

**Report to: Executive Board - Monday 11th November 2002**

**HOUSING REPAIRS - DECORATION VOUCHERS.**

<p><b>Report of:</b> <i>Business Manager, Oxford Building Solutions</i></p> <p><b>Report Author:</b> <i>Chris Pyle O.B.S. Tel no. 01865 335411 Email: cpyle@oxford.gov.uk</i></p> <p><b>Lead Member Responsible:</b> <i>Housing Portfolio Member</i></p> <p><b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee Responsibility:</b> <i>Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee</i></p> <p><b>Key Decision:</b> <i>No</i></p>	<p><b>WARDS AFFECTED</b> All</p>
<p><b>SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p> <p><b>This report is to seek approval for the proposed changes to the Council's Decoration Voucher scheme.</b></p> <p><b>Staffing implications - there will be no additional posts created or posts lost as a result of these changes but it will result in taking some pressure off existing administration staff by reducing workload.</b></p> <p><b>Executive Board is asked to approve one of the options outlined in the report.</b></p>	

1. In March 2002, the Council's Internal Audit section carried out an audit on Tenant Grants and Payments, following which a report and draft Action Plan were produced.
2. With regard to the Decoration Voucher scheme (DV) a number of recommendations were made. These related, principally, to the administration process and included the listing of applications, authorized signatories, the setting and monitoring of Performance Indicators, post inspections and issuing of regular reports.
3. D.V's are issued after agreement with the tenant, usually in the following circumstances:-
  - Decoration of a void property - an agreed number of rooms at £40 per room or £150 for a whole house..
  - Following repair works - offered and issued on the same basis as voids.
  - Elderly Persons - under the elderly persons decoration scheme tenants who are eligible for the scheme have the option of claiming a DV of £100 as an alternative to having one room decorated per year.
4. In all cases, the Voucher system was introduced in order to turn around the properties quicker and at less cost to the Council. It should be noted that any changes to the system may result in tenants insisting that the Council carryout the re-decorating works with the resultant increase in costs and job delivery times.
5. Under the present scheme, tenants are able to purchase decorating related items such as Paste tables, steps and brushes from a list of approved retailers. The retailer then invoices the Council direct for each Voucher. There is no doubt that the present system is bureaucratic and open to abuse both for the retailer and the Council. Indeed it is understood that retailers are looking at the viability of the present scheme due to the difficulties involved and they may withdraw from it in the future.
6. It is thought that there are five alternatives to the existing scheme:-
  - a) An alternative Voucher scheme - based upon a retailer's gift voucher scheme. The Council agrees the sum involved with the tenant (it is thought that new levels of £20 per room or £75 per house and £50 for the elderly persons scheme might be more appropriate) and gives them vouchers for the agreed amount (endorsed "decoration materials only"), the tenant then exchanges them for the materials. This process would reduce administration costs considerably. The Council would need to buy a minimum of £400 worth of vouchers from the retailer initially and then issue them as necessary. A formal system, to be agreed with Internal Audit, for the issue of vouchers would be necessary, together with a check of an agreed percentage to ensure that the tenant has exchanged the voucher for decorating materials and the system is not being abused.

b) A local housing association uses a different system - at signup for a new tenancy or after repairs, they issue their tenant with a colour chart and order form. The tenant chooses a maximum of three colours and they indicate what size the property is (2 bed. 3 bed etc) the tenant then returns the form to the association. An order is then raised and sent to a local paint supplier together with the tenants order. The supplier then contacts the tenant and arranges delivery - normally within two weeks. The paint supplier then invoices monthly. No brushes, ladders etc. are included in this scheme, only paint. This system, as in a) is an improvement in terms of administration and has the advantage of being less likely to be abused. Again, a percentage of checks on site would be needed.

c) A scheme similar to b) above but administered by the Council's building stores at Oxford Building Solutions - this has the disadvantage of greater administration costs for the Council but greater control and less likelihood of abuse. In order to minimise storage area, there would need to be a smaller range of colours for tenants to choose from.

d) The fourth option is to finish the voucher scheme and make tenants responsible for the internal decorations.

e) The fifth option is to finish the voucher scheme and for the Council to carryout all void and repair decoration work.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY: The Housing Portfolio Member, The Business Manager, Oxford Building Solutions.

Background papers: