

**Overview and Scrutiny Committee Resolutions to Executive Board - 11 November 2002**

The Executive Board is asked to consider each recommendation in the following table separately and:

- (a) to decide whether to accept or reject each recommendation of the Committees;
- (b) if it decides to reject any of the recommendations, to give reasons for doing so.

The relevant resolutions have been included in full with the comments and recommendations addressed to the Executive Board shown in italics (left hand column). Comments received from the portfolio holder have been included in the right hand column. Relevant reports are appended.

**Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 15 August 2002**

<b>Min</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Portfolio-holder's Comments (Cllr Cook)</b>
42	<i>(1) that the scheme should not be reduced in extent from the original proposal and that the scheme should stop short of Carfax</i>	The extent of the scheme has been increased.  The scheme stops short of Carfax.
	<i>(2) that the City Council should still require a high quality scheme but safeguard the financial contribution of the Council</i>	The proposed scheme achieves these objectives.
	<i>(3) express surprise at the relatively small saving produced by changing from granite to asphalt, and ask that the figures should be checked; and request that the costs should be discussed further</i>	The figures have been checked by city officers.  The costs will be discussed further.
	<i>recommend that the Executive Board note that the southern end of Cornmarket requires urgent attention, and request that the County Council carry out remedial work in advance of the environmental improvement scheme starting.</i>	This has been done.

101

	<i>(5) recommend asking the original consultation group about the revised proposals</i>	This has been done
	<i>(6) recommend ensuring that the final design gave a definite boundary line at the end points of the proposed scheme</i>	This would be an essential requirement of the legal agreement between the two councils.
	<i>(7) recommend revisiting the proposed design of street lighting and street furniture in light of the changes to the specification of the scheme, to ensure that these are consistent with the revised scheme;</i>	I do not consider that the scheme has changed sufficiently to justify a complete re-think of the street furniture palette. I therefore do not propose to revisit the street furniture designs.
	<i>(8) recommend consideration of raised planting if planting level with the road surface was not practicable;</i>	Raised beds are likely to attract litter, pose a hazard for the visually impaired, and increase street clutter contrary to the aims of the Public Realm Strategy. For these reasons I do not consider that raised planting would be appropriate at this time.
	<i>(9) recommend including a contrast strip between the pavement and the carriageway to help pedestrians and vehicles distinguish between these areas</i>	This is what is currently proposed..
	<i>(10) ensure that the City Council does not abandon its rights under the existing contract</i>	
	<i>(11) reuse or resell unused and reclaimed materials from the current scheme</i>	
	<i>(12) express general support for the revised scheme, and a wish to see work progressed without further delay;</i>	Noted

	<i>(13) express support for a high quality scheme, and for the use of York stone paving;</i>	Noted
	<i>(14) request that the designs for street furniture should be revisited to take into account the changes in the overall scheme, perhaps reconsidering the materials used and the provision of historical information on benches;</i>	I do not consider that the scheme has changed sufficiently to justify a complete re-think of the street furniture palette and think that the provision of historical information on benches will only add to the visual clutter this scheme is trying to avoid. I therefore do not propose to revisit the street furniture designs.
	<i>(15) request that some planting be provided, using suitable types of trees (taking into consideration eventual size and leaf litter), and using raised beds or hanging baskets if necessary</i>	County Council Officers think it highly unlikely that there are any sites on Cornmarket suitable for tree planting due to the large amount of underground services. If any possible sites are found it is even more unlikely that these will occur at an appropriate position for planting. Given Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recognition of the problems caused by leaf litter, and interference with CCTV camera operation I do not propose to accede to the request for trees to be planted in Cornmarket at this time. Raised beds are likely to attract litter, pose a hazard for the visually impaired, and increase street clutter contrary to the aims of the Public Realm Strategy. There may well be a role for hanging baskets attached to the buildings themselves but not the current poles which are a hazard for the visually impaired and serve to increase street clutter.
	<i>(16) express support for a weight limit on vehicles using Cornmarket and the city centre, but note the comments of Boswells manager that many suppliers use large vehicles making multiple deliveries, and insisting on the use of smaller vehicles may be impracticable;</i>	I agree with the comments of Boswells manager confirmed by county council officers that insisting on the use of smaller vehicles will be impractical.

104

	<i>(17) ask officers to investigate ways of restricting the movement of bank and security vehicles through pedestrian areas;</i>	Only bank and security vehicles collecting or delivering to businesses on Cornmarket are permitted to use Cornmarket between 10a.m. and 6p.m. Officers will have to ask the police to enforce these restrictions.
	<p><i>(18) request:</i></p> <p><i>limits on cycles in Cornmarket, and provision of additional cycle stands in side streets with none provided on Cornmarket;</i></p> <p><i>and</i></p> <p><i>limits on street traders</i></p> <p>pavement cafes could be encouraged if properly delineated and if litter could be controlled.</p>	Noted

**Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Group - 12 September 2002**

<b>Min</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Portfolio-holder's Comments (Cllr Hollingsworth)</b>
32	<b>RESEARCH BIDS</b>	
	<i>Inform Executive Board that £40,000 is needed for overview and scrutiny research.</i>	

Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 19 September 2002

Min	Recommendations	Portfolio-holder's Comments (Cllr Cook)
52	<b>CERTIFICATES OF LAWFUL USE</b>	
	(1) <i>to ASK the Executive Board:</i>	
	(a) <i>to ensure enforcement action is taken on housing in multiple occupation where the relevant permissions do not exist and to ask the Executive Board to employ additional employees in the Environmental Health and Planning Sections to undertake this work, if necessary on a temporary basis</i>	Enforcement officers will take action when they receive complaints about HMOs which are causing a nuisance or danger. Without taking enforcement officers off other equally important enforcement cases I can only offer the current level of response. More enforcement action will take place as resources allow, however a significant increase in enforcement could only be achieved with a concomittant increase in funding to the planning business manager in order to fund this level of service.
	(b) <i>to ask the Government to make the environmental health and planning powers on housing in multiple occupation compatible;</i>	I am happy to ask that a letter to this effect should be written to the appropriate Government minister(s)
	(c) <i>to consider ways of ensuring housing in multiple occupation meets minimum standards and of seeking improvements to the standard of such properties;</i>	I am happy to consider any suggestions.
	(2) <i>to ask the Planning Services Manager to consult neighbours and ward councillors on applications for certificates of existing use;</i>	I am happy to ask the Planning Services Manager to inform ward councillors on applications for certificates of lawful use by including them on the weekly list of planning applications.

105

	(3) to note that the Neighbourhood Renewal Manager would report to the February meeting of the Committee on work being undertaken in the East Oxford Action Area to improve the standards of housing in East Oxford when a report on the review of the East Oxford/St Clement's Registration Scheme is also submitted.	
--	--	--

<b>Min</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Portfolio-holder's Comments (Cllrs Baker and Smith)</b>
53	<b>OVERVIEW OF NEW LOCAL PLAN HOUSING POLICIES AND OF CURRENT SOCIAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME</b>	
	(1) to ask the Planning Manager to report to the February meeting of the Committee on the decisions by area committees on planning applications for social housing schemes to enable the Committee to undertake a review of the handling by area committees of such planning applications;	
	(2) to <i>RECOMMEND</i> the Executive Board to consider creating a post to be funded from either capital or revenue funds (the postholder to be responsible for identifying future sites and funding for social housing);	
	(3) to ask the Neighbourhood Renewal Manager to report to the Committee on progress on the schemes in the pipeline.	

Min	Recommendations	Portfolio-holder's Comments (Cllr Cook)
54	<b>VOIDS POLICY AND PERFORMANCE</b>	
	(1) <i>to RECOMMEND the Executive Board:</i>	
	(a) <i>to review whether tenants should be given a choice of area or property for temporary decants;</i>	Decided that offers of temporary homes for decanting should be reasonable taking into account personal preference but caution must be applied to personal circumstances that cannot reasonably be met.
	(b) <i>to provide an additional £55,000 for garden clearance;</i>	Will be considered as part of the HRA budget debate
	(c) <i>to agree to change the categories of voids to offer four options dependent on the range of works as set out in the report;</i>	This will be implemented
	(d) <i>to note that there was a potential overspend of £570,000 for long term voids and £20,000 for routine voids if the ratio of void properties continued at the current level (76.88% for long term voids and 23.12% routine voids);</i>	Noted
	(e) <i>to ask the Financial Management Manager to review the £5000 threshold for tendering for major void/refurbishment works and to report to the Executive Board on whether the threshold should be changed;</i>	
	(f) <i>to ask the Housing Management Manager and the Oxford Building Solutions Manager to report to this Committee and to the Executive Board on:</i>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>how the potential overspend could be funded;</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The handling of the overspend and MRA programme will be reported in the 2nd quarter monitoring report and HRA budget debate.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>a review of the major repairs allowance work programme;</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A review of the policy on void repairs is due at Executive Board on 11th November 2002</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>a review of which repairs were undertaken by the Council and which repairs were undertaken by tenants;</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new letter and process has been implemented</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>housing management employees being more proactive in inspecting properties and encouraging tenants to comply with their tenancy agreements; introducing incentives to tenants for keeping their property in good order or penalties to tenants for not maintaining their property in good order;</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be progressed through a joint Unit working group</li> </ul>
	(2) to include a review of the position on voids at each meeting of the Committee.	Agreed



109

Min	Recommendations	Portfolio-holder's Comments (Cllr Smith)
55	<b>HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT: SHORT TERM FINANCIAL OUTLOOK</b>	
	(1) to ask the Financial Management Manager to report to the Committee on the outlook for the next 10 years (table 4) to include the best and worst case scenarios;	
	(2) to ask the Housing Management Manager and the Oxford Building Solutions Manager to report to the Committee on any other spending pressures in their Units to the November or December meeting of the Committee;	Agreed. Will form part of the HRA budget consultation process and be reported in the 2nd quarter monitoring report.
	(3) to note that there might need to be savings of £0.5m in the Housing Revenue Account for 2003/4 and <i>to ASK the Executive Board to advise the Committee how it proposed to deal with the potential shortfall and to invite the Portfolio Member for Housing to attend the meeting when this information was available.</i>	Agreed. Will form part of the HRA budget consultation process and be reported in the 2nd quarter monitoring report

**Finance Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 25 September 2002**

Min	Recommendations	Portfolio-holder's Comments (Cllr Tarver)
59	<b>BEST VALUE INSPECTION - REVENUES AND BENEFITS</b>	
	(1) <i>to DRAW the Executive Board's attention to the value of training on benefit regulations;</i>	
	(2) to ask the Revenues and Benefits Manager to send a précis of the draft Best Value report and the draft recommendations of the Benefit Fraud Inspection to the members of the Committee.	

Finance Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 9th October 2002

• M i n	Recommendations	Portfolio-holder's Comments (Cllr Cook)
62	<p><b>CONCESSIONARY BUS FARES</b></p> <p>(1) to advise the three members of the public when concessionary bus fares would next be considered and to send them a copy of the minutes of this meeting;</p> <p>(2) to set up a working group comprising the Chair (Councillor Campbell), Councillors Bryan Keen and Woodin to review the existing scheme and to consider other proposals (including the use of return fares in calculating the level of reimbursement and the provision of tokens for people who needed to use alternative means of public transport because of disability or age) with the aim of bringing forward proposals which would be anti-poverty, would promote the use of public transport, would enable effective audit and would provide greater predictability in the cost of the scheme to the Council <i>and to ADVISE the Executive Board of the Committee's proposals and to ASK that no action be taken on any of the proposals set out in the Transport and Parking Manager's report until the Committee had reported to the Executive Board on its proposals.</i></p>	<p>Agreed</p>

110

**REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE****To: The Executive Board - Monday 11<sup>th</sup> November****CORNMARKET ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS SCHEME**

The Executive Board is asked to consider each point in the following table separately and:

- (a) decide whether to accept or reject each comment of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- (b) if it decides to reject any of the comments, to give reasons for so doing.

A meeting of the ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE on 15 August 2002 considered the revised proposals for the resurfacing of Cornmarket.

Councillor Fooks (Chair), Councillors, Darke, Hollander, Muir, Sanders, Simmons, and Sinclair were present.

Councillor Cook also attended as portfolio holder. The Built Environment Business Manager and representatives of the Oxford Civic Society, Oxford Pedestrians Association, Oxford Preservation Trust disabled people, the managing director of Boswells, and a member of the original design development team. The surface treatment of Cornmarket and other matters were discussed

The recommendations and comments of the Committee are shown below, along with the comments of the portfolio holder.

<b>Number</b>	<b>Committee Recommendations</b>	<b>Portfolio Holder Comments (Councillor Cook)</b>
1	that the scheme should not be reduced in extent from the original proposal  that the scheme should stop short of Carfax	The extent of the scheme has been increased.  The scheme stops short of Carfax.
2	that the City Council should still require a high quality scheme but safeguard the financial contribution of the Council	The proposed scheme achieves these objectives.
3	express surprise at the relatively small saving produced by	The figures have been checked by city officers.

	<p>changing from granite to asphalt, and ask that the figures should be checked;</p> <p>and request that the costs should be discussed further</p>	The costs will be discussed further.
4	<p><u>recommend</u> that the Executive Board note that the southern end of Cornmarket requires urgent attention, and request that the County Council carry out remedial work in advance of the environmental improvement scheme starting.</p>	This has been done.
5	<p>recommend asking the original consultation group about the revised proposals</p>	This has been done
6	<p>recommend ensuring that the final design gave a definite boundary line at the end points of the proposed scheme</p>	This would be an essential requirement of the legal agreement between the two councils.
7	<p>recommend revisiting the proposed design of street lighting and street furniture in light of the changes to the specification of the scheme, to ensure that these are consistent with the revised scheme;</p>	I do not consider that the scheme has changed sufficiently to justify a complete re-think of the street furniture palette. I therefore do not propose to revisit the street furniture designs.
8	<p>recommend consideration of raised planting if planting level with the road surface was not practicable;</p>	Raised beds are likely to attract litter, pose a hazard for the visually impaired, and increase street clutter contrary to the aims of the Public Realm Strategy. For these reasons I do not consider that raised planting would be appropriate at this time.
9	<p>recommend including a contrast strip between the pavement and the carriageway to help pedestrians and vehicles distinguish between these areas</p>	This is what is currently proposed..
10	<p>ensure that the City Council does not abandon its rights under the existing contract</p>	

11	reuse or resell unused and reclaimed materials from the current scheme	
----	--	--

