

- 1.7 In assessing the decommissioning options officers took into account the lessons of recent resettlement projects at Foulgers Court sheltered housing scheme and the general needs housing at Barrack Street.
- 1.8 The investigation has highlighted that of all the factors considered by officers the overriding consideration was the protection of vulnerable and elderly residents during a period of significant change and uncertainty.
- 1.9 Notwithstanding this, the investigation has also identified that the decision to use the vacated housing units for temporary letting arrangements for staff was not documented, did not adequately assess the risks and failed to appreciate the full implications of the departure from the approved and very specific policy for providing accommodation to staff joining the authority from outside the City.
- 1.10 The investigation has shown that the decision to use the vacated properties for staff accommodation under the Council's relocation policy for new employees was taken at Director level (the then Director of Community and Neighbourhoods) with responsibility for establishing the process for implementation, including appropriate safeguards resting with the acting Head of Strategic Housing together with the Housing Strategic and Enabling Manager. After some three months of applying this letting strategy there was a change in the eligibility criteria that enabled any member of staff to apply for accommodation and this was offered on a first come first served basis. There was no assessment of housing need and there was no written procedure for allocating these tenancies.
- 1.11 The lack of documentation means that most of the evidence used in this part of the investigation is based on the recollections of those interviewed of discussions held, decisions made and actions taken over a 1 to 2 year period. Therefore there are some differences in the evidence presented.
- 1.12 The section concludes that the officer decision to extend the eligibility for housing to all staff on a first come first served basis is procedurally unsound.
- 1.13 Section 5 of the report considers the process adopted for the selection of the development partner and the use of a design competition to develop a scheme for the site. The conclusion is that this process accords with exemplary practice, is well documented and was approved by the Executive

2 Decommissioning of council housing at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street

2.1 This section of the report assesses the process leading to the recommendation to redevelop the sheltered housing units at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street and surrounding commercial units owned by the City Council together with residential property owned by the County Council. A map showing the different ownerships is attached.

2.2 The main factors that led to a recommendation to the Executive on the 21st March 2007 to decommission 25 sheltered housing units and a former wardens house at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street were that:

2.2 (i) Norfolk County Council announced the closure of Alderman Clarke House, a sheltered housing complex adjacent to the City Council owned properties. This site was allocated in the 2004 adopted local plan for housing.

2.2 (ii) An adjacent industrial site of 10 small units (Haslips Opening) was owned by the City Council and was also allocated in the 2004 adopted local plan for housing.

2.2 (iii) There is no agreed procedure for how 'not fit for purpose' housing units are identified. In this instance Landlord Services, the section responsible for the management of the Council's housing stock, identified that the 15 one bedroom bungalows and 10 one bedroom corridor units at Goldsmiths Street/Greyhound Opening did not meet the decent homes standard and because of their internal layout and poor thermal insulation they would be both difficult and expensive to adapt to meet current standards including DDA compliance. They also noted that the corridor units were proving to be difficult to let although at the time the decision was taken to decommission the units they were all occupied. In this context Landlord Services considered the properties were not fit for purpose and would be appropriate for decommissioning.

2.3 Having regard to the above matters, the Strategic Housing section, who lead the Council's affordable housing delivery programme, commenced during the second half of 2006 an assessment of the development potential of the above sites. At an early stage the implications for existing tenants of this approach were acknowledged as an important consideration. There is a range of documentation recording the various meetings and assessment undertaken as part of the complex analysis of the development potential for this area.

2.4 The outcome of the assessment by the strategic housing team was presented in a report to the Executive on the 21st March 2007 (Copy attached). In the report officers recommend the disposal of Council owned land at Greyhound Opening for new affordable housing and the inclusion of the site in a wider development scheme. Confidential matters relating to the financial detail of the various elements of the land disposal including the implications for third party interests were considered in a separate confidential report to the same meeting of the Executive.

- 2.5 The following 9 resolutions were made by the Executive:
- resettle the current residents of 30-48 Goldsmith Street and 4-18 Greyhound Opening to properties according to their individual needs and agreed preferences;
 - establish the post of Greyhound Opening Resettlement Officer to facilitate the above;
 - dispose of the Council's interest in the land to enable the provision of new affordable housing;
 - work with Norfolk County Council to facilitate a development site for new affordable housing;
 - delegate to the Strategic Director – Community and Neighbourhoods and the Head of Asset and City Management the power to take the incidental and ancillary steps to achieve the above;
 - note the financial consequences of the development of the site at Greyhound Opening for new affordable housing;
 - note the options relating to a property on the periphery of the site and delegate the implementation of the tenants' agreed option to the Strategic Director – Community and Neighbourhoods;
 - approve the methodology of costs incurred in site assembly being reimbursed by the Registered Social Landlord who purchases the site from Norwich City Council; and
 - ask the Group Leaders to consider a response to the County Council at their next meeting.
- 2.6 Combined the above decisions of the Executive provided a clear instruction, with appropriate supporting delegation, for officers to progress the redevelopment of this site. It is noted that there is no explicit reference to any interim letting arrangements in either the resolutions or covering report.
- 2.7 In conclusion, the process followed to reach a decision to decommission the housing units at Goldsmith Street/Greyhound opening is well documented and the decision making process is transparent, sound and was, in accordance with the constitution of the Council, taken by the Executive.

3 Resettlement of the residents of the sheltered housing units at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street

- 3.1 This section of the report assesses the process followed to resettle the residents. As recorded in the report to the Executive on the 21st March 2007 (attached) the engagement of tenants (and where appropriate their families) to explain the potential impact of any decision to decommission the sheltered units had commenced in Mid February 2007. This approach ensured that from the outset residents were aware of the potential redevelopment scheme in advance of it being announced publicly.
- 3.2 The March 2007 report to the Executive highlighted four important elements of the resettlement process:
- 3.3 Firstly, residents would be resettled to alternative accommodation in accordance to their needs and preferences.

