

To Executive Board – 10 October 2005

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Housing Scrutiny Committee – 14 September 2005

59. SIGNAGE ON THE OUTSIDE OF VOID PROPERTIES

The Voids Manager submitted a report (previously circulated now appended) concerning the possible displaying of signage on the outside of void properties, which the Chair agreed to certify as urgent business.

Councillor Murray suggested that the scheme be trailed in one area and then reviewed, however he had concerns over the cost of the signs.

Councillor Roberts said that she felt the scheme was a good idea as it would allow tenants and residents to know what was happening with a property that was screened, especially with the shortage of accommodation in Oxford, but she to had concerns over the costs.

Martyn Mumford said that at first he felt it was a good scheme, but now had concerns following recent incidents, where 3 screened properties had been broken into and vandalised. He said that he had also spoken to the Police who felt that the signs might encourage properties to be broken into.

In response to questions Martyn Mumford said that it was not easy to evict squatters once they were in a property as a Court Order was required and this could take up to 6 weeks to obtain and while this was taking place the properties could be suffering damage which lead to increased costs by the Council for refurbishment.

Councillor Fooks said that maybe signs could be placed only on properties that were screened. Councillor Brett added that he would support this, but that other ways should be sought to inform people what was being done to a property that was screened.

Martyn Mumford said that Estate Manager took the decision whether or not to screen a property, however if a property was damaged, then that property would be screened. He further added that in some cases a property that was screened was still occupied by the tenants, so not all screened properties were void.

The Committee agreed:

- (a) To RECOMMEND the Executive Board that that information concerning the status of void properties should be displayed in the Local Housing Offices, on the City Council website and sent regularly to Tenants' Associations;

- (b) To note the report.

Finance Scrutiny Committee – 7 September 2005

26. REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICE UPDATE ON PERFORMANCE, IMPROVEMENT PLANS, RUNNING COSTS, LOCAL COST OF BENEFITS AND PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

The Benefits and Revenues Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended).

Resolved to RECOMMEND the Executive Board:-

- (1) that the Revenues and Benefits budget be reported to this Committee so that members can see the extra costs of employing staff in debt collection compared with the expected and projected income which will be generated;
- (2) to ask the Revenues and Benefits Business Manager, in consultation with the Human Resources Business Manager, to review issues relating to staff retention and morale with a view to drawing up an action plan to improve staff retention and morale;
- (3) that consideration be given to ways of working more closely with clients, for example out of hours, in order to improve debt collection performance and that proposals be submitted to the Committee concerning the extension of the out of hours telephone service and debt collection;
- (4) that the use of outside providers be considered as part of the value for money exercise to be carried out in relation to Revenues and Benefits;
- (2) that measures be taken urgently to reduce the amount of outstanding mail;
- (6) that proposals for the benchmarking of the Revenues and Benefits service be submitted to the Committee's December meeting along with plans to enable the service to meet its performance and financial targets.

(Report attached at Appendix A.)

30. PROPERTY REVIEW – SUMMARY OF AREA CONSULTATION

The Finance and Asset Management Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated and now appended).

Resolved to INFORM the Executive Board that:-

- (1) the Asset Management Plan, the Maintenance Programme and the Capital Programme should be completed by Christmas;
- (1) the Asset Management Plan and the Capital Programme should be integrated;
- (2) officers in Finance and Asset Management need to liaise with officers in Planning concerning those properties included in the Projects Programme;
- (3) reviews of the investment portfolio should be carried out on a more regular basis.

(Report attached at Appendix B.)

34. CORNMARKEt REVIEW RESPONSE

The Committee had before it a joint response from leaders of the City and County Councils and an action plan for implementing the recommendations contained in the Review report (previously circulated and now appended).

Resolved: -

- (1) to note the position;
- (1) to RECOMMEND the Executive Board to review the Public Realm Strategy that the resulting document should provide a high quality environment and that it should re-enforce the Council's commitment to the Strategy.