<b>Number</b>	<b>Committee Comments</b>	<b>Portfolio Holder Comments (Councillor Cook)</b>
12	express general support for the revised scheme, and a wish to see work progressed without further delay;	Noted
13	express support for a high quality scheme, and for the use of York stone paving;	Noted
14	request that the designs for street furniture should be revisited to take into account the changes in the overall scheme, perhaps reconsidering the materials used and the provision of historical information on benches;	I do not consider that the scheme has changed sufficiently to justify a complete re-think of the street furniture palette and think that the provision of historical information on benches will only add to the visual clutter this scheme is trying to avoid. I therefore do not propose to revisit the street furniture designs.
15	request that some planting be provided, using suitable types of trees (taking into consideration eventual size and leaf litter), and using raised beds or hanging baskets if necessary	County Council Officers think it highly unlikely that there are any sites on Cornmarket suitable for tree planting due to the large amount of underground services. If any possible sites are found it is even more unlikely that these will occur at an appropriate position for planting. Given Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee's recognition of the problems caused by leaf litter, and interference with CCTV camera operation I do not propose to accede to the request for trees to be planted in Cornmarket at this time. Raised beds are likely to attract litter, pose a hazard for the visually impaired, and increase street clutter contrary to the

		aims of the Public Realm Strategy. There may well be a role for hanging baskets attached to the buildings themselves but not the current poles which are a hazard for the visually impaired and serve to increase street clutter.
16	express support for a weight limit on vehicles using Cornmarket and the city centre, but note the comments of Boswells manager that many suppliers use large vehicles making multiple deliveries, and insisting on the use of smaller vehicles may be impracticable;	I agree with the comments of Boswells manager confirmed by county council officers that insisting on the use of smaller vehicles will be impractical.
17	ask officers to investigate ways of restricting the movement of bank and security vehicles through pedestrian areas;	Only bank and security vehicles collecting or delivering to businesses on Cornmarket are permitted to use Cornmarket between 10a.m. and 6p.m. Officers will have to ask the police to enforce these restrictions.
18	request: limits on cycles in Cornmarket, and provision of additional cycle stands in side streets with none provided on Cornmarket;  limits on street traders  pavement cafes could be encouraged if properly delineated and if litter could be controlled.	Noted

This report has been written by Committee Services from the minutes of the meeting and includes comments from the Portfolio Holder.

**VOID PROPERTIES**

<p><b>Report of:</b> <i>Business Managers, Housing Management and Oxford Building Solutions</i></p> <p><b>Report Authors:</b> <i>Laurinda Hornblow Housing Operations Manager 01865 252369 lhornblow@oxford.gov.uk Graham Bourton 01865 335434 O.B.S. Business Manager gbourton@oxford.gov.uk</i></p> <p><b>Lead Member Responsible:</b> <i>Councillor Val Smith Housing Portfolio Member</i></p> <p><b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee Responsibility:</b> <i>Housing 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>This report has been written by Housing Management and Oxford Building Solutions.</p> <p>It explains the current position with the number of empty properties, the process being undertaken by Housing Management and Oxford Building Solutions to turn the voids around and the monitoring tools used to identify performance levels . It also identifies the current budget situation, anticipated budgetary shortfalls and the cost implications of undertaking additional work.</p> <p>Members are requested to offer observations in respect of the following issues:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The current position with void properties</li><li>2. The budgetary process</li><li>3. Problems identified with voids</li><li>4. The clearance of gardens</li><li>5. The voids process</li><li>6. The monitoring processes and performance levels</li><li>7. Proposals for a way forward</li></ol>	

## **1. Background**

1.1 Voids are split into five classifications agreed by District Audit. These are routine, long term, not to be let (which are properties due for demolition or disposal), properties being used as a decant and sheltered accommodation. The majority of void properties fall into the first two categories.

1.2 Routine voids are those properties that can be let immediately after the safety checks have been completed or let quickly after minor works. The turnaround time of the voids classified as routine is monitored very closely by both Business Units. Up until April 2002 the relet time of these voids was a Best Value Performance Indicator. Now, there is no longer a requirement to report nationally on our performance in this area, but it has been agreed to keep it as a local performance indicator that feeds into the corporate database.

1.3 Long term voids (LTV) are those properties that require major works, such as new kitchens, bathrooms, installation of central heating and those that are referred to the Technical Support Unit for further extensive works. Capital investment is used for these repair works/refurbishments and the properties remain empty for longer whilst these works are being undertaken.

1.4 The budgets for 2002/3 are £100,000 for routine voids and this is contained within the Day to Day Repairs budget and £600,000 for long term voids which is contained within the Major Repairs Allowance budget.

1.5 As at 30/8/01, there was a total of 174 void properties of which 67 were to be let, 44 were classified as long term and 23 were routine. There were a further 4 sheltered properties to be let.

1.6 There has been an average of 466 lettings of void properties per year over the past 3 years (406 in 99/00, 448 in 00/01 & 543 in 01/02). All 1397 of these let properties went through the voids process at OBS. Over the 3 years, the number of properties classified as LTV rose from 39% to 45% and the number of properties classified as routine decreased from 54% to 47%. The remaining 7-8% of let properties for each year were of sheltered accommodation.

## **2. The Current Position**

2.1 As at 29/8/02 there was a total of 238 void properties of which 108 are to be let. 86 are long term and 14 are routine, with the other 8 being sheltered properties.

2.2 The increase in void numbers could be attributable to the increased number of transfers between last Summer and this Spring (the percentage of properties offered for transfer was reduced from 35% to 20% on 1<sup>st</sup> May 02).

2.3 Members will note that well over half of the void properties are classed as not being available for letting. This is because they are either due to be demolished, are being used as temporary homes, are being considered to be sold or are subject to a block clearance for modernisation. The current breakdown is as follows:

- Sheltered blocks being emptied for modernisation - 54
- Properties being used as temporary homes - 17
- Properties being considered by TSU for disposal - 6
- Properties to be demolished - 53



2.4 Since April 2002, there have been 199 voids of which 186 are to be let and have been sent to OBS for repairs. The other 13 fall into one of the categories outlined above.

2.5 The detailed breakdown of voids received on a week by week basis during the current financial year is attached as Appendix A. If this trend continues it is likely that there will be approximately 470 voids becoming available for letting in 2002/03. The reduction for this year compared to last year is a reflection of the slow down in transfer cases which decreases the number of properties for letting.

2.6 As stated above, there are currently 238 void properties. A high proportion are classified as long term because of the extent of work which needs to be undertaken in them. There is also a requirement for all Council properties to meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard by 2010, with one-third of its properties achieving this standard by 2004. Heating/insulation, electrics, kitchens and bathrooms are key measures in meeting the Decent Homes Standard and therefore when properties are empty it is considered to be the most expedient time to undertake these major works.

2.7 There are always tensions between undertaking major works and void turnaround times, but it will not be possible for the Council to either afford or physically undertake all of the building work that is necessary to meet the Decent Homes Standard if the work continues to be deferred to future years.

2.8 Performance on routine voids has not been to target in recent months. The turn around time for the quarter April to June 01 was an average of 3.3 weeks compared with a target of 4 weeks. In the first quarter of this year, the performance was an average of 4.8 weeks compared with a target of 3.5 weeks.