- 3.4 Secondly, a post of Resettlement Officer would be established to help facilitate this process (this was in addition to the on-site warden).
- 3.5 Thirdly, that all tenants would be eligible for home loss payments (maximum £4,000 in March 2007) to cover incidental costs of relocating and all removal costs would be met by the City Council.
- 3.6 Finally, it was estimated that the relocation of the 25 tenants would take 2 years (i.e. be completed by early 2009).
- 3.7 The minutes of the March 2007 Executive meeting record that 2 residents from the complex attended the meeting and that one tenant took the opportunity to address members. The minutes record that in addressing the meeting the residents supported the development of the site for affordable units.
- 3.8 There is no written procedure for the process to be followed for the resettlement of residents. Notwithstanding this there is detailed documentary evidence recording various group and individual meetings with residents, the assessment of their needs and aspirations for resettlement and the financial arrangements associated with their relocation.
- 3.9 The first resident was resettled to new accommodation in April 2007 and by the end of June 2007 7 properties had been vacated. The last tenancy was surrendered on the 27th July 2008. The resettlement officer's workbook notes and the formal records of tenant submitting to the City Council their notice to quit their property to move to other Council accommodation, show that almost all of the relocations (22 out of 25) took place within the first 12 months of the Executive decision to decommission.
- 3.10 In conclusion, the process followed for the resettlement of the tenants resulted in residents voluntarily moving to accommodation that met their needs and in a location of their choice. All tenants were advised from an early date that the Council wished to decommission their property and were informed of what this meant for them. In this instance no tenant was served with a notice to quit their accommodation because they all voluntarily surrendered their tenancy. A key reason for this is that the appointment of a resettlement officer, with experience of the then current resettlement schemes at Barrack Street, with specific responsibility to handle all aspects of the resettlement process, helped to ensure that the needs of tenants were given a high priority. The resettlement process was achieved ahead of schedule. In addition to the work of the resettlement officer the presence of a warden on site for most of the resettlement period helped to ensure that tenants and their families were able to seek advice on all aspects of the decommissioning of the sheltered housing complex.
- 3.11 As noted above, although the Council had decommissioned other housing units there were no written procedures for the process to be followed. Therefore, the decision making arrangements surrounding the decommissioning of Goldsmith Street/Greyhound Opening were based on

the experience of the officers involved and the practical steps necessary to resettle residents. There is no evidence that the absence of a policy on the decommissioning of council properties had any deleterious impact on tenants but, as shown in Section 4 below, it did have serious implications for the interim letting arrangements for these properties. The documentary evidence shows that overall the resettlement process worked well, was completed within the envisaged timescale and, although based on the need to obtain vacant possession, it was sensitive to the needs of vulnerable and elderly residents.

4 Temporary use of the vacated sheltered housing units at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street for accommodation for employees of Norwich City Council

- 4.1 The purpose of this section of the report is to assess the decision making process followed for the temporary occupation by staff of the vacated housing units at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street.
- 4.2 The March 2007 report to the Executive identified the vulnerable nature of elderly residents within the development but did not contain any reference to how the vacated units would be secured during the estimated 2 year decommissioning process.
- 4.3 There is limited documentation explaining the reasons why a decision was taken to use the vacated units for temporary letting arrangements for staff but what is available shows that officers had, at the time of the report to the Executive, concluded that to protect the existing tenants the course of action would be to let vacant properties to staff. Almost all the information arising from the interviews confirm that the whole re-letting process was planned, organised and implemented by staff in the strategic housing section. Officer(s) in the Strategic Housing Section also prepared the tenancy agreements. The properties were let on the basis of temporary letting arrangements that could be terminated by one months notice from either party. In October 2007 there was a discussion between legal services and strategic housing on the form of the tenancy arrangements.
- 4.4 In the absence of documentation, the interviews with the existing and previous senior officers directly responsible for this decision (i.e. the former Director of Community and Neighbourhoods, the then acting Head of Strategic Housing and the former development Housing Strategy and Enabling Officer) have provided an explanation of why this approach was considered to be the most appropriate.
- 4.5 Firstly, the officers confirmed that they considered four main options of how the vacated units could be managed:
 - (i) The properties could be boarded up and made secure against unauthorised trespass/squatting;
 - (ii) The properties could be let on short term tenancies to people on the waiting list or homeless individuals awaiting the outcome of the assessment of eligibility for accommodation;

- (iii) The properties could be occupied through temporary letting arrangements by private sector tenants under a guardianship contract with a private company; and
- (iv) The properties could be let to Council employees as part of the package of relocation measures contained in the Council's employment scheme for new employees moving to Norwich.

4.6 Secondly, the officers stated that each option was assessed first and foremost alongside the potential impact they would have on the residents and secondly against the potential cost. In undertaking the assessment, Officers did have regard to the then current and ongoing unsatisfactory and expensive experience of applying options (i) and (ii) to vacated and decommissioned properties at Barrack Street and to the cost of adopting option (iii) to the decommissioning of the former county council and city council sheltered units at Foulgers Opening (which were vacated in 2004). The conclusion of this assessment process (which is not documented) was that officers considered that the least disruptive approach for tenants and the most cost effective approach for the council would be to let the properties to staff.

4.7 Residents were formally notified of this decision in May 2007. The correspondence sent to the residents dated 11th May 2007 states that vacated properties would be let to council staff relocating to the area. This approach is in line with the council relocation assistance scheme for new employees. The resettlement officer recalls that when residents were informed of this decision, they did not object to the proposal and were satisfied that this arrangement would maintain both the security and residential feel of the complex.

