

**OXFORD CITY COUNCIL  
HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
Date of meeting: 23<sup>RD</sup> May 2005**

**Report of: Neighbourhood Renewal Business Unit**

**Title: Review of Internal Housing Enabling Function and  
the Registered Social Landlord Partnership**

**Ward: All**

**Report author: Val Johnson  
Contact Tel No: 01865 252209  
E-mail address: vjohnson@oxford.gov.uk**

**Key Decision: No**

**Lead Member: Cllr. Ed Turner**

**Scrutiny responsibility: Housing Scrutiny**

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Housing Scrutiny Committee recommends to the Executive Board to agree to:

1. Endorse the proposals to establish an Affordable Housing Steering Group as set out in section 4 of the report.
2. Endorse the Actions as set out in the Appendix to the report.

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 Council agreed to provide an additional £100,000 for 2005-08 to increase the development of affordable housing in Oxford. Following this decision, a review has been carried out on the internal enabling function and the existing Registered Social Landlord (RSL) Partnership.
- 1.2 At the last meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Committee, Members received a verbal update from the Strategic Director for Housing Health and Communities on the initial findings of the review. The principal findings of the review are set out below and an action plan linked to the recommendations is attached as Appendix 1 to the report. A copy of the Consultant's full report has been placed in the Members Room. Housing Scrutiny Committee is asked to comment on the action plan.

- 1.3 The Review contributes directly to the Strategic priority of the Council to provide more affordable housing.

## **2. Review Brief and Methodology**

- 2.1 Housing Quality Network (HQN) were commissioned to conduct a review of:

- i) the internal organisation of Oxford City Council and it's effectiveness in enabling affordable housing
- ii) the RSL Partnership.

The intended outcomes of the review were to:

- a) Recommend how existing resources can best be used in the Housing Development Team and where additional resources would benefit.
- b) Recommend how the affordable housing programme should be strategically managed.
- c) Recommend how the RSL Partnership should be taken forward in the short term.

- 2.2 The review methodology is set out in page 2 of the Consultant's Report. Interviews were largely based on telephone meetings with:

- Officers in relevant Council Business Units including Neighbourhood Renewal, Housing Services, Planning, Asset Management and Legal Services.
- Elected Members
- Officers undertaking the enabling role in other Oxfordshire authorities
- Officers involved in affordable housing in the County Council
- Development managers and other Housing Association staff.

## **3. Principal Review Findings**

### **Internal Enabling Function**

- 3.1 This is carried out over a number of Business Units and the findings were:

- staff are committed but the service is ad hoc and reactive.
- capacity problems were identified in a number of the Units but processes were inefficient and should be streamlined

- essential features for such a cross cutting function, such as good communication, strong management and clarity of roles, were weak because of the spread over so many teams
- the strategic role had not been developed for affordable housing because of capacity problems in the Housing Development Team
- the opportunity exists to overhaul the affordable function by looking at where the Housing Development Team would be located in the Council's structure.

### **Corporate Commitment**

- There is a mismatch between the commitment to affordable housing as set out in the Council's aims and objectives and the way the service is structured.
- The profile of affordable housing is high in the community and the Council should capitalise on this
- There should be a stronger role for Members and Senior Managers in the enabling process through the establishment of a Board or similar body.

### **RSL Partnership**

- The Partnership has delivered against the objectives set for it but the formal processes for establishing targets and monitoring against them were absent
- Potential in the Partnership had not be tapped
- Partners were committed to continuing to work with the Council but this way of working was under threat from developers working with outside RSLs and the Housing Corporation also funding outside the Partnership. These factors are likely to intensify over the next few years.
- The majority of the current partners are strongly represented in the Housing Corporation's funding programmes and this is likely to continue, which is important with the wider issue of the County wide partnership still under discussion.
- There was a tension between the drive for affordable housing to meet the Council's priority housing need and the RSL partners' having to make their developments sustainable
- The new Housing Corporation bid round opens in July so there is little point in reselecting RSL partners.