2.9 There are number of reasons associated with this, including: -

- (a) O.B.S. going through a restructuring process with many employees undertaking new roles.
- (b) A shortage of builders. O.B.S. experienced recruitment and retention problems due to the uncertainty of its future in the early part of the year and also the current building market where work is plentiful and labour is scarce.
- (c) The additional volume of work to be undertaken in voids due to the significant increase in the number of long term voids.

Further details about problems with voids is outlined later in this report.

2.10 The dedicated void surveying team at OBS has now been temporarily increased from 2.5 to 4 full time staff and this will continue for so long as the current workload exists. This has already improved the time taken by OBS to inspect and order works to a property. Recently OBS has also been able to recruit more staff and sub-contractors which has allowed more labour to be devoted to voids work. Processes have also been reviewed and all of the actions are starting to improve the actual time taken to return the void to Housing Management for letting. In respect of routine voids, the average turnaround time for repair work is now around 10 working days.

### **3. The Budgetary Position**

3.1 By the end of August 2002, some 186 void properties have been received by OBS of which 143 (76.88%) have been long term voids and 43 (23.12%) routine voids. This change has had a dramatic effect on the workload and consequently turnaround times, as well as the budget.

3.2 In terms of the budget, approximately £470,000 (78.33%) has already been either spent or committed on 138 long term voids and approximately £50,000 (50%) on routine voids. In addition 5 voids require such a significant amount of repair work that the Portfolio holder is discussing with her colleagues whether the most appropriate action would be to dispose of these on the property market.

3.3 This level of spend shows the average cost of a long term void is £3405.80 and £1162.79 for a routine void. If the current volume of voids continues at the same ratio of long term to routines, then the additional budgetary requirements during the current financial year will be £570,000 for long term voids and £20,000 for routine voids. Whilst the routine void budget is not a significant problem, if the additional finance is to be provided for long term voids without adversely effecting reserves, then the MRA work programme will need to be reviewed at an early stage.

### **4. Problems identified with voids**

4.1 As stated earlier, the most significant change affecting voids this year is the number of properties which need to be classed as long term voids due to the extent of work which needs to be undertaken. A number of voids are being returned by tenants to the Council in a very poor state of repair, requiring extensive work to bring the property back up to a lettable standard.

4.2 Properties that are abandoned or where tenants have been evicted usually need to be cleared of furniture, which adds to the cost and time.

4.3 Tenants who have willfully neglected their properties or have carried out DIY improvements on them are recharged for any repair items, but if the tenant is on a low income, the best return we can hope for is weekly installments of £2.70 per week. In cases of abandonment or eviction, we often do not have a forwarding address to send the recharge bill to.

Other issues affecting turnaround times and costs are :-

- (a) The high number of properties where a significant volume of rubbish/furniture etc. needs to be removed.
- (b) The high number of properties where gardens are filled with rubbish and / or badly overgrown.
- (c) The increasing number of properties where special treatments/processes are required e.g. because of the presence of fleas, sharps, bodily fluids etc.

4.4 In respect of gardens, only minimum works are currently undertaken, but to ensure that these are presented to prospective tenants in a good condition and do not present potential hazards to children etc., then additional resources are necessary. It is estimated that this work could be undertaken by a team of 2, provided with a vehicle and appropriate tools etc, and that the cost of this, including tipping charges would be £55,000 per annum.

4.5 The problems with the condition that the properties are left in by tenants are not new and are not unique to Oxford. Similar problems were reported by officers in 1999 and were discussed by Housing Committee. However, OBS void surveyors have reported that they consider that the situation is worsening. Tenancy Agreements do confer responsibility on tenants to maintain their home, but enforcing conditions when a tenant may have a vulnerability clearly presents problems. Indeed some tenants are affronted to be challenged about their living conditions especially if officers cannot prove that their lifestyle is causing a statutory nuisance. Housing Management are discussing schemes to help the most vulnerable to maintain their home through the new Supporting People funding regime. This will help a few but will not help deal with the willful offenders.

## **5. The Voids Process**

In order to aid members understanding of the voids process, a flow chart is attached at Appendix 'B'.

## **6. Monitoring**

6.1 There are numerous monitoring tools currently used by Housing Management and Oxford Building Solutions, which are detailed below:-

- A weekly computerised print out detailing every void property, by Local Housing Office is produced. The report provides data with regards to the address, void start date, the number of weeks the property has been void, the property type whether the property has a current offer and how many offers have been withdrawn and refused. This report is received by each LHO, the Allocations Team, the Housing Operations Manager and OBS.
- The OBS Voids Team produce a void progress sheet each week which is sent to the Housing Operations Manager for distribution to the Local Housing Offices to inform them of inspection dates, date work was ordered, target date for the completion of the work, whether the property is routine or long term and a brief detail of the work required.
- Each Area Housing Manager produces a weekly void sheet detailing the voids in their area using the data from the above two reports. This sheet is sent to the Housing Operations Manager who cross checks the data to ensure that the classifications of voids are correct and that routine voids are monitored very closely on a weekly basis. It is also sent to the Allocations Team Manager to inform him of the voids that are ready for offer.
- A works in progress spreadsheet is also produced by the Technical Support Unit each month to inform Housing Management of the current status of the voids which require extensive works that they currently have under their remit. The data

included on this spreadsheet is vital to co-ordinate forthcoming decants.

- Monthly liaison meetings are held between representatives from Housing Management and OBS to discuss void performance and other related issues.
- Every quarter Housing Management report to the Tenants Monitoring Panel on the previous quarter's performance. A copy of the last report to TMP is attached as Appendix 'C' for information.

## **7. The Way Forward**

7.1 As far as the repair part of the process is concerned, it is considered that further improvements can be achieved by changing the categories of voids to offer four options, dependent on the range of works. These are :-

### **Category 1 - Minimal Works**

Work will involve a Surveyor's visit, gas checks, an electrical check, clearance of rubbish / furniture, a clean and a small number of very minor repairs.

The target turnaround time for properties within this category would be 5 working days.

### **Category 2 - Minor Works**

In addition to the work detailed in category 1 above, minor repairs up to the value of a further £1000 would be undertaken, e.g. replacement worktops, tiling, part decoration, replacement doors etc.

The target turnaround time for properties within this category would be 10 working days.

### **Category 3 - Major Works**

In addition to the works detailed in categories 1 and 2, it will involve major repairs / refurbishment works up to the value of £5,000, such as the replacement of kitchens, bathrooms and the installation of central heating systems.

The target turnaround time for properties within this category would be 20 working days, unless central heating systems are required as well as major refurbishment works, in which case it would need to be extended to 30 working days.

### **Category 4 – Tendered Major Works**

This category is for major void / refurbishment works estimated to exceed the sum of £5,000. Under the Council's Financial Regulations at least two quotations / tenders must be received for works above this figure.

A full survey, comprehensive specification and in some cases drawings need to be produced. The design, tender and tender evaluation process will take approximately 3 months with a further one month as a contractor lead in period. Depending upon the extent of the works the contractor may take two to three months on site. The total time therefore, from start of the project to completion, can be some 7 months but with so many factors beyond our control, this period can sometimes be exceeded.

7.2 It should be noted that these proposals are aimed at establishing local categories / indicators, without changing the nationally defined categories, i.e. categories 1 and 2 above will be classed as Routine Voids and categories 3 and 4 as Long Term Voids.

