

REPORT OF HOUSING COMMITTEE

(Meeting held 20 September 2000)

1. RENT ASSESSMENT (MINUTE NO. 20) (REPORT B)

The Committee has considered progress made towards the development of a new rent assessment system based on a revised points system. Members noted that statutory requirements for rent setting purposes are likely to change as a result of proposals contained in the Housing Green Paper, published earlier this year.

The Committee has agreed that the revised points system be approved in principle but that further action towards the development of a new rent assessment system be suspended until the outcome of the Government Green Paper "Quality and Choice - A Decent Home For All", is known.

The Tenants' and Residents' Consultative Group have been involved throughout the development of the revised points system and have supported the proposal to suspend further action. On the question of rent differentials with the private sector, the Committee noted the Tenants' desire for a more comprehensive points values system to be investigated. Assurances were given that the aim was not to increase rental income but to achieve a fairer distribution.

2. ALLOCATION OF CAPITAL RESOURCES (MINUTE NO. 21) (REPORT C)

The Committee has considered and approved the allocation of surplus resources for Social Housing Grant. In view of the anticipated significant additional resources available next year for financing expenditure on the Council's stock and the shortfall in the provision of new homes this year, surplus resources of £619,000 will be allocated to the Social Housing Grant Programme. This will increase the total new provision to 206. Members noted the substantial increase in the number of families being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation due to the lack of available social housing. Concerns were expressed by the Tenants' and Residents' Consultative Group that there was insufficient funding for adaptations, other than for kitchens and bathrooms.

Policy and Resources Committee are being requested to approve a supplementary estimate of £779,000 for Social Housing Grant in 2000/01 (comprising £160,000 re-phasing of the existing programme and £619,000 surplus capital resources)

3. BUDGETARY CONTROL REPORT (MINUTE NO. 22) (REPORT D)

The Committee has noted key variations in capital and revenue expenditure identified since 21 June 2000. The Tenants' and Residents' Consultative Group commented on the Housing Revenue Account projected balance for 31 March 2001, in the context of previous and future rent increases. With the changes in methods of the housing finance, including Major Repairs Allowance together with increased balances, the Council would have greater flexibility in its rent setting and expenditure plans in future years.

4. FUNDING OF THE OPEN DOORS PROJECT (MINUTE NO. 23) (REPORT E)

The Committee has considered proposals for funding this project which provides assistance to non-priority homeless households in the New Forest. Open Doors was set up in 1994 by the New Milton Christian Association for Homeless People and since its inception has helped to re-house more than 200 people in the New Forest area. Clients are referred by a number of statutory and voluntary agencies including the Council, Probation Service, Social Services and the Citizens' Advice Bureaux. Members noted that to maintain the current level of service the Council would need to provide funding of £4,500 in the current financial year due to the loss of funding from other sources. The Open Doors service will be retained and work more closely with the Council in providing a housing service for the community and will be requested to manage the Council's bond deposit scheme, which is targeted at priority homeless households.

The Tenants' and Residents' Consultative Group has expressed support for the project. The Committee were unanimous in their support for the project and Policy and Resources Committee are being requested to approve a supplementary estimate of £4,500 for 2000/01, and the inclusion of £11,750 in the expenditure plans for 2001/02 onwards. This is subject to approval of the latest set of accounts from Open Doors.

5. FLOATING SUPPORT (MINUTE NO. 24) (REPORT F)

The Committee has agreed to make a financial contribution of £6,000 per annum to the Floating Support Service, the cost to be met from existing resources in the Housing Revenue Account. Members unanimously supported this scheme which will be managed by Hyde Housing Association and which will greatly assist some of the Council's more vulnerable tenants as well as having financial benefits for the housing budget. The Tenants' and Residents' Consultative Group, whilst supporting the scheme, expressed reservations that the scheme would not be managed in-house.

Members expressed appreciation and thanks to the Officers for their work and expertise in bringing forward this scheme.

With regard to future funding for the scheme, the Committee felt that steps should be taken to put in place a declaration of intent that funding would continue regardless of whether on-going funding from the Housing Corporation would be forthcoming. The Committee noted that should Housing Corporation grant be not available there would be a number of options which members could consider at the appropriate time to ensure the continued success of the scheme.

The following principles will be applied when providing the service:

- (i) The service initially will be offered to all age groups, but this will be reviewed in due course in the light of experience;
- (ii) Persons with care packages will not be referred to the service;
- (iii) No particular geographical area within the District will be specifically targeted.

Hyde Housing Association will be permitted to use the Council's interview facilities to interview clients who they consider should not be seen alone in their own home; and the Council's logo will be included on publications relating to the service.

6. THE NEW FOREST WELFARE MEALS SERVICE (MINUTE NO. 26) (REPORT G)

The Committee has considered the future funding and operation of the New Forest Meals-on-Wheels Service. A comprehensive review of the Service, the first to take place in Hampshire, was completed in August 1999. It is now being recommended as 'best practice' for other Districts to follow. Members referred to the inconsistencies which currently exist in the funding of luncheon clubs and emphasised the need for more detailed consideration on future funding of the Service generally. The Tenants' and Residents' Consultative Group has expressed support for the continued funding of the scheme but expressed concerns over the eligibility criteria and associated funding.

The Committee has authorised Officers to continue to work with Hampshire County Council Social Services and the WRVS to establish an equitable solution to the funding of luncheon clubs. The Committee has also agreed to maintain the current level of service and prices for non-category 1 tenants' meals, subject to Policy and Resources Committee approving a supplementary revenue estimate, following withdrawal of subsidy by Social Services. Non-category 1 tenants are those who do not meet the Social Services eligibility criteria for subsidised meals.

Officers will advise the appropriate Portfolio Holder and Portfolio Performance and Review Panel on the rationale for the future funding of Meals-on-Wheels and luncheon clubs.

**Councillor B Rule
VICE-CHAIRMAN**

(HC200900)