4.8 The rent charged for Council staff was the same as the basic rent any tenant would pay for occupation of the units (currently £46.89). However this would be lower than that charged to the elderly residents occupying properties at Goldsmith Roan/Greyhound Opening because it excluded payment for specific services provided to the elderly tenants. For comparison purposes the charges for 2008/09 would be as follows:-

Basic Rent: £46.89

Alarm Service: £3.07

Support Charge: £11.84

Sheltered Service Charge: £7.51

Total inclusive rent (basic rent + service charges) = £69.31

4.9 During the 3 month period between May and July 2007 this letting process changed from the application of an existing employment relocation policy to a new approach that opened up the scope for letting properties to all staff. The only written record of this change in approach is the following article in the 30 July 2007 edition of the weekly staff newsletter, 'inner city' inviting applications from staff. It should be noted that the level of rent quoted was an error and the actual rent was as shown in paragraph 4.8 above. The article was as follows:

Need somewhere to live?

There are several vacant properties at Greyhound Opening (on Goldsmith Street), a short walk from the City Centre, being offered exclusively to staff for only £60-£70 per week.

Greyhound Opening is a sheltered housing scheme close to Dereham Road which is due to be decommissioned in early 2009 to make way for affordable housing. Current tenants are being moved to other sheltered schemes across the City and we would like to temporarily fill the empty properties so the remaining elderly tenants are not left in isolation. We would ask that anyone interested be mindful of their elderly neighbours. For further details please contact.....

4.10 Arising from the above article the three questions pertinent to this investigation are:

- What factors were taken into account in the decision to let the vacated properties to existing employees?
- How was this decision taken? and
- Is it procedurally sound?

4.11 There is no written documentation available that addresses the above questions so it is necessary to refer to the outcome of the interviews. From this it is clear the underlying consideration for the senior officers in the Strategic Housing section responsible for managing this process was the need to protect the day to day living environment of elderly and vulnerable tenants during a period of significant change and uncertainty. In this context the factors that prompted a widening of the eligibility for staff access to these properties were that the speed of resettling existing residents to their new homes was faster than anticipated and this meant that units were vacated quicker than expected; the demand for unfurnished accommodation from relocating staff was insufficient to fill the vacated units and as a consequence there was the real prospect that a decreasing number of tenants would be living in a complex with an increasing number of vacant units. In these circumstances officers would need to revisit the options for dealing with vacant units listed in paragraph 4.5 above. The officer view at the time was that the properties could be vulnerable to illegal trespass/squatting and may, therefore, need to be boarded up.

4.12 Based on the information stated during the interviews it appears that this assessment led officers to the conclusion that the best way forward was to widen the number of staff eligible to occupy the units on a first come first served basis. There is no evidence that this change in letting policy was referred to either the Corporate Management Team or discussed informally with Members of the Executive. There are differing views on who was/was not consulted on this matter but it is clear that the main responsibility rests with a limited number of senior strategic housing staff. Furthermore there is no evidence that any consideration was given to the procedural soundness of this decision, the relationship to existing policy, and the need for any criteria to select prospective tenants. The general presumption appears to have

been that officers had delegated authority to make such a change in the letting strategy. At the start of December 2008 17 properties were occupied. There was a written process for issuing the tenancies.

- 4.13 Procedurally the widening of the eligibility was a departure from approved policy and was outside of, or contrary to, the Council's policy framework. In this context it is not a decision that could be taken by officers. From the interviews it appears that this misunderstanding may have arisen from officers placing an over-reliance on the March 2007 Executive decision to delegate to the then Director of Community and Neighbourhoods 'the power to take the incidental and ancillary steps' necessary to implement the decision to redevelop the site of Goldsmith Street/ Greyhound Opening sheltered housing scheme for affordable housing.
- 4.14 It is clear that the procedural soundness of this decision was never a consideration for those officers directly involved in this matter. In addition it is appropriate to note that the policy implications of the content of the staff newspaper advertisement announcing the availability of council housing units to let, was not picked up within the organisation generally.
- 4.15 The proper approval process would have required a report to the Executive. Notwithstanding this the absence of any procedure for selecting tenants and monitoring period of occupation has led to a situation where single units were let to more than one person; where a current tenant has left the employment of the council; and where tenancies have been allowed to run for over a year. Combined these factors demonstrate a lack of robustness in the way this arrangement was introduced and managed. Finally, the lack of an approved policy may be a factor associated with the letting arrangement of one of the units by the Head of Service responsible for the Strategic Housing service both at the time this arrangement was introduced and currently. This matter is the subject of a separate investigation and is not covered in this report.
- 4.16 In conclusion, the lack of documentary evidence highlights a major weakness in the overall management by officers of the letting of vacated units on an interim non-secure tenancy basis. There is no doubt that the underlying rationale behind the initial decision to let the properties to staff under the relocation policy is sustainable and justifiable. However, the subsequent decision to widen eligibility, although taken on the basis of being the best approach for the remaining tenants; failed to assess all the risks involved; had no process for tenant selection and management; and was procedurally unsound.

