

To: Executive Board – 28 February 2005

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Housing Scrutiny Committee – 1 February 2005

100. PRIVATE SECTOR STOCK CONDITION SURVEY – INITIAL FINDINGS

The Environmental Health Business Manager and the Strategy and Review Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended) which advised the Committee on the commissioning process and the findings of the Private Sector Stock Condition Survey which had been completed in November 2004.

The Committee received a presentation from Fordhams Research which had carried out the survey and a representative answered questions.

Councillor Campbell asked what advice could be given on for example 3 key issues. In response Andrew Forbes said that the report was a starting point. The results would need to be taken and reviewed along with the Council's present policies and strategies to enable priorities to be identified.

Graham Stratford in response to questions on the Decent Homes Standard said that one 'miss' on the criteria did not mean that the property had failed the standard. Gail Siddall said that it was important to get properties fit and then to the Decent Homes Standard.

Jim Davison from Fordhams said in response to questions that they had taken a random sample of properties and were bound to pick up Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) which the Council did not know about. Gail Siddall added that landlords did not have to inform the Council, even under the new licensing regulations only landlords of certain properties had to come forward.

Andrew Forbes said that the Council had powers to serve notices on landlords to carry out works to the properties.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To note the survey and its findings;
- (b) To ALERT the Executive Board of the following serious and urgent concerns of the Committee;
 - (i) The high level of properties in Oxford which required works to them;
 - (ii) The lack of a pro-active strategy to publicise grants and assistance available to elderly and vulnerable people to obtain central heating etc.

- (iii) The need to prioritise people suffering from 'cold';
 - (iv) The need for resources to enable properties to be identified;
 - (v) The need to identify enforcement measures available to the Council;
 - (vi) That Environmental Health should receive support and funding for HMO Licensing.
- (c) To RECOMMEND the Executive Board to approve further work towards a Private Sector Strategy be carried out;
- (d) To request further reports as set out in the Action Plan and timetable and that an update report be submitted to the Housing Scrutiny Committee on 17th March 2005.

(Report attached at Appendix 1)

Housing Scrutiny Committee – 10 February 2005

117. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUSINESS PLAN

The Strategy and Review Business Manager submitted (previously circulated now amended) the draft Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2004-2006.

Graham Stratford said that the Business Plan was a statutory document assessed by the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) and had been passed as fit for purpose. He said that the document set out a long term strategic plan for the HRA and so would require updating on a regular basis.

Councillor Campbell said that the document was very informative and clear. Councillor Rundle added that it should be seen as an example of good practice. Councillor Rundle said that there was no timetable for reviewing the Plan and key actions. In response Graham Stratford said that a review would start immediately and be ongoing.

Councillor Campbell said that the document should not be politicised and references to political parties should be removed. Councillor Sareva added that Officers should not be political either. Councillor Rundle said that the document was not political but a statement of fact, however its focus was on the future delivery of Housing Services.

Councillor Campbell said that in chapter 4 (How's the bank balance? The financial picture) the Council should also be looking at the medium to long term capital funding. In response Graham Stratford said that this was not possible until the Stock Options Appraisal was complete.

Councillor Campbell said that he was not aware of any Council properties in the St. Margaret's ward. Councillor Sareva said that these may have been acquired properties.

Councillor Fooks said that there was no mention about upgrading the environmental standards of Council properties. In response Graham Stratford said that the Decent Home Standard only required a decent standard. Councillor Rundle said that the Plan did not necessarily focus on other services etc. that the Council wanted to provide for its tenants.

Councillor Murray said that the title of chapter 6 (Why can't we just leave things the way they are?) raised a question that was not answered. In response Graham Stratford said that it did contain the answer as the Government has stated that things can't stay as they are. Councillor Sareva added that there should be reasons why the Government has said this.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To RECOMMEND to the Executive Board
 - (i) That all the data was updated to January 2005 and that the updated Plan be re-issued with a further update in September 2005;
 - (ii) That the energy efficiency of Council properties be addressed;
 - (iii) That the document should be noted as an example of good practice for the production of future reports and plans;
- (b) To INFORM the Executive Board that the Stock Options Appraisal process created some uncertainty with aspects of the Plan;
- (c) To thank Janet Banfield for her work in producing the Plan.

(A copy of the Business Plan has been circulated under separate cover to members of the Executive Board. A copy has also been deposited in the Members' Room.)

119. VOIDS PROPERTIES

The Acting Business Manager for Housing Services and the Oxford Building Solutions Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated now amended) which provided an update on the progress of improving void performance.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To note the report;

- (b) To request the Acting Business Manager for Housing Services and the Oxford Building Solutions Business Manager to submit a further report on sheltered accommodation;
- (c) To RECOMMEND the Executive Board to set achievable targets that can be monitored on the reduction of void properties;
- (d) To INFORM the Executive Board of the Housing Scrutiny Committee's concern at the delays in the implementation of the voids procedure.

(Report attached at Appendix 2.)