- The lack of funding commitment from the Council does not reflect corporate commitment to affordable housing

#### **4. Establishment of the Affordable Housing Steering Group**

4.1 In order to strengthen the overall direction of the affordable housing service it is proposed to set up an Affordable Housing Steering Group with Members and Senior Managers.

4.2 The main areas of activity would be to :

1. drive forward the action plans for the Review
2. ensure that strategic and operational activities were linked
3. co-ordinate the review and implementation of all affordable housing policy
4. monitor the delivery performance of the internal enabling function and the RSL partnership

4.3 The permanent members of the Steering Group would be:

Portfolio Member for Housing and Planning  
 Chair of Housing Scrutiny Committee  
 Strategic Director (Housing, Health and Communities)  
 Strategic Director (Physical Environment)  
 Business Unit Managers: Neighbourhood Renewal, Strategy and Review, Planning, Legal Services and Finance.

Other Business Managers or Officers will be invited as and when required.

4.4 The Steering Group would be chaired by the Neighbourhood Renewal Manager and serviced by staff from that Unit. It is not intended that the Group will be a formal decision making body of the Council (as for example the Housing Advisory Board is.)

#### **5. Financial Implications**

5.1 There is an allocation of £100,000 to support this area of work in 2005-6, 2006-7 and 2007-8. Appendix 1 has a list of actions to take the review recommendations forward and these are set out with the resources and estimated costs required. Figures for staffing are inclusive of on costs.

5.2 The costs are summarized in the following table.

<b>Action</b>	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>2006-07</b>	<b>2007-08</b>	<b>Total</b>
Consultants fee – enabling/RSL review	£5k			£5k
Consultants fee - review of strategic groups	£4k			£4k
Staff recruitment	£6k			£6k
Employ temporary Development Officer	£25k			£25k
Employ permanent Development Officer	£25k	50	50	125
Employ permanent Planning Officer	£35k	50	50	135
<b>Total</b>	<b>£100k</b>	<b>£100k</b>	<b>£100k</b>	<b>£300k</b>

## 6. Legal implications

- 6.1 Review of the RSL partnership will include Legal input to ensure that the Council is acting within its powers and within the law.

**REVIEW OF THE INTERNAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING ENABLING FUNCTION  
AND RSL PARTNERSHIP**

Recommendations	Proposed Actions	Date	Responsibility	Cost
<p><b>Housing Development Team Recommendation 1</b></p> <p>Work on organisational and inter department links to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Allow it to focus on enabling affordable housing</li> <li>· Ensure it is linked to relevant Strategic Groups, internally and externally</li> <li>· Reflect the importance and role of the team in enabling affordable housing</li> <li>· Improve the performance of the Team</li> </ul>	<p>Short term</p> <p>a) Consultant to review internal and external Strategic Groups and make recommendations as to their effectiveness and appropriate level of representation from the City Council.</p> <p>b) Establish an Affordable Housing Steering Group (details set out in Section 4)</p> <p>c) Review the location of the affordable housing function within the Council</p>	<p>May/June 2005</p> <p>July 2005</p> <p>August 2005</p>	<p>NRU Business Manager</p> <p>NRU Business Manager</p> <p>Senior Management Team</p>	<p>£4k</p> <p>Staff time from NRU, Planning, Asset Management, Legal Services and Finance.</p>
<p><b>Housing Development Team Recommendation 2</b></p> <p>Introduce a resource to address immediate issues within the team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Develop a site register with RSL partners, Asset Management and</li> </ul>	<p>Short term</p> <p>d) Employ a temporary additional Development Officer to enable</p>	<p>May 2005 - November</p>	<p>Housing Development</p>	<p>£25,000 2005-06</p>

