

**COUNCIL MEETING - 14 OCTOBER 2003**

**RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL**  
**COUNCILLOR GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES**

1. Updated Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plans

The Executive have given consideration to the updated Housing Strategy and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plans documents which will contribute towards establishing the Council's baseline position for the HRA stock option appraisal process. This matter has also been considered in detail by the Housing Review Panel at its meeting on 17 September 2003.

Since these documents were produced last year, a number of issues have emerged or the circumstances relating to a range of existing policies and procedures have changed. It has been necessary therefore to modify and update the documents to reflect the latest positions.

During the next financial year it is proposed to revise the two documents and submit them to the Government Office for the South West to seek approval under the "Fit for Purpose" criteria which, if achieved, will reduce the need for the Council to write detailed plans for housing each year.

It is therefore RECOMMENDED that the updated Housing Strategy and HRA Business Plan documents be adopted.

Councillor G Garner

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### **REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES**

Within my summary for Full Council in July, I explained how the day to day activities of the various housing departments were continuing with general business as usual and gave examples of recent decisions made.

I also advised that following a number of recent government initiatives Housing will be required to undertake considerable additional work outside of the day to day operations. There are two tasks in particular that are both considerable in workload and far-reaching in impact on the housing and tenants of TDBC. Both tasks must have the bulk of the preliminary work completed by April 2004.

The two projects in question are:

1. Housing Stock Transfer Options
2. Housing Best Value Review

#### **1. What is Housing Stock Transfer Options and why are we doing it?**

Stock Options is where a stock holding council undertakes an appraisal on how it delivers its service taking account of its financial position. The purpose of this is to determine what additional investment may be required in our stock, whether we can continue to manage the housing stock and to consider other available options.

The Government has requested that all stock holding councils carry out this review by July 2005. Following a financial appraisal completed a year ago, indications then were that we would start to run at a loss in the next four to five years, however a more recent evaluation now suggests that the decision to transfer may be more marginal than first thought.

During the next six months, there will be a great deal of consultation and discussion with tenants. A steering group has been formed comprising 4 Members, 4 Officers and 4 Tenants together with representatives of specialist interest groups. Specialist advisors have also been commissioned to work with Members, staff and tenants to help guide us through the evaluation to help us arrive at the best possible decision for all concerned. A required feature of this process will be regular updates in an open and transparent manner.

As a council, we have decided to undertake this appraisal alongside the Housing Best Value Review and have this exercise completed by April 2004. The results of the Stock Options appraisal will be put before Full Council in May 2004.

In summary, I believe the stock options work undertaken in the next six months will be critical as we consider the future of our housing stock.

## **2. Housing Services Best Value Review**

A comprehensive review of all Housing Services commenced in October 2002. At the start of the review, 26 distinct service areas were identified and an initial assessment of them was carried out to determine if there were service quality issues that needed to be addressed.

Following this initial work, the detailed scope of the review was agreed by the Housing Review Panel, concluding that the review needed to be focussed on three principle cross service areas –

- Customer services
- Decent Homes (in all housing sectors)
- Capacity Building (ensuring the systems are in place to ensure good management, monitoring and decision making)

A number of significant projects and reports that will contribute to the review process include: the mock inspection report produced by HACAS Chapman Hendy at the start of the review, a report on the Housing IT system carried out by Acclaim Consulting, work on a Communications Strategy for the Community Services Directorate, the completion of a major satisfaction survey of all council tenants, the production of new strategies on Homelessness and Private Sector Renewal and the HRA Stock Options Appraisal process. A draft initial improvement plan has already been drawn up identifying over 100 potential service improvements.

An officer in the role of Best Value Project Co-ordinator has been seconded to work with David Woolnough, Community Services Policy Unit Manager, who is leading the review.

A report updating progress on the review and providing a project plan for the remaining work up until the end of April 2004 will be provided to the Housing Review Panel in November.

**Greg Garner**