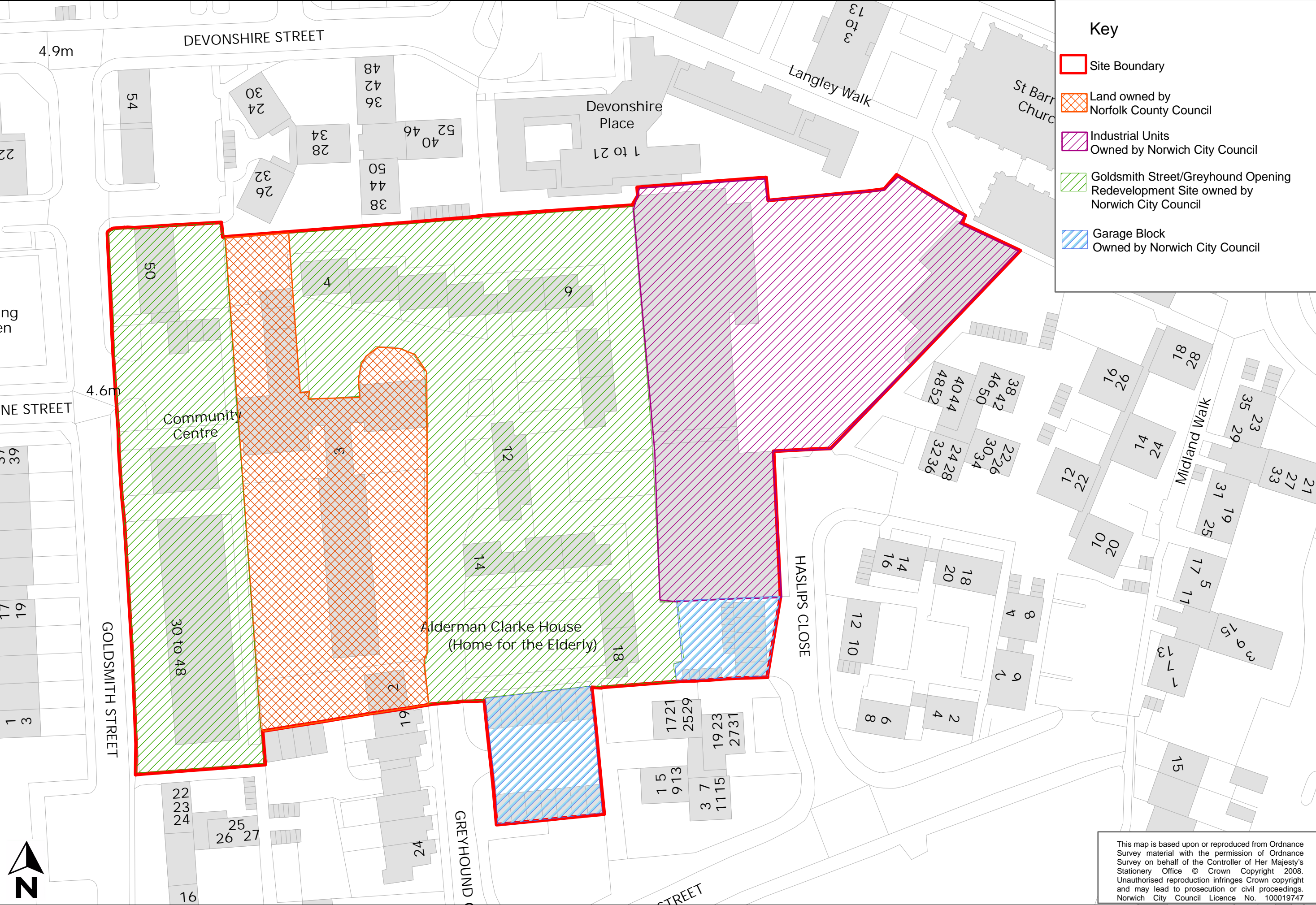
5 The process for the redevelopment of the site for affordable housing

- 5.1 The March 2007 Executive report gave approval for officers to progress the acquisition of all third party interests in land surrounding Greyhound Opening/Goldsmiths Street and then dispose of the whole site under the Delivering Affordable Homes Project (DAHP) initiative for a mixed tenure development of some 100 dwellings.
- 5.2 On this basis, negotiations have subsequently been concluded for the

purchase of the county council owned Alderman Clarke House and solicitors have been instructed to prepare the necessary documentation. Notices to quit have been served on all tenants occupying industrial units at Haslips Opening and are due to expire March 2009. The property related aspect of the scheme is documented and has been undertaken in accordance with the resolution of the Executive.

- 5.3 In addition to land assembly and development partner arrangements, the March 2007 Executive report also established that, subject to the approval of the DAHP partners, the scale and nature of the site would make the scheme an appropriate candidate for a design competition. To deliver this instruction, under the management arrangements of the DAHP, the RIBA competitions office has been appointed to run the competition. There is a project plan for this process, it is well documented and has been rolled out in a successful manner. In October 2008, 5 architectural practices were selected from 101 submissions to submit proposal for the design of this development. The design proposals were received on the 12th December 2008. The successful scheme will be selected early in the new year.
- 5.4 Combined, the resolution of land ownership matters and the selection of the design should, subject to final costs and subsequent regulatory approvals, enable commencement on site in the autumn of 2009. This is later than originally envisaged and the main reason for this is that the design competition has taken longer than expected.
- 5.5 In conclusion all the land owning, development partner and design procurement arrangements are clearly documented, procedurally sound and have been approved by the Executive. Overall, the approach to the redevelopment of this site could be considered to be an example of exemplary practice.

Jerry Massey
Director of Regeneration and Development



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Report to Executive
21 March 2007

Report of Strategic Director - Community and Neighbourhoods
Head of Asset and City Management

Subject Greyhound Opening

Item
12

Purpose

To agree to the disposal by the Council of the site comprising of twenty-five dwellings, ten commercial units, fourteen garages and associated land at Greyhound Opening for new affordable housing.

Recommendations

- (1) To resettle the current residents of 30-48 Goldsmith Street and 4-18 Greyhound Opening to properties according to their individual needs and agreed preferences;
- (2) To establish the post of Greyhound Opening Resettlement Officer to facilitate the above;
- (3) To dispose of the Council's interest in the land to enable the provision of new affordable housing;
- (4) To work with Norfolk County Council to facilitate a developable site for new affordable housing;
- (5) To delegate to the Strategic Director - Community and Neighbourhoods and the Head of Asset and City Management the power to take all incidental and ancillary steps to achieve the above.

Financial Consequences

The financial consequences are set out within the additional report under the exempt section of this agenda (Item 14 below).

Strategic Objective/Service Plan Priority

The report helps to achieve the strategic objectives to make Norwich safe and secure, building strong and proud local communities and to ensure the City has a clean and healthy environment; and the service plan priority to enable new affordable housing to meet known need.

