

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 2 November 2005)

1. SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT – THE DELIVERY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING (ON DEVELOPMENT SITES) THROUGH THE PLANNING PROCESS (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO. 63)

The Cabinet has agreed a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 'The Delivery of Affordable Housing (on Development Sites) through the Planning Process' as set out in Annex 3 to Report A to them.

The draft document was published for public consultation in July 2005. Whilst the Local Plan provides the Council's basic policy framework for securing the provision of affordable housing on development sites through the planning process, it does not give detailed information about the implementation of these policies. The SPD is intended as a guide to landowners and developers on how the Council will seek to implement its policies through the negotiation of planning applications. Members considered the comments received on the SPD and agreed the responses to them as set out in Annex 1 to Report A to the Cabinet.

In particular Members discussed issues surrounding the provision of affordable housing and the difficulties in differentiating between 'commercial' developers and 'owner' developers. Officers had given consideration to including a 'local occupancy' condition in some planning applications. However, Government guidance specifies equal treatment for all and it was not felt that this option could be pursued. The Cabinet noted that the points raised at their meeting by members of the public in relation to the calculation of financial contributions, had been considered by the Inspector at the Local Plan Inquiry. The Inspector had been of the view that the Council's affordable housing policies would not stop developers coming forward and therefore those objections had been dismissed. In the light of discussions the Cabinet agreed that further clarity was needed on the processes that officers needed to follow for the negotiation of the delivery of affordable housing. Any change to the Council's adopted affordable housing policies will be a matter to be pursued through work on the local development framework.

2. DEMOTED TENANCIES (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO. 64)

The Cabinet has agreed a proposal to introduce, under Part 2 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 (ASB Act 2003), a demoted tenancy scheme. This is a new form of tenancy to deal with anti social behaviour that can deprive a tenant of their security of tenure and other rights.

The ASB Act 2003 gives a power to local authorities to apply for demotion of a tenancy where a resident of, or a visitor to, a dwelling is guilty of anti-social behaviour or unlawful use of property. The Council can serve a Notice of Proceedings for Possession and apply to the court for a Possession Order. A tenant served with such a notice has a statutory right to a review of the decision by the Council.

The Cabinet has therefore agreed the following terms of reference to establish 'review panels' to carry out this process:

'To conduct hearings relating to the review mechanisms contained in the Housing Act 1996 and the Demoted Tenancies (Review of Decisions)(England) Regulations 2004 and to make determinations accordingly.'

The Cabinet has also agreed delegation arrangements for the process.

A Demoted Tenancy will give a serious warning to tenants who create anti-social behaviour. It will provide a clear linkage between the enjoyment of the benefits and rights of security of tenure and the need for responsible behaviour from tenants.

Mrs Murphy, the Tenants' Representative confirmed that the proposals had been considered and supported by the tenants.

3. EXPENDITURE PLAN PROPOSALS/FEEES AND CHARGES (REPORT C) (MINUTE NO. 65)

The Cabinet considered the expenditure plan proposals together with suggested fees and charges for the coming financial year. All review panels and committees will be considering the detail of the proposals at their next meeting and will be reporting back to the Cabinet in December.

In discussing the report the Finance and Support Portfolio Holder said that it was necessary for the Council at this time to aim for a target increase in the Council Tax of 3%. There would be no increase in Government funding and further savings would be required over the coming years.

The Chairman said that additional funding was required to cover rising employee costs, in particular employer pension contributions had risen above the rate of inflation. He indicated that whilst it might not be possible to fund all the projects that the Council would wish to, all the basic services would continue. He hoped that the review panels, when considering the expenditure plans, would try to maintain the current standards of service to the Council's customers.

Members noted that closer links were being made between service planning and expenditure planning. However, as service planning did not take into account the Council's overall financial position it was important that the Cabinet maintained an overview in order to agree priorities.

The Cabinet agreed that further work should continue in order to identify ways of reducing net expenditure with particular emphasis on savings that can be considered as 'efficiency' savings. Following this, and consideration by the review panels, the Cabinet will be in a position to make an informed decision on the expenditure plans in the light of available resources.

4. 'YOUTH MATTERS' : GREEN PAPER (REPORT D) (MINUTE NO. 66)

The Cabinet has agreed a response to the Green Paper "Youth Matters".

The Government has an extensive agenda for children and young people issues. As part of wide ranging legislation, a Green Paper has been issued for consultation. The Cabinet agreed that the Council was well represented in these processes and will continue to be involved in any developments as they emerge. In particular members referred to the successful Youth Festival and 'Shout About' events that were held in 2004. It was agreed that the Council's positive support to young people should be reflected in the response to the Green Paper.

5. THE FUTURE OF CENTRAL CONTROL (REPORT E) (MINUTE NO. 67)

The Council's Central Control Service acts as a call/contact centre providing a response and assistance to customers for 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. In 2002/2003 a Best Value Review of the Council's Lifeline and Central Control Services was carried out. A number of issues were identified that required action if the future long term sustainability of the service is to be secured.

In particular there were issues surrounding new legislation and the operation of Local Government businesses. Since the Best Value review, it has now been established that a local government business can expand and it would now be possible, if the Council wished to create an arms length business, to manage Central Control, and compete in the external market place.

However, for this course of action to be successful the Central Control equipment would need to be updated on a regular basis and staffing levels would need to be increased to meet regulation standards and to overcome health and safety issues.

Members agreed that the service was highly valued and any changes in delivery must safeguard the current quality and customer satisfaction standards. After considering the financial implications they have asked officers to fully investigate the opportunities for a partnership approach to providing the current services and report back to the Cabinet with the results of the investigations as soon as possible.

**Cllr M J Kendal
CHAIRMAN**