4.10

**REVIEW OF THE INTERNAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING ENABLING FUNCTION AND RSL PARTNERSHIP**

4.11

<p>Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Enable the Housing Development Team involvement in HRA Asset Review</li> <li>· Enable strategic involvement by Housing Development Team Manger</li> <li>· Develop processes and procedures to clarify roles and responsibilities between Teams</li> <li>· Develop a formal communication arrangements, respond to enquiries and requests within a reasonable time frame</li> <li>· Facilitate regular partnership meetings</li> <li>· Support to exploit the partnership potential</li> </ul>	<p>the Team Manager to implement the review recommendations.</p> <p>e) Standardise HDT project management processes</p> <p>f) Set up 3 year Development programme</p> <p>Longer term</p> <p>f) Employ a permanent Development Officer to project manage schemes and enable the Team Manger to be more strategic.</p>	<p>July 2005</p> <p>July 2005</p>	<p>Manager</p> <p>Housing Development Manager</p> <p>Neighbourhood Renewal Manager</p>	<p>£25,000 2005-06 &amp; £50,000 2006-08 (incl. on costs)</p>
--	--	-----------------------------------	--	---

REVIEW OF THE INTERNAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING ENABLING FUNCTION AND RSL PARTNERSHIP

4.12

<p><b>Recommendation 3</b> <b>Planning</b> To introduce a resource to planning to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Provide a one point of contact for affordable housing development on a day to day basis</li> <li>· Work on S106 and housing policy</li> <li>· Research into evidence for balance of housing mix on sites</li> <li>· Ensure involvement of Housing development team at early opportunity</li> <li>· Agree on what is wanted from developer contributions</li> <li>· Enable work to clarify use of developer contributions on sites previously used for social housing</li> <li>· Monitor the impact of 50% affordable housing on quality and mix</li> </ul>	<p>Short term</p> <p>g) Provide an additional Planning Officer to support this work</p> <p>h) Set up officer group to monitor S106 progress and co-ordinate policy work</p> <p>Longer term</p> <p>i) To review the need for a strategic lead to oversee the supply of affordable housing.</p>	<p>September 2005</p> <p>June 2005</p>	<p>Planning Business Unit Manager</p> <p>Neighbourhood Renewal Manager / Planning Manager</p> <p>As above</p>	<p>£35,000 2005-06 &amp; £50K 2006-8</p> <p>Staff time</p> <p>As above</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 4</b> <b>Raise Housing Development profile</b> To develop a stronger role for elected members and senior officers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Address organisational structure to ensure the enabling function reflects</li> </ul>	<p>Short term</p> <p>j) Establish Affordable Housing Steering Group</p>	<p>July 2005</p>		<p>Staff costs</p>



**REVIEW OF THE INTERNAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING ENABLING FUNCTION AND RSL PARTNERSHIP**

<p>the corporate priority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Review skills within the relevant teams so that they are effectively used in the enabling process</li> <li>· Raise the profile of affordable housing to the Community, through partnership and other means</li> <li>· Take a consistent approach to negotiations with developers and partners.</li> </ul>	<p>k) Review the location of the affordable housing function within the Council</p>	<p>As above</p>		<p>Staff costs</p>
--	---	-----------------	--	--------------------

4.13

**REVIEW OF THE INTERNAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING ENABLING FUNCTION AND RSL PARTNERSHIP**

4.14

<p><b>Recommendation 5 RSL Partnership</b></p> <p>Build on the success of the existing RSL Partnership and strengthen it to respond to 'environmental changes'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Recognise conflicting agendas eg sustainable communities vs meeting housing need and reach a solution to deal with these</li> <li>· Frank discussion with partners to:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evaluate development performance</li> <li>- Identify challenges and agree an approach</li> <li>- Assist Oxford in what it wants in the future – affordable homes and /or additionality and make appropriate commissioning decision.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Short term</p> <p>l) Establish Affordable Housing Steering Group</p> <p>m) Review with partner RSLs and stakeholders – report to EB</p> <p>n) Establish formal partnership arrangements to allow on going monitoring against targets</p> <p>Longer term</p> <p>o) Review partnership effectiveness against 'environmental changes'</p>	<p>June 2005</p> <p>July 2005</p> <p>September 2005</p>	<p>NRU Business Manager</p> <p>Housing Development Manager</p> <p>Housing Development Manager</p>	<p>Staff time</p> <p>Staff time</p> <p>Staff time</p>
--	---	---	---	---