Contact Officers

Kris Reeves, Acting Head of Strategic Housing
Chris Dady, Head of Asset and City Management

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Report

Background

1. Greyhound Opening is a large area (1.2 hectares) encompassing two Local Plan allocations for housing (a former residential care home and commercial workshops), twenty-six dwellings and a garage site. The potential exists to comprehensively redevelop the whole of this area for the provision of new affordable housing. Land ownership is split between Norwich City Council and Norfolk County Council. Early discussions indicate that it will be possible to work in partnership with Norfolk County Council to provide new affordable housing on this site.
2. There are several constraints to development on this site. Foremost of these is the presence of twenty-five sheltered housing units, all of which are tenanted. Secondary is the presence of four business tenants in the Haslips Opening Warehouses. There is also another property that could potentially be included in the development, details of this property can be found in the exempt part of this report.

Goldsmith Street Sheltered Housing Scheme

3. This comprises fifteen one-bedroom bungalows and ten one-bedroom 'corridor units'. In order to bring the Goldsmith Street scheme up to both the Decent Homes and Disability Discrimination Act standards it would require considerable capital investment. The 'corridor' homes on Goldsmith Street are difficult to let due to their layout. The size and layout of the Greyhound Opening bungalows has presented residents with numerous difficulties, such as a lack of usable storage space and the absence of appropriately placed wash-hand-basins. Due to these difficulties it is being recommended that this scheme be decommissioned.
4. On Wednesday, 14 February 2007, a meeting was held with the twenty-five residents of Goldsmith Street Sheltered Housing Scheme to explain the potential impact of these plans upon them. The meeting was well-attended by residents and their families.
5. Eighteen of the residents attended the public meeting. The news that this proposal was being considered came as a shock to most residents. Most were reassured by the support that would be given to them in the event of any move. Many residents wanted more information on why this was being considered, several understood the great need for affordable housing in Norwich and were thus supportive of the proposals. A couple of residents requested that alternative sheltered housing be constructed in the proposed new development. A follow-up meeting has been arranged for Friday, 23 March 2007 to discuss with all residents the outcome of the decision taken today.
6. The residents who were unable to attend were all visited on a one to one basis as soon as was possible after the meeting.
7. Feedback forms were given to all residents in order to give them a full opportunity to comment. To date four feedback forms have been received. One gives support for the proposal as it will increase affordable housing in Norwich. One requests that the existing properties be improved. Two express preference for a particular

sheltered housing scheme if this proposal is to go ahead. If further forms are received these will be summarised at the meeting of the Executive. In addition to this several residents expressed a wish to attend this meeting. Transport has been arranged to facilitate this.

8. At the meeting it was explained to residents that the Executive Committee will be making a decision whether or not to proceed with these plans. If approved this would mean that all residents would be resettled to alternative accommodation according to their needs and preferences. It is proposed to create within the establishment a Resettlement Officer for Goldsmith Street in order to facilitate this work. Details of this can be found in the exempt part of this report.
9. All tenants would be eligible for a statutory home-loss payment which is currently £4,000. In addition to this they would need help with the disturbance of moving. It is proposed that Norwich City Council would work with residents to arrange every aspect of their move and meet any costs incurred. It is estimated that the relocation of all twenty-five residents would take approximately two years.

Haslips Opening Warehouses

10. The warehouses on this site are currently partially let to four different tenants. As the site is allocated for housing in the Adopted Local Plan 2004 all will have been aware of the possibility of redevelopment for some time.
11. All business tenants were informed that Norwich City Council was considering proposals for the redevelopment of the area for the provision of New Affordable Housing on Wednesday, 14 February. No responses were received.

Alderman Clarke House

12. This former residential care home is owned by Norfolk County Council and is vacant. The property is currently being secured by Camelot Guardians, a security firm.
13. Early discussions have been held with Norfolk County Council regarding land assembly. They appear keen to work with Norwich City Council to achieve the provision of new affordable housing on this site. Details of how these discussions can be carried forward are provided in the exempt part of this report.

New Development

14. It is proposed that the new development would be carried out by three RSLs in the Greater Norwich Housing Development Partnership Framework for predominantly new affordable housing. Early discussions with Planning Services have indicated that approximately one hundred new dwellings could be constructed in this area.
15. The Housing Market Assessment Evidence Base: A Study of Housing Need and Stock Condition, carried out by Opinion Research Services, has found that the majority of the housing need in Norwich City is for affordable rented dwellings. However large mono-tenure developments have been proven not to work in the past and affordable rented properties require the greatest public subsidy. The majority of the accommodation should be affordable rented but in order to create a mixed and sustainable community and create valuable cross-subsidy for affordable rented accommodation a mix of tenures should be incorporated. This

would allow for the creation of sub-market rented accommodation, in accordance with the political aims of the current administration, a form of Low Cost Home Ownership and a small proportion of open market sale. Officers will consider the exact proportions of these as the plans progress.

16. It is possible that a number of the resettled tenants may wish to return to the area and even if they do not, a proportion of older tenants would help create a vibrant mix in the area. It is therefore proposed that one-block of accommodation could be designated for over-55s. This would be flexibly constructed to meet future needs, with communication link-ups and level-access throughout. Some of these properties could be provided as Low Cost Home Ownership for older people if ongoing discussions with Supporting People identify a need.
17. As this is a high-density City-Centre scheme the majority of the properties would be small apartments. However subject to design constraints it should be possible to construct a small proportion of the total as three-bedroom town houses. The remainder would thus be divided between one and two-bedroom apartments. Due to their greater flexibility for future occupants it is proposed that the vast majority of these properties would be two-bedroom with a small contingency of smaller units, if required, for design resins. Officers would consider the exact proportions of house size and type as the plans progress.
18. As a large development site with Norwich City Council's involvement, the highest standards of design should be aimed for to create a sustainable, vibrant, liveable area.
19. It is proposed that the scheme should aim for level four of the Code for Sustainable Homes (Eco-Homes 'Excellent') and have all properties constructed to the lifetime homes standard. There is scope for numerous sustainable technologies to be employed at this site. Photovoltaic cells are particularly effective on three and four storey buildings and there is scope for shared low-carbon emission heating systems to be installed in larger, shared buildings. It should be recognised that this will have financial implications and may require additional financial contributions from Norwich City Council to achieve this.
20. Although to be developed through the Greater Norwich Housing Development Partnership Framework it is proposed that a different approach to design be taken with this site. It is large enough to run a design competition to find a suitably innovative architect to achieve the desired standards of design. This competition would also involve the Housing Corporation to get buy-in of the scheme's primary funder at an early stage in the process. This would not present any cost implications to the Council as the work would be carried out at risk by bidding firms of architects and ultimately paid for by the developing RSLs.