7.3 Housing Management has recently restructured with an emphasis on the staff in the Local Housing Offices getting out and about on their estates and with this in mind we will carry out a pre-termination visits on any transferring tenants, where possible.

7.4 Housing Management staff already visit the property when the keys are first returned to the Local Housing Office to establish if a clearance is required before the property can be inspected. This eliminates an unnecessary visit by the visit team surveyor and delays at the start of the crucial void period.

7.5 Since the creation of the Allocation Team on 1/7/02 and at the request of OBS, Housing Management has changed its approach to pre-offering void properties. Void properties are no longer offered automatically when notice is received from an outgoing tenant, but are now offered no more than 4 weeks in advance of a completion date.

7.6 Post inspections are currently carried out solely by a void team surveyor. It is considered that it may be prudent to arrange accompanied post inspections by the void team surveyor and the relevant estate manager, wherever possible, prior to allowing the potential tenant to view the property. This would alleviate the recent problems experienced by Housing Management staff carrying out accompanied viewing with tenants to properties which have been returned and still required snagging works to be completed prior to the property being ready for occupation.

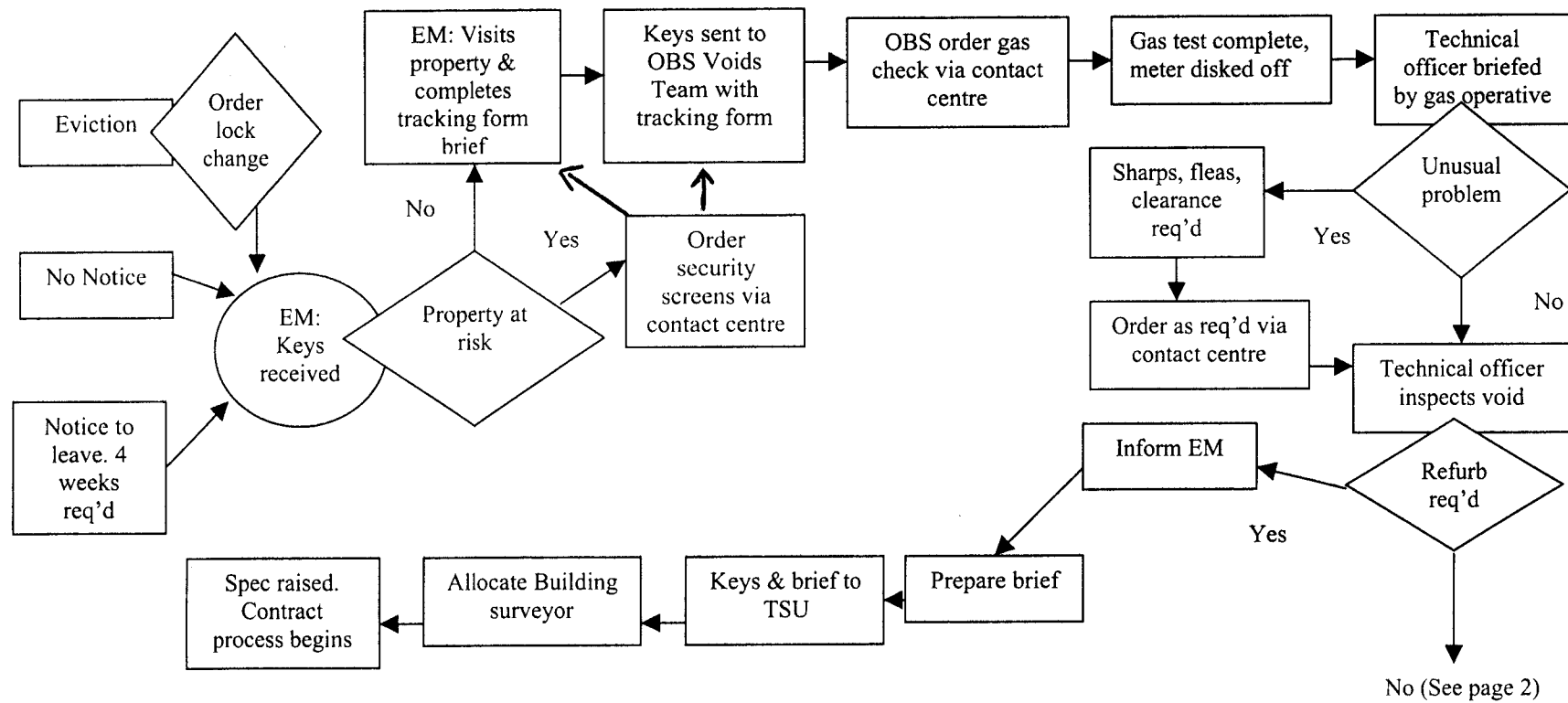
THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY: Portfolio Member and Business Managers for Housing Management and OBS

## Void Properties Received at OBS from 1.4.02

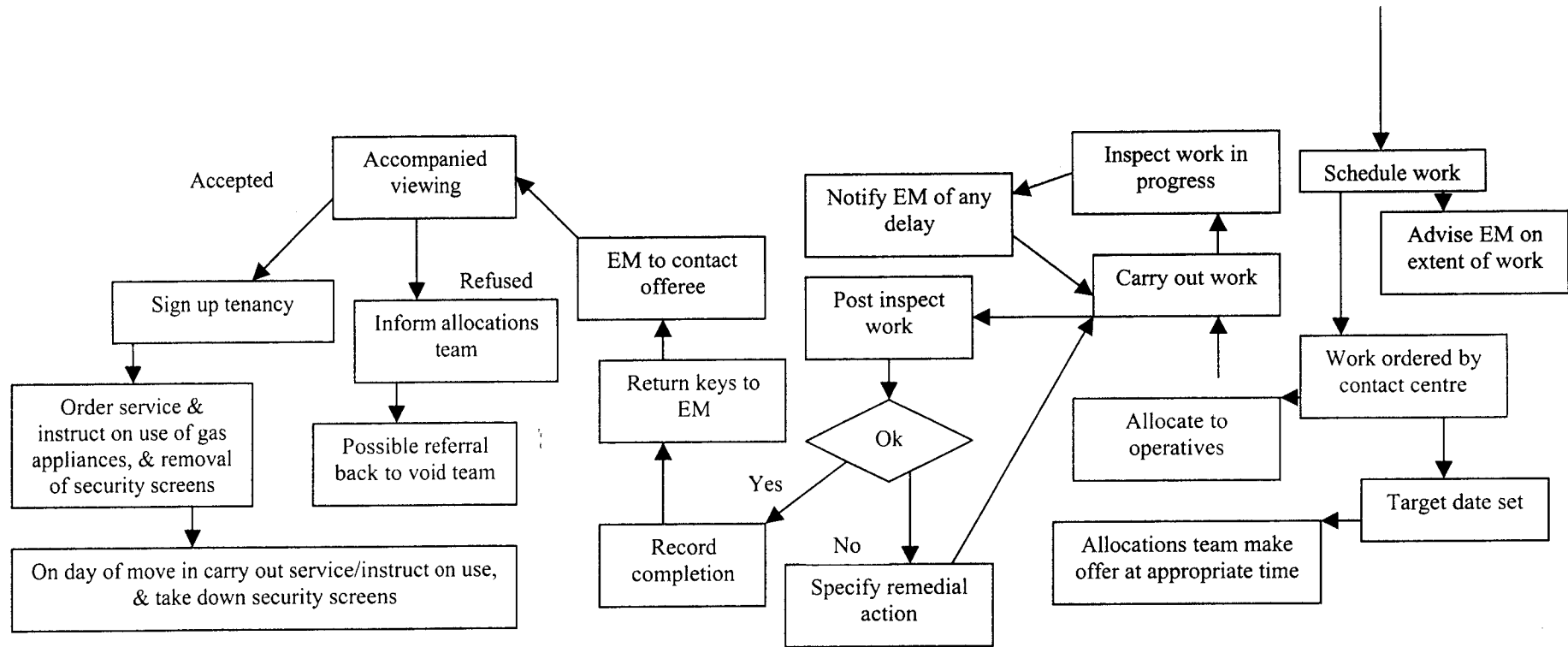
<b>Week Commencing</b>	<b>Routine</b>	<b>Long Term</b>	<b>Total</b>
01/04/02	0	2	2
08/04/02	0	15	15
15/04/02	0	10	10
22/04/02	0	3	3
29/04/02	1	6	7
06/05/02	2	3	5
13/05/02	2	15	17
20/05/02	4	11	15
27/05/02	1	6	7
03/06/02	5	3	8
10/06/02	2	4	6
17/06/02	4	8	12
24/06/02	2	7	9
01/07/02	3	6	9
08/07/02	1	3	4
15/07/02	5	10	15
22/07/02	2	3	5
29/07/02	5	12	17
05/08/02	0	4	4
12/08/02	1	5	6
19/08/02	1	5	6
26/08/02	0	1	1
02/09/02	2	1	3
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>186</b>

