

**To: City Executive Board**

**Date: 7<sup>th</sup>. December 2011**

**Report of: Finance and Performance Panel**

**Title of Report: Comments on the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2012-2042**

### **Summary and Recommendations**

**Purpose of report:** To present the views and recommendations of the Finance and Performance Panel

**Key decision? No**

**Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Scott Seamons**

**Executive Lead Member: Councillor McManners**

**Policy Framework:**

For the City Executive Board to say if it agrees or disagrees with the following recommendations:

#### **Recommendation 1**

**To review as a matter of urgency our current policy and partnerships for the management of rent debt and debt advice to ensure that we have in place the resources and systems to support tenants and do all we can to avoid or contain debt.**

#### **Recommendation 2**

**In the commissioning of the Fundamental Service Review to articulate clear value for money targets and ambitions so that robust delivery is ensured and transparent.**

#### **Recommendation 3**

**As part of the developing co-regulation and performance management proposals to take all opportunities to ensure that the service offered represents good value for money when compared to the best. For the managements costs per dwelling to be set in comparable terms.**

**Introduction**

1. The Finance and Performance Panel considered the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2012-2042 at their meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup>. November 2011. They were supported in the debate by David Watt, Nigel Kennedy, David Edwards and Jackie Yates. The Panel would like to thank these officers for their time and contributions.
2. The Panel had decided to focus their debate on:
  - Finance and Treasury Management and
  - Governance arrangements.
3. Time constraints meant that governance was not considered and the Panel will return to this at their meeting in February.
4. The Plan has clearly been modelled in very prudent terms and this prudence serves to act as mitigation against many of the financial risks. There are however 2 risks that the Panel would like to emphasise at this point.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

5. **Rent arrears** are very likely to rise over the term of this Plan and certainly within the immediate years. The reasons for this have been well documented and discussed and the bad debt provision within the Plan has been significantly increased on this account. This of course is more than a financial issue, if tenants cannot or do not pay their rent they are ultimately likely to lose their homes. The Plan talks about a review of our strategy for the management of rent and arrears and the Panel believe this to be essential and urgent recognising that rent arrears will often be accompanied by other debt issues.

### **Recommendation 1**

**To review as a matter of urgency our current policy and partnerships for the management of rent debt and debt advice to ensure that we have in place the resources and systems to support tenants and do all we can to avoid or contain debt.**

6. **Service Reviews** – The Plan identifies the major expenditure in Direct Services and requires a 20 -30% reduction in cost to make the Plan affordable. This reduction would bring costs in line with comparable bodies. The Panel heard that discussions were underway and a Fundamental Service Review was to be commissioned in January 2012. This review will be required to produce a significant but essential reduction in cost whilst improving outcomes. The Panel agrees that this is the correct path but would like to ensure that outcomes produce the right service at the right price within the right timescales.

### **Recommendation 2**

**In the commissioning of the Fundamental Service Review to articulate clear value for money targets and ambitions so that robust delivery is ensured and transparent.**

7. The Panel heard that other day to day management costs had already been reviewed as part of the recent Council 2012 programme and savings delivered. The Director was not keen to reduce costs any further here when more was to be expected of the service. This is accepted by the Panel but to ensure good value for money for tenants the Panel would not wish to see anything placed out of bounds.

### **Recommendation 3**

**As part of the developing co-regulation and performance management proposals to take all opportunities to ensure that the service offered represents good value for money when compared to the best. For the managements costs per dwelling to be set in comparable terms**

### **Board Member Comments**

8. I am happy to agree to these recommendations

#### **Name and contact details of author:-**

Pat Jones on behalf of the Finance and Performance Panel  
Principal Scrutiny Officer  
Law and Governance  
Tel: 01865 252191 e-mail: phjones@oxford.gov.uk

#### **List of background papers:**

**Version number:**

This page is intentionally left blank