EXECUTIVE

5.30 p.m. - 7.45 p.m.

21 March 2007

Present: Councillors Morphew (Chair), Blakeway, Brociek-Coulton, Morrey, Waters and Westmacott

Also Present: Councillors Cooke and Lowe (to end of item 8)

Apologies: Councillors Ferris (Vice-Chair) (other Council business) and Blower

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2007.

2. GREYHOUND OPENING

(Mrs Chris Watson and another resident of Goldsmith Street Sheltered Housing Scheme attended the meeting for this item.)

The Housing Development Manager presented the report and circulated a plan of the area and answered questions. It was proposed that around 65-70% of the 100 affordable homes would be available for rent. If the proposals were successful there would be a two-year period during which officers would ensure that residents were placed at the top of the waiting list and relocated according to their agreed preferences.

Mrs Watson, said that she lived in one of the 'corridor units' and favoured the proposals for new affordable homes. She said that the support of the Sheltered Housing Manager and her staff had been 'splendid'. Mrs Watson also suggested that she hoped that a road would be named after Alderman Clarke.

During discussion members welcomed the proposals in the report and expressed support for the suggested commemoration of Alderman Clarke. Members also noted that a high standard of energy efficiency would be required in the development.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) resettle the current residents of 30-48 Goldsmith Street and 4-18 Greyhound Opening to properties according to their individual needs and agreed preferences;

- (2) establish the post of Greyhound Opening Resettlement Officer to facilitate the above;
- (3) dispose of the Council's interest in the land to enable the provision of new affordable housing;
- (4) work with Norfolk County Council to facilitate a developable site for new affordable housing;
- (5) delegate to the Strategic Director - Community and Neighbourhoods and the Head of Asset and City Management the power to take all incidental and ancillary steps to achieve the above.

3. SECTION 106 EXPENDITURE

(The Chair agreed to take this item as an urgent item.)

The Head of Planning presented the report and circulated a revised resolution which replaced the funding for a new play area at Skelton Road, Heartsease, for a contribution towards the new play area at Heartsease Towers, Sale Road, with the balance coming from funds allocated in the Capital Programme.

The Executive supported the revised proposals with the exception of the discretionary expenditure of £41,695 for improvement to facilities at St Clement's Park, which was withdrawn to allow further discussion with Ward Councillors.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) approve the following discretionary expenditures, arising out of the options assessment in Appendix 2, totalling £682,824
 - (a) £93,911 for provision of new junior and toddler play in the Ives Road area of Fiddlewood;
 - (b) £95,479 for new toddler and teenage provision at Sloughbottom Park;
 - (c) £25,000 for improvements to Mile Cross Gardens;
 - (d) £24,145 to improve facilities at Shorncliffe Avenue play area;
 - (e) £13,825 contribution towards a new play area at Heartsease Towers, Sale Road (to provide a new £45,000 facility, with the balance coming from funds allocated in the Capital Programme);
 - (f) £60,000 for major improvements to Astley Road play area;
 - (g) £32,538 to improve facilities at Bendish Way play area;
 - (h) £52,355 for the refurbishment of Wilberforce Road play area;

- (i) £30,000 to provide new play area at Gypsy Lane;
 - (j) £1,164 to improve West End Street play area;
 - (k) £8,868 for improvements to St Paul's play area;
 - (l) £160,507 for phase 1 of improvements to Jenny Lind and Eagle Walks play areas;
 - (m) £8,608 for improvements to provision at Clarendon Steps play area;
 - (n) £17,266 for improvements to Heigham Park junior play area;
 - (o) £11,066 for highways improvements to Distillery Square;
 - (p) £10,035 for highways improvements to King Street;
 - (q) £1,057 for highways improvements in the vicinity of former Cavalier Hotel, Thorpe Road.
- (2) approve:-
- (a) the retention of £150,079 to supplement funds already identified in previous Executive reports on Section 106 spending, for improvements to play and open space provision in the King Street area, including creation of a new play area;
 - (b) the retention of £74,167 to enable identification of site/s through Northern City Centre Area Action Plan process.

4. PRIVATE RENEWALS POLICY AND STRATEGY

The Private Sector Housing Manager presented the report.

Discussion ensued in which members supported the need to ensure that private rented properties were up to standard and welcomed the proposed actions in respect of affordable warmth and energy efficiency; and the empty homes initiative to bring empty homes back into use. Members welcomed the development of the Greater Norwich Landlord Accreditation Scheme and the Private Sector Leasing Scheme. Members noted the rise of properties available to rent in the private sector and it was pointed out that the 'buy-to-let' market comprised new build properties.

RESOLVED to approve the Private Sector Renewals Strategy 2007-2011.

5. NORFOLK RAIL ALLOWANCE

The Chief Executive Officer presented the report.

During discussion members supported the campaign for strategic investment in the railway network for the benefit of Norwich and Norfolk.

RESOLVED to support the Norfolk Rail Alliance in making a case for additional priority investment in Norfolk's rail network in advance of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review 2007, when the future agenda for the rail network will be set.

6. NEIGHBOURHOOD STRATEGY

The Strategic Director - Community and Neighbourhoods presented the report.

Members of the Executive welcomed the proposals which would be a fundamental change in how the Council delivered services. It was suggested that the Council should draw on the experiences of other local authorities that provided services on a neighbourhood basis, such as Barnsley. An Executive member said that building community engagement had been part of the Council's Unitary bid and that there needed to be commitment to what was an ongoing process. The Executive noted the financial consequences as set out in the report.