# Voids Procedure

123



No (From page 1)



124



**Report to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Housing – 19<sup>th</sup> September 2002**

**Certificates of Lawful Use**

<b>Report of:</b> <i>Head of Development Control and Conservation</i>	<b>WARDS AFFECTED</b>  <i>All</i>
<b>Report Author:</b> <i>Roy Thompson</i> <i>Tel no. 01865 252151</i>	
<b>Lead Member Responsible:</b> <i>Councillor Colin Cook</i>	
<b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee Responsibility:</b> <i>Housing</i>	
<b>Key Decision:</b> <i>No</i>	
<b>SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
<p><b>The purpose of this report is to explain the purposes of Certificates of Lawful Use, the legal context, and the Council's powers relating to these Certificates.</b></p> <p><b>The report has no staffing or financial implications. Legal implications are implicit.</b></p> <p><b>The Committee is ASKED to note the contents of the report.</b></p>	

**Background**

1. This Committee has asked for a report on Certificates of Lawful Use following the recent receipt of several Certificates of Existing Lawful Use for houses in multiple occupation.

**What is a Certificate of Lawful Use (CLU)**

2. CLU's are normally submitted by householders/developers/landowners to establish whether planning permission is required for either a use or a

development. However, anyone can legally apply. They establish whether an existing or proposed use or development is lawful. There are two types of CLU. Firstly, there is the Certificate of Proposed Use or Development, which seeks a determination from the Council whether a use or development that has not taken place requires planning permission. Secondly, there is the Certificate of Existing Use or Development, which seeks a determination whether an existing use or development requires planning permission. Given the background set out above, this report concentrates on the latter.

3. A Certificate of Existing Lawful Use works on the principle that if a use is immune from planning enforcement action it is lawful, and therefore authorised, and does not require planning permission.

### **The legal context**

4. Immunity from enforcement action varies by type of use. For instance, if a house or flat has been used for four years or more without planning permission it becomes immune from enforcement action. Generally, other uses (including multiple occupation) only become immune from planning enforcement action after ten years.

5. The onus of proof is firmly on the applicant. It is for the applicant to decide what evidence to put forward. It may include sworn affidavits, tenancy records, Council tax returns, service bills, or records from other Council departments. The relevant test is 'on the balance of probability' rather than the more onerous 'beyond reasonable doubt'. The applicant's own evidence does not need to be corroborated by independent evidence in order to be accepted. If the local planning authority does not have any contradictory evidence, there is no good reason to refuse the application. The relevant legislation states:

*"The local planning authority should proceed on the basis that neither the identity of the applicant nor the planning merits of the operation, use or activity, are relevant to the consideration of the purely legal issues which are involved in determining an application"*

6. There is no requirement for the local planning authority to notify neighbours of the receipt of CLU's. Clearly with Certificates of Proposed Development for instance, the decision will be taken on purely factual grounds, having regard to the relevant planning legislation, and the planning history of the property. For Certificates of Existing Use however, there is some merit in seeking neighbours comments. However, such comments can only relate to whether the property has been in use for the use suggested and for the requisite time period. The difficulty with this is that claims from neighbours about the length of time that a use has been in existence can sometimes be difficult to substantiate.

7. Once all the evidence has been evaluated the Head of Legal Services will make a determination to either approve or refuse the Certificate. There is a right of appeal for the applicant if the Council refuses a Certificate. It should

also be noted that an applicant could re-apply with different or additional evidence following a refusal. Thus a refusal does not necessarily mean that a use is unauthorised, merely that not enough evidence has been submitted.

### **The Councils powers**

8. The decision whether to approve the Certificate must be taken on legal, factual grounds. The evidence has to be evaluated, and any conflicting evidence has to be weighed in the balance. As specified above the test is whether 'on the balance of probability' the use has been in continuous use for more than four/ten years. There is not much guidance on what constitutes 'continuous', but a break of a few months in the use would not normally invalidate an application.

9. The Council cannot refuse a Certificate because the use is considered to be unacceptable, nor because it does not like how a particular landlord operates. Therefore they cannot be used to affect the balance of uses in the local communities or to deal with individual landlords.

### **Conclusion**

Certificates of Lawful Use are determined by the Head of Legal Services on the basis of clearly defined legal parameters and the decision cannot be influenced by the perceived planning merits of the case or the views on the suitability of the applicant. Certificates can only normally be refused where little or no substantive evidence is put forward by the applicant, or where the Council has clear contradictory evidence.

Background Papers: Enforcing Planning Control: Legislative Provisions and Procedural Requirements (Circular 10/97)

**Report to: Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Committee  
Wednesday 9th October 2002**

<p><b>Report of :</b> Business Manager – Transport &amp; Parking</p> <p><b>Report Author :</b> Graham Smith, Business Manager, Transport &amp; Parking</p> <p><b>Lead Member responsible :</b> Councillor Colin Cook</p> <p><b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee responsibility :</b> Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Committee</p> <p><b>Key Decision</b> No</p>	<p><b>WARDS AFFECTED</b> ALL</p>
---	--------------------------------------

**SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**This report: Outlines the existing concessionary fare scheme operated by the Council and reviews its parameters. It also outlines considerations to be made in the review after best practice research has been received and in the light of any advice to be given by the Legal Services Business Manager.**

**The first 6 recommendations are for consideration by the committee now. The remainder of the recommendations are for consideration at the end of the review.**

**The Committee is RECOMMENDED to ask the Executive Board to :**

- 1. Call in and re-issue all existing passes during the period January to June 2003 or whatever other period can be successfully negotiated with the administrators of the pass issue.**
- 2. Set the validity period for the passes at three years from the date of the new issue.**
- 3. Note that negotiations are proceeding with the two main bus companies to introduce smartcard technology onto the buses but that the consideration of this for the current review is not possible because of timescales.**
- 4. Note that negotiations are proceeding with the two main bus companies to include return fares in the reimbursement calculation formula and that further details on this will come to the committee at the end of the review period.**
- 5. Approve the consultation with users to be progressed by Councillor**

### **Taylor and officers**

- 6. Name 3 committee members to work with officers on this project with the proviso on reporting detailed in the report.**

**After the consideration of information on “best practice” at a future meeting decide for recommendation to the Executive Board:**

- 7. The continuation of the flat fare system, at what value and if differing rates should apply by age or;**
- 8. The introduction of a percentage fare system and if so at what level. (Government minimum is 50%) or;**
- 9. The introduction of a token based system and if so within what parameters.**

**Within whatever scheme is recommended to the Board to:**

- 10. Recommend restriction times on usage.**
- 11. Recommend the restrictions on area usage.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This is the first report to the scrutiny committee in their review of Concessionary Bus Fares. The review is scheduled to run from September to December.

