

REPORT OF HOUSING COMMITTEE
(Meeting Held 23 March 1999)

1. PLANNED MAINTENANCE REVENUE PROGRAMME AND CAPITALISED REPAIRS AND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME 1999/2000 (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO 59)

The Committee has approved a list of schemes for the Planned Maintenance Revenue Programme and the Capitalised Repairs and Improvement Programme.

Members noted that the prime purpose of this expenditure was to maintain the fabric of the Council's housing stock and to ensure that such services as electrical and heating installations were maintained in a safe condition and replaced when necessary.

A further phase of improvements to the "hard to let" sheltered scheme at Barfields Court was included within the programme. Converting the current bedsits into self-contained flats would mean that current delays in re-letting vacant flats could be significantly reduced. The most urgent would be dealt with first.

The Committee was aware that all works identified were based upon the full and detailed stock condition survey carried out in 1989.

Members also noted that energy conservation was an essential part of all planned maintenance and improvements and, wherever possible, the opportunity was taken to increase the thermal efficiency of dwellings to ensure that energy efficiency savings were achieved.

Details on further projects which would be carried out under the miscellaneous category included within the revenue allocations were provided to the Committee.

2. SOCIAL HOUSING GRANT PROGRAMME – START 1999/2000 (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO 61)

Members noted the allocation of Social Housing Grant from the Housing Corporation, and agreed the allocation of local authority social housing grant.

The grant programme of £3.116 million would provide 154 homes. The number of homes falls significantly short of this Council's minimum target of 200 new homes per year, which was set in the housing strategy for 1999/2004.

The proposed developments include rented homes, rural homes, supported housing, and shared ownership accommodation, together with grants for temporary rented homes to support the empty homes strategy. These would be split between new build and making better use of existing homes. The empty homes strategy would be funded by both Local Authority and Housing Corporation Social Housing Grant, with funding being made available through a range of empty homes grants.

The Committee was advised of the two important elements to the 1999/2000 programme:

- That whilst Local Authority Social Housing Grant had remained at approximately the same level as 1998/1999, the Housing Corporation input had risen significantly from £605,000 to £1.316 million.
- To maintain rent at a level of approximately £72.00 per week for a three bedroomed house, Housing Associations have had to bid for a grant up to the maximum grant rate, resulting in fewer homes being provided from the available grant.

Members noted that the programme was likely to change, due to schemes which fall out of the programme for various reasons and because additional resources sometimes become available to the New Forest for its enabling programme.

3. **ROUGH SLEEPERS – “HEAD COUNT” (REPORT E) (MINUTE NO 64)**

The Committee has approved a proposal to carry out a “head count” of rough sleepers in the district, so that information can be provided as part of the Housing Investment Programme bidding process. It would involve an investigation into those sleeping rough on a given night in May 1999 between the hours of midnight and 6.00am in every town in the District.

There will be minimal cost to the Council as most work will be undertaken by volunteers. A small budget will be required to cover the expenses of the volunteers. It is estimated that this would amount to no more than £1,000, which could be contained within the 1999/2000 homelessness budget.

A steering group chaired by a Council officer will co-ordinate the project and be responsible for interpreting and publishing the results.

4. **RESOURCE ACCOUNTING IN THE HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (REPORT G) (MINUTE NO 65)**

The Committee has agreed a response to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on Resource Accounting in the Housing Revenue Account.

The consultation follows the comprehensive spending review, after which Ministers proposed a package of measures aimed at ensuring good value for money for future investment and improved efficiency of the management of Local Authority Housing.

Members received details of the main elements of the package, methods of valuation, new capital charges, rent rebates and a provisional timetable.

5. **BEST VALUE IN HOUSING (REPORT H) (MINUTE NO 52)**

The Committee has agreed a response to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions’ consultation paper on Best Value in Housing by their deadline of 16 April 1999.

The Government's intended approach to Best Value is set out in their White Paper "Modern Local Government – In Touch With the People" published in July 1998.

There will be a requirement for Councils to produce local performance plans evaluated by a Housing Inspectorate as part of the Audit Commission. Local Performance Reports for stakeholders would need to be produced, possibly to replace the existing statutory "Annual Reports to Tenants".

The issue had been considered at the Tenants' Liaison meeting on 15 March 1999. The tenants had welcomed the proposals together with the recognition of the importance of all stakeholders, including Council tenants, in the process. The tenants had agreed that the proposed "Local Performance Report" should replace the "Annual Report to Tenants".

Separate processes for both local housing authorities and registered social landlords are proposed.

6. TENANT PARTICIPATION COMPACTS (REPORT I) (MINUTE NO 67)

The Committee has agreed a response to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' consultation paper on Tenant Participation Compacts (agreements).

Members were aware that a key element of the Government's Best Value in Housing initiative was to increase the role of tenants in the planning, monitoring and review of services.

The consultation paper proposes that, on a voluntary basis, every Housing Authority should draw up a Housing Compact (agreement) with a representative group of tenants by April 2000. The compact would be the Council's pledge to tenants, specifying how tenants would have their say in all aspects of the Housing Service. It is suggested that compacts could be introduced at both local neighbourhood and at district wide levels with links to community issues. If Councils do not comply voluntarily, the Government proposes that performance be monitored through the competitive Housing Investment Programme bidding process, as part of the Best Value process.

The issue was considered at the Tenant Liaison Meeting on 15 March 1999, where the concept of tenant participation compacts was welcomed. However, concern was expressed with regard to the short implementation timescale, particularly having regard to the Council's Housing Stock Transfer work programme.

**Councillor Mrs M J Robinson
CHAIRMAN**