Councillors Lowe and Cooke queried how the development of the strategy could be funded and suggested that 'Building Capacity East' funding should be available for community development.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) adopt the Neighbourhood Strategy;
- (2) use the new Vision for Neighbourhoods to inform the development of neighbourhood level service delivery by the City Council and its contractors and partners;
- (3) pilot the delivery of services on a neighbourhood basis alongside the two pilot neighbourhood management programmes;
- (4) explore how further services can be delivered on a neighbourhood basis;
- (5) contribute to a best practice workshop.

7. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION FUND

The Head of Community Services presented the report and, together with the Chief Executive Officer and the Head of Communications and Cultural Services, answered members questions. The scheme would strengthen the role of Ward Councillors who would be aware of different channels of communication within communities to publicise the Fund.

An Executive member said that it was the intention that the funding scheme would run alongside the Community Grant scheme but would give an opportunity for wider community involvement and encourage other people to come forward. The scheme included a mentoring which would give added value to help individuals build skills for more projects in their communities. Members considered that the scheme had potential to grow and give communities some 'clout'.

RESOLVED to approve the Community Participation Fund programme as set out in the report.

8. CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISALS: ST MATTHEW'S , THORPE HAMLET, THORPE RIDGE

The Design Quality Manager presented the report and answered members' questions on the report.

RESOLVED to approve:-

- (1) the conservation area appraisals and management and enhancement plans for St Matthew's, Thorpe Hamlet and Thorpe Ridge Conservation Areas following public consultation as Planning Policy Guidance;
- (2) the addition of the buildings in appendix 1 to the Local List of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest.

9. GRANT AWARDS TO THE VOLUNTARY AND NOT-FOR-PROFIT SECTORS

(Councillor Morphew declared a prejudicial interest in Age Concern. Councillor Brociek-Coulton declared a prejudicial interest in Norwich in Bloom. Both Councillors Morphew and Brociek-Coulton withdrew from the remainder of the item and did not take part in the decision.)

(Councillor Morrey in the chair.)

The Head of Communications and Cultural Services presented the report and answered questions.

RESOLVED to award grants for the financial year 2007/2008, to the total of £195,893:-

- (1) £9,900 to Age Concern Norwich and that Age Concern move to a 3 year Grant Funding Agreement;
- (2) £8,000 to BTCV and that BTCV move to a three year Grant Funding Agreement;
- (3) £5,665 to Creative Arts East;
- (4) £42,000 to the Norfolk & Norwich Festival and that the Norfolk & Norwich Festival move to a 3 year Grant Funding Agreement;
- (5) £14,328 to the Norfolk and Norwich Heritage Trust and an arrangement to pay the outstanding balance agreed from this sum;
- (6) £10,271 be awarded to Norwich and Norfolk Racial Equality Council and that NNREC move to a 3 year Grant Funding Agreement;
- (7) £1500 be awarded to Norfolk Wildlife Trust and that the NWT move to a 3 year Grant Funding Agreement;
- (8) £55,216 is made to Norwich and District Citizens' Advice Bureau and that Norwich and District CAB move to a 3 year Grant Funding Agreement;

- (9) £9,414 be awarded to the Norwich Fringe Project and that the Norwich Fringe Project move to a three year Grant Funding Agreement;
- (10) £10,000 be awarded to Norwich in Bloom;
- (11) £12,599 to the Puppet Theatre and that the Puppet Theatre move to a 3 year Grant Funding Agreement;
- (12) £5,000 be awarded to The Academy Trust and the Academy Trust move to a 3 year Grant Funding Agreement;
- (13) £12,000 to WEETU.

10. DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNCIL'S ENFORCEMENT MODEL FOR THE DELIVERY OF THE GOVERNMENT'S SMOKEFREE LEGISLATION TO BE INTRODUCED ON 1 JULY 2007

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented the report and responded to members' questions.

The Executive welcomed the proposals contained in the report.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) note the proposals for the implementation and enforcement of the smokefree legislation;
- (2) authorise the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to develop the current Regulatory Services enforcement model across the Council.

11. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of Items 12 - 17 below on the grounds contained in the relevant paragraph of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

***12. GREYHOUND OPENING (PARAGRAPH 3)**

The Head of Asset and City Management presented the report and explained the financial consequences of the report, and together with the Deputy Chief Executive Officer answered questions.

During discussion members noted the County Council's position and expressed regret that the County Council was not being more supportive of affordable housing.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) note the financial consequences of the development of the site at Greyhound Opening for new affordable housing;
- (2) note the options relating to a property on the periphery of the site and delegate the implementation of the tenants' agreed option to the Strategic Director - Community and Neighbourhoods;

- (3) approve the methodology of costs incurred in site assembly being reimbursed by the Registered Social Landlord who purchases the site from Norwich City Council.
- (4) ask the Group Leaders to consider a response to the County Council at their next meeting.

***13. DISPOSAL SITE A, FIFERS LANE, NORWICH (PARAGRAPH 3)**

The Head of Asset and City Management presented the report and answered questions.

RESOLVED to approve the disposal of the freehold interest know as 'Site A Fifers Lane' in accordance with the details outlined in paragraphs 8 and 9 of this report.

***14. RESTRUCTURE IN HUMAN RESOUCES AND LEARNING (PARAGRAPHS 1 & 3)**

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer presented the report. No comments had been received from UNISON at the time of the meeting but any received subsequently would be circulated to members.

An Executive member said that this was an under-resourced area of the Council and that the restructure, which brought together human resources and learning, was a positive move forward.

RESOLVED to:-

- (1) create:-
 - (a) a new post - Recruitment Co-ordinator (Post no ODRCO1)
 - (b) an additional Recruitment Adviser post (Post no ODHRA3)
- (2) redesignate the post of Human Resources Officer (Post no ODHR03) and create a new full time post of HR Assistant (Post no ODHAA1);
- (3) approve the virement of £38,562 from the HR recruitment budget to the HR salaries budget.