The report:

- highlights some of the problems with the existing scheme;
- gives some details about those schemes operated by adjacent districts;
- describes, briefly, the different types of schemes operated with some of the advantages and disadvantages;
- talks about progress being made in negotiations with the bus company on the current reimbursement formula and smartcard technology; and
- outlines what will happen next.

## **HISTORY OF THE EXISTING SCHEME**

1.
  - 1.1 The Council’s current concessionary fare scheme was introduced under the Transport Act 1985. That Act did not specify the level of discount on bus fares to be offered and left the decision to the relevant authority. The Transport Act 2000, now provides for a statutory minimum discount level of 50% on local bus services.
  - 1.2 The scheme was introduced in April 1981 when the discount fare was set at 10p, that was increased in October 1990 to 20p and has stayed at that level ever since.
  - 1.3 Subject to other qualifying criteria people with disabilities or “elderly” are

entitled to receive a bus pass. The Transport Act 2000 defines "elderly" as a person who has attained pensionable age (within the meaning of the rules in the Pensions Act 1995). Women qualify under the scheme at the age of 60 and men at the age of 65. From April 2003 the qualifying age for men reduces to 60.

- 1.4 Use of the passes is restricted in that they can only be used after 9.00am and also only for journeys within the City boundary.

## 2. **HOW THE EXISTING SYSTEM IS OPERATED**

- 2.1 Applications are made to the Council for concessionary bus fare passes on the basis of disability or age and if relevant supporting evidence is produced a pass is issued which is valid for life.
- 2.2 Passes issued before January 1999 are stored in hard copy in filing cabinets. From January 1999 passes were issued through a computer database. Due to the amount of information contained in hard copy, 1985 to 1999, the number of passes issued or in circulation cannot be accurately established.
- 2.3 The amount of money the City Council pays to the bus companies under the scheme is based on a mathematical formula and has been used for a number of years. It is a formula that has been used by other authorities elsewhere in the country.
- 2.4 The formula calculates the sum to be paid using two variable factors: the average full-cost fare single fare to which the discount was applied; and the number of journeys made using the discounted fare (currently 20p).
- 2.5 The two variable figures are submitted by the bus companies to the Council from their records. There is no way of checking these figures other than by making a comparison with previous data to check for any marked change in usage.

## 3. **OTHER AUTHORITY SCHEMES**

- 3.1 Details on the schemes operated by all other authorities in the country are collated in a publication entitled 'Concessionary Fares UK' published by 'TAS Publications & Events' The latest available version of this is from 1998, the 2001 version is due to be published by the end of the year.
- 3.2 For comparison purposes the 1998 publication has been used but only for non-financial matters as the financial information from 4 years ago would not be relevant now.
- 3.3 Appendix 1 is a copy of the basic comparison tables in the publication for District Councils.

- 3.4 From these tables it seems that the majority of concessionary fare schemes are based on passes (Table D6), and half fare discount (Table D7). Based on this information the City Council's scheme is more generous than most other districts.
- 3.5 The District Councils adjacent to the City work together and all use the same system which is based on the governments recommended 50% discounted fare.

#### 4. **CURRENT SCHEME DIFFICULTIES**

##### **Lack of Control of Passes**

- 4.1 Passes are currently issued for life and as a result of having 2 issue recording systems it is not possible to analyse the information to provide accurate details of the numbers in existence, including the number of replacements and the number no longer valid because of death or moving.
- 4.2 Other authorities re-issue passes on various time periods, some as short as annually.
- 4.3 **PROPOSAL** : It is proposed that all passes should be called in over a period of 6 months and re-issued with a 3 year life. The administrators of the pass issue have difficulties with this because of the resources it would consume. This will be negotiated by officers and reported upon at a future meeting  
When started all re-issue will be recorded on the computer database system.

In addition to the qualification information required for the pass to be issued it would also be useful to ask for additional information, suggestions for this will be made after best practise information has been considered.

**Advantages** : Will provide an ongoing accurate database of information on the number of passes in operation and therefore aid the Council in determining Value for money.

**Disadvantages** : Inconvenience users.

**Financial Cost** : Unknown at this stage but there will be additional staff costs for the initial call in and the re-issue on the three year cycle.

**Financial Savings** : Probably none

#### 5. **REIMBURSEMENT RETURNS FROM BUS COMPANIES / SMARTCARD TECHNOLOGY**

- 5.1 For financial reimbursement each bus company submits their data on the uses of the concessionary fare passes and the average single fare

applicable. There is no way this information can be checked or challenged other than checking against previous returns for the same periods.

5.2 **PROPOSAL** : Introduce smartcard technology machines onto the buses and within the Council.

The ideal method for keeping track of card usage and therefore an accurate method of proving the financial claims from the bus companies would be to have the passes encoded with a magnetic strip and require this to be passed through a reading device on the buses when used. This would provide a computer record for later use. It would also allow analysis of the number of passes being used, at what times of the day and for what journey lengths. In order for this to happen a large capital investment would be required from the bus companies and the City Council. This is unlikely to happen in the short term although research work is being undertaken by the County Council for a system that could be used for buses, theatres, cinemas and many more outlets.

The Oxford Bus Company is currently researching this idea for their own purposes, they have been asked to consider the inclusion of our concessionary fare scheme when deciding on the specification they intend to use for their system.

Stagecoach have not given any indication when they will consider smartcard technology

It would seem likely that Oxford Bus Company will move first and this will cover about half of spending within about 3 years. Regrettably detailed consideration in this review will have to be discounted because of the lengthy timescales.

6. **AVERAGE FARE CALCULATION**

- 6.1 Currently the average fare used for reimbursement calculations is based on a single fare with no allowance for any return fares. Introducing return fares into the calculations was proposed by the Council in January 2001 but was never progressed.
- 6.2 The Oxford Bus Company has agreed in principle to re-consider including return fares along the lines of the January 2001 proposals. The Stagecoach company has been written to requesting comments on this proposal but so far no response has been received.
- 6.3 **PROPOSAL** : To continue to negotiate with the Oxford Bus Company and the Stagecoach Company the inclusion of return fares in the reimbursement formula and to report on progress to a future meeting.



