

REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 7 March 2012)

1. PROPOSALS FOR A NEW HOUSING STRATEGY TO MEET THE NEW COUNCIL HOUSING FINANCE REGIME (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO. 72)

Changes in the finance regime for Council Housing open up opportunities for the Council to invest resources from the Housing Revenue Account to meet local housing needs. The Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel established a task and finish working group to examine the implications of the changes and to recommend a way forwards to the Council. The recommendations of this task and finish working group, as approved by the Panel in December, form the basis of the revised housing strategy which is now before members for approval. The Leader commended the Task and Finish Working Group and the Portfolio Holders, for developing an effective Strategy to meet the future needs of the Council in such a short timescale.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities commented that it is a source of some regret that the Government has required this Council to pay £143 million to them in respect of the Council's housing stock, one of the highest figures imposed nationally. The devolution of power to local authorities to take decisions about the future management of their housing stock and finances is however universally welcome among Members. The Council will no longer have to pay £9 million per annum to the Government in respect of the Council's houses. By careful financial management, the 40 year Strategy has the objective of securing an additional 2,000 homes to meet local housing need, while continuing to maintain the existing housing stock at the current high standards, and repaying the £143 million debt. Over the next 5 years an additional 200 homes will be provided from the Council's own Housing Revenue Account's resources. Some of these will be built by the Council on existing land holdings, for example under-used garage areas; some through continuing partnerships with registered social landlords; and also through buying suitable properties on the open market. The opportunity will also be taken to acquire additional land, when advantageous terms present themselves. A Project Board, consisting of the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holders for Housing and Communities and Finance and Efficiency, together with essential officers, has already been established to implement the Strategy

The Finance and Efficiency Portfolio Holder is satisfied that the proposed Strategy represents a relatively low long-term financial risk. In addition, although the Government have not yet announced the rules under which "Right to Buy" will operate for homes constructed under the new arrangements, it is hoped that the capital receipts will be able to be retained and used locally. It is expected that the rules will continue to ensure that, even with discounts, the property cannot be sold for less than it cost the Council to construct.

The exact profile of loans that the Council will need to allow the payment to Government was to be determined on 26 March, however an indicative profile was included as Appendix 2 to Report A to the Cabinet. It is intended that there will be no repayments against the principle sum for the first 5 years, freeing up funds to give the provision of affordable homes an initial boost.

Mr Ackerman, the Tenants' Representative advised the Cabinet of the tenant's support for proposals that will allow additional families, in housing need, to be given good quality accommodation.

RECOMMENDED:

(a) That the Council endorses the revised Housing Strategy, as set out in Report A to the Cabinet, supported by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan which includes:

- **The provision for investment and working with our partner Registered Social Landlords to encourage the development of affordable housing by them (£100,000 provided for 2012/13).**
- **HRA Funds to be utilised in the provision of affordable housing by either the purchase of existing homes or new development on Council owned housing land.**
- **The opportunity purchase of land, subject to a business case, as and when appropriate, to provide the opportunity for future affordable housing development.**
- **An initial £6m in 2012/13 for investment in new affordable housing as detailed in the Business Plan.**

(b) That the Heads of Service be authorised, in consultation with the Executive Director, to take all decisions including entering into all necessary contracts and agreements to implement the agreed strategy as contained in Report A to the Cabinet.

2. OFFICE OPTIMISATION – OUT TURN (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO. 73)

The office optimisation project is concluding and the Cabinet was pleased to receive a report on the outcomes.

The project has been completed on time and under budget, and with the minimum of disruption to the provision of services. The management of the project, using a project board operating at a strategic level, with direct management by an implementation team of the Head of Housing, Head of Property Services and Head of Planning, had proved to be a successful model. There had also, importantly, been strict financial control of the contract, in particular for approved variations to the contract. A number of unexpected costs had arisen during the project, most notably to remedy structural defects in the roof for the Lymington Town Hall reception, but these had been maintained within budget, with a final under spend of £77,000, which was 2.47% of the revised total project budget of £3,111,000.

The project has brought a number of benefits, including an estimated total saving to the taxpayer of around £400,000 per annum from the rationalisation of office space and the sharing of the Town Hall site with the New Forest National Park Authority. The arrangement is also more convenient to the public, who only need to visit one location for services.

One particular benefit of note is the provision of an additional 46 parking places at the Town Hall at weekends, following the removal of the old portacabins on the campus. In addition, the demand for parking at the Town Hall is now less, and the opportunity is being taken to include 23 spaces, at the bottom of the Town Hall car park, within the public parking available at the adjacent Barfields car park on all days of the week. At times when the Town Hall is quieter, in the summer months, it is also hoped to include a further 24 spaces in the public parking area. This is also allowing

47 spaces in the Canon Street long stay car park to be designated as short stay places, providing more parking for people wishing to visit the town for shopping and recreation. The provision of additional parking has been welcomed by the Lymington Chamber of Commerce.

The Cabinet were pleased to note that the employee side comments on the project were very positive.

In addition to thanking the Office Optimisation Team and the contractors, the Cabinet commended all staff affected, who had made every effort to ensure the project was successful.

3. ICT SECURITY POLICY (REPORT C) (MINUTE NO. 74)

The Council's ICT Security Policy has been updated to reflect changes in working practices, and in the media that are now used, following continuing technical developments.

It has been agreed that, in the light of accelerating technical advancements, consideration will be given to ways in which the policy can be updated without the need for submission to the Cabinet and Council.

RECOMMENDED:

That the ICT Security Policy at Appendix 1 to Report C to the Cabinet be approved and adopted.

**Cllr B Rickman
CHAIRMAN**