***15. CONSOLIDATING THE POLICY AND IMPROVEMENT TEAM (PARAGRAPHS 1 & 3)**

The Head of Policy and Improvement presented the report and reported that there had been positive feedback on the proposals from the majority of staff and UNISON. There would be further consultation to give all staff involved a full opportunity to comment.

An Executive member welcomed this development of the service which would improve the Council's partnership working and bring policies forward. The financial consequences of the report were noted.

RESOLVED to create the following posts:-

- (1) Partnerships Manager (Post No PIPTNM)
- (2) Policy and Performance Manager (Post No PIPPM1)
- (3) Policy Officer (Post No PIPPO)
- (4) Research and Partnerships Officer (Post No ODSP5)
- (5) Performance and Research Officer (Post No ODREO2)
- (6) Research Assistant (20 hours per week) (Post No PIPRA).

***16. VOLUNTARY EARLY RETIREMENT/VOLUNTARY REDUNDANCY
(PARAGRAPH 1)**

The Deputy Chief Executive Officer presented the report and answered members' questions.

RESOLVED to approve the payments relating to the redundancy of the employees listed in Appendix A.

***17. CONTRACTUAL AND LEASING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE THEATRE
ROYAL (PARAGRAPH 3)**

(The Chair agreed to take this item as urgent business because of the need to sign the lease by the end of March 2007.)

The Head of Communications and Cultural Services presented the report and, together with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, answered members' questions.

During discussion the Executive considered that the proposed resolution did not go far enough to protect the lease from falling into the hands of an entrepreneurial commercial venture which would not maintain the current uses of the Theatre as a regional theatre, providing educational and cultural benefits to the community. The lease needed to be protected so that the lessee could not assign the lease without the City Council's permission.

RESOLVED to agree in principle to the recommendation contained in the report and delegate to the Chair and Vice-Chair, in consultation with the Head of Communication and Cultural Services and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, to resolve the issues regarding the lease.

CHAIR

Frequently asked questions about Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street

How is the inquiry progressing and when will it be completed?

Norwich City Council is making good progress with the inquiry into the letting of properties at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street to members of staff prior to its redevelopment. This is being conducted by senior officers and must adhere to council procedures. This needs to be a thorough and fair investigation and it is not expected to be concluded in full until the New Year. Kristine Reeves, head of neighbourhood and strategic housing services, remains suspended on full pay.

What is being investigated?

- Who took the decision to let properties at this complex to members of staff, who were not relocating to the city from elsewhere?
- What was the process through which that decision was ultimately made and on whose authority?
- How these properties were then allocated to staff?
- Were the council's laid down procedures followed?
- What other options were considered for the use of these particular properties?
- Why were these rejected?
- Does any action need to be taken as a result of the findings?
- Do things need to happen differently in the future?

Does the council have a policy to provide temporary accommodation for staff?

Yes, under the 1985 Housing Act and the council's own relocation policy, staff relocating to the city can live in temporary, council-owned accommodation for up to 12 months. Accommodation such as that at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street has been used for that purpose. Last year, more than 150 people joined the council and the majority of these were not relocating. In a typical year, we would expect to house up to five people in temporary accommodation for short periods while they look for permanent accommodation.

Are other members of staff currently living in temporary, council-owned accommodation?

Our records show that other than, the 18 people registered as living in Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street, there are no other staff in such accommodation. Those still living at the complex are to be given notice to vacate by 31 January 2009.

Why is Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street being redeveloped?

In the next 20 years, greater Norwich will need an estimated 33,000 new homes. A large proportion of these will need to be affordable homes and the city council is committed to building on brown field sites where possible, with a good track record of this.

Greyhound opening was chosen for redevelopment as the properties did not meet the standards that the tenants expect of modern sheltered housing and could not be brought up to standard. By redeveloping this area, 100 new affordable properties can be built. We will work with a housing association to build sustainable eco-homes to the highest standards of design. A competition has been run by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) to identify a suitable developer and five entries have now been shortlisted.

What involvement did members have in decisions made about Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street?

Members of the executive agreed in March 2007 to decommission these properties as they were hard-to-let and needed major refurbishment. It was decided to incorporate the 25 units with the land occupied by the garages and warehousing to redevelop the site for new affordable homes. This decision to demolish the units was made in consultation with the residents and a resettlement officer was appointed with responsibility for helping the tenants to relocate. Tenants were offered home loss compensation payments of up to £4000.

After Executive approval to redevelop the site, officers implemented the recommendations to resettle the residents of Goldsmith Street and Greyhound opening to individual needs and agreed preferences; the full recommendations from that report are listed below:

- (1) To resettle the current residents of 30-48 Goldsmith Street and 4-18 Greyhound Opening to properties according to their individual needs and agreed preferences;
- (2) To establish the post of Greyhound Opening Resettlement Officer to facilitate the above;
- (3) To dispose of the Council's interest in the land to enable the provision of new affordable housing;
- (4) To work with Norfolk County Council to facilitate a developable site for new affordable housing;
- (5) To delegate to the Strategic Director - Community and Neighbourhoods and the Head of Asset and City Management the power to take all incidental and ancillary steps to achieve the above

Why were elderly people moved out of the accommodation so early?

We always knew this would be a stressful time for residents and we did not want to put any unnecessary pressure on them to move. The role of the resettlement officer was to help tenants find suitable alternative accommodation which met their needs and requirements as far as possible; indeed, residents were given top priority in the choice of accommodation. With this mind, it was expected the relocation process ahead of the demolition

would take up to two years. It was left to the elderly residents when they moved out within this period and the last of these moved out in July 2008.

Why are staff paying less rent than the elderly tenants?

Elderly residents benefited from a warden service and other support, which was not available to staff.

How were these properties advertised to staff?

Staff relocating would have been made aware of the availability of temporary properties when they joined the council. The offer of properties at Greyhound Opening/Goldsmith Street was made to all members of staff via our weekly staff newsletter Inner city on 30 July 2007.