**Advantages :** Reduced financial burden on the Council

**Disadvantages :** None

**Financial Costs :** None

**Financial Savings :** Unknown at this stage but there would be some.

## 7. OTHER FACTORS FOR CONSIDERATION

### 7.1 VARIABLE DISCOUNT RATES

7.2 The current system makes no distinction between peoples ages, the discount rate is the same for all. It has been suggested that the discount rate could be variable depending on age bands.

7.3 **CONSIDER :** Providing variable discount rates for age groups, 60 to 69, 70 to 79 and 80+

**Advantages :** Would provide a greater financial relief to older pensioners.

**Disadvantages :** Logistical problems for the bus companies when processing the different passes on the bus and also the Council when analysing the reimbursement returns. This would be considerably reduced if smartcard machines are installed.

**Financial Costs :** Unknown at this stage but there would be additional staff costs in setting up the new system and checking when people move from one age group to another.

**Financial Savings :** Unknown at this stage.

## 8. USAGE RESTRICTIONS

8.1 Currently passes cannot be used between 06.00 and 09.00 in the mornings. This is in line with the majority of other authorities although there are a number that have no time restrictions.

8.2 **CONSIDER :** Remove any time limiting period.

**Advantages :** Gives scheme users more flexibility on travelling times.

**Disadvantages :** There is already a capacity problem on certain routes before 9.00am and if the restrictions during the morning rush hour were removed the capacity problem would increase requiring more buses and drivers.

**Financial Costs** : Unknown at this stage but would probably cost more.  
**Financial Savings** : Unknown at this stage but probably none.

## 9. FIXED FARE

- 9.1 Very few District Councils operate a flat fare scheme. (Table D7)
- 9.2 The City Council scheme has a fixed discounted fare of 20p, the discount figure has been at this level since 1990.
- 9.3 When the figure was increased from 10p to 20p in 1990 the average fare was 48.23p, therefore the fixed rate was equivalent to a 58.5% discount. With average full fare now at 90p the equivalent discount is 78%.
- 9.4 Consideration could be given to raising this figure and if so to what level. There are currently some bus fares at 50p and 60p, therefore if the discount figure is raised above 25p then the discount on the lower fares would default to a 50% discount.
- 9.5 **CONSIDER** : Raising the discount fare figure

**Advantages** : Reduced financial burden to the Council

**Disadvantages** : Increased financial burden to users.

**Financial Costs** : None

**Financial Savings** : At 25p =£33,000 pa

At 30p =£76,000 pa

At 35p =£128,000 pa

At 40p =£186,000 pa

A completely free service is estimated to cost at least an additional £600,000 pa assuming a 90p fare, 2.237m trips and a reimbursement factor of 80%

## 10. PERCENTAGE FARE

- 10.1 The majority of District Councils operate a half fare scheme. (Table D7) in line with government requirements in the Transport Act 2000.
- 10.2 Consideration could be given to changing the present flat fare scheme to a flat percentage fare scheme.

**Advantages** : Reduced financial burden on the Council. Easier operation for the bus companies.

**Disadvantages** : Increased financial burden on the users. Greater increases for those requiring to make longer journeys. Amount of discount unknown unless taking same journey every time.

**Financial Costs** : Unknown at this stage but there would be staff costs in drawing up and implementing a new system

**Financial Savings** : Based on 90p average fare and therefore a

concessionary fare of 45p the saving is estimated to be £248,000. There would be a saving each year as inflation would be borne by both the City Council and the pass holder.

## 11. **TOKENS**

- 11.1 About 50% of District Councils (Table D7) use token schemes, these usually run alongside pass schemes for the more rural areas where the bus services are less frequent or non existent.
- 11.2 They have a set value and can be used on the buses or taxis and in some cases on trains. Where tokens are issued they each have a set value, normally 50p or £1 and are handed over when used. The operator then has to send them off to the token company for reimbursement or in some cases take them to the district Council who then reimburse the operator and obtain reimbursement from the token supplier later. The value of tokens issued varies but would seem to average out at £20 - £30. Once the tokens have been used up there are no further issues of tokens, people using tokens have to sign to accept the set value received and forgo any further discounts until their next issue of tokens.

**Advantages :** Known cost to the Council for each issue. Could be used for taxis if the taxi firms agree.

**Disadvantages :** People travelling a great deal would run out of discounted travel fairly soon. Consideration would have to given to how issuing a fixed value of tokens would match the legislative provision of providing 50% discount on all journeys.

**Financial Costs :** May be some additional administration cost depending on way operated.

**Financial Savings :** Unknown at this stage but anticipated there could be some.

## 12. **REIMBURSEMENT CALCULATION FORMULA**

- 12.1 The Council is currently using a formula that was introduced some time ago. Other authorities use slightly different formulas. However the end resulting payment to the bus operators should be the same at the end as legislation is laid down to the effect that the bus companies should be no worse or no better off in financial terms. It should be noted that any proposed change to the formula would have to be in consultation with the bus companies. This process will take some time to be resolved.

- 12.2 **CONSIDER :** Changing the formula to include return fares once agreement has been reached with the two main bus companies.

**Advantages :** Reduced financial burden on the Council.

**Disadvantages :** None

**Financial Costs :** None

**Financial Savings :** Unknown at this stage but anticipated there will be some.

**13. AREA APPLICABLE**

13.1 Almost all other District Councils limit the travel area to the boundaries of their authorities. Our scheme is the same and only covers journeys within the City boundaries.

13.2 **CONSIDER :** Widening area to include journeys that start within the City but terminate at locations such as Abingdon, Witney or Kidlington or others.

**Advantages :** Provides a greater freedom of travel for the users of the scheme.

**Disadvantages :** None

**Financial Costs :** Unknown at this stage but could be considerable if there is a large take up of the option.

**Financial Savings :** None

**14. BEST PRACTICE/WHAT NEXT**

14.1 Officers and Councillors met Peter Headicar (Oxford Brookes School of Planning) on 3<sup>rd</sup>. October with a view to his department producing some work in the area of best practice.

14.2 The remit of the work is to look at the schemes in operation that provide the best value for every pound spent in concessions.

This is to be considered in the light of the current scheme enjoyed by applicants which is above that required by law and how any change either financial, administrative or both can best be implemented.

A verbal update will be given to the committee on the outcome of this meeting.

14.2 The committee also wanted to consider any changes to the scheme in the light of public perception. To aid this process the information from the consultation on the spending priorities of the authority, which is due to report at the end of October, will be analysed. Oxford Brookes where also asked for information in this area.

14.3 The committee has also asked to take into account the views of those people who will be directly affected by any changes in the scheme. Officers would propose that this is a 2 stage process:

1. Now to let them know formally a review is taking place and any ideas or information they have to input;
2. When the committee has come to some decisions on recommendations so that their views can be taken on board and made known to the Executive Board when they are making their decisions.

Councillor Taylor, who is supporting the Portfolio Holder in his area, has offered to co-ordinated this work and if this is acceptable will report to the committee at times to be decided by the meeting.

- 14.4 Because of the short timescales involved the committee is asked to delegate 3 councillors to work with officers on this project and receive an update report in November and a final report with recommendations for consideration in December.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY THE : Business Manager – Transport & parking Business Manager – Legal Services Business Manager - Modernisation Directorate Finance Manager Portfolio Holder
---

Background Papers : Concessionary Fares reports of 6<sup>th</sup> February and 31<sup>st</sup> July.