

COUNCIL MEETING - 24 FEBRUARY 2004

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR GARNER - HOUSING SERVICES

(a) **Housing Revenue Account - Revenue Estimates and Rent Levels**

The Executive have considered the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the 2004/2005 Financial Year. It also includes details relating to the new rent level, service charges and other housing related charges such as garage rents. It also provides information on the Deane Helpline Trading Account and Deane Building DLO Trading Account.

In addition to the Executive, both the Housing Review Panel and the Review Board have considered this report. The recommendations submitted reflects the views raised at those meetings.

The Council are therefore RECOMMENDED that the Housing Revenue Account budget be agreed.

(b) **Housing Capital Programme 2004/2005 to 2006/2007**

The Executive have considered, together with a draft programme for 2005/2006 and 2006/2007, the proposed Housing Capital Programme for 2004/2005. It includes details of the resources available as well as recommendations for how they should be allocated. Investment focuses on the three areas of maintaining and improving the Council housing stock to a Decent Home Standard, providing grants to Registered Social Landlords to build new homes and providing grants to individual homeowners to reduce levels of unfitness in private sector properties.

In addition to the Executive, both the Housing Review Panel and the Review Board have considered this report. The recommendations submitted reflects the views raised at those meetings.

The Council are therefore RECOMMENDED that the Housing Capital Programme be agreed.

Councillor Greg Garner

COUNCIL MEETING 24 FEBRUARY 2004

REPORT OF COUNCILLOR GREG GARNER – HOUSING SERVICES

This report covers 4 topics:

1. Housing Stock options (update)
2. Housing Best Value review (update)
3. Houses imported from Canada
4. Deane Helpline

1. Housing Stock Options (update)

The stock options appraisal continues and remains on course for submission to Full Council in July 2004.

The on going process continues, on 31 January 2004, DOME the Independent Tenants Advisors held the second Insight Group meeting at the Holiday Inn.

Forty tenants took part, most of whom had previously been involved with the group however others had seen the article in the Somerset County Gazette inviting tenants to attend.

The topic for the morning was a discussion about housing need and demand within Taunton Deane during which Malcolm Western gave a comprehensive report on the key facts.

In summary the group understood that there is insufficient affordable housing for rent in Taunton Deane and there is a mismatch between the requirements of those on the waiting list and the sizes of properties available.

Other meetings are planned and these will cover

- Current housing stock condition
- Council's Housing finances
- Assessing current/desired Housing
- Setting the criteria for choosing the best option and making that choice

In March a group of about fifteen members of the Insight Group will visit three other Housing organisations, to meet tenants and staff and learn more about the options being considered.

On behalf of tenants, DOME commissioned a telephone survey. The results show that despite newsletters and road-shows being held in thirty three locations of the TDBC's housing estates there was a low level of awareness of this process. A further survey will be conducted towards the end of this process to test whether there is a greater understanding amongst tenants after consultation.

Stock Option Survey forms were sent to all 54 members before Christmas but only 6 were returned. This pitiful response led to the forms being sent out again after

Christmas, just over 20 have been returned which is still disappointing. It is not too late to submit returns, if members require a form, please advise.

This month, representatives from Government Office South West recently visited TDBC. They praised the officers managing this process and indeed made it clear that TDBC are a role model for others to follow.

2. Housing Best Value review (update)

This process works largely in parallel with stock options but must be completed in advance of the stock option process in order for the BV findings to be considered within the stock option appraisal.

A summary of work undertaken in the last quarter together with a future timetable is as follows:

Recent actions

- Series of best practice visits to Derby, Stroud, Rochdale, Exeter, Mid Devon and North Somerset
- Updates given at all Housing team meetings and improvement plan proformas circulated for front-line staff to contribute their ideas and suggestions
- Partners event held on 21st January with comprehensive feedback on how to improve our services
- Core group agreement (30th Jan) on structure of the Review report
- Verbal feedback from our external critical friend at the Core group (30th Jan)
- Update of the risk register at Core group (30th Jan)

Ongoing actions

- Outstanding actions still to be completed for Customer Services, Decent Home and Building Capacity working groups
- Gathering position statement information and evidence
- Writing up the Review

Future actions and timetable

- First draft (with missing items) to be discussed at Core group on 27th Feb
- Evaluation of the Review process to be carried out at Core group on 27th Feb using SWOT test
- Prioritising the Improvement Plan to be carried out by Housing Services Management Team on 3rd March
- Completion of writing up the Review 5th March
- Draft to be critiqued by Audit and Review, Director, external critical friend and Portfolio holder to be carried out during week beginning Mon 8th March.
- Review to CMT 17th March
- Review for discussion at CMT on 23rd March
- Review for decision (sign-off) at CMT on 29th March
- Review to Tenants Forum 13th April

- Review to Housing Review Panel 14th April
- Review to Executive 12th May

3. Houses imported from Canada

For approximately three years a site occupied by under utilised garages and land had been considered for housing development at Greenway, Bishops Lydeard.

The Quantock partnership through the Falcon Housing Association and TDBC carried out research in June 2003 to explore the viability of alternative housing i.e. wooden construction, this small site at Bishops Lydeard was considered ideal for such an experiment.

Various suppliers from the UK, Scandinavia and Canada were contacted. A company called Canadiana could meet the specification and were the most competitive. Canadiana is an established house builder in Canada but, to date, has only built church halls in the UK but no housing. Given that we are the first, this has enabled Falcon to negotiate favourable terms.

At the beginning of February three containers from Canada arrived together with a crew of four Canadian builders (plus two from their UK representative company). The containers contained two three bedroom and three two bedroom houses in kit form. These kits were erected to a watertight condition within about 10 days.

These houses are more spacious than comparative UK houses as they all have a fully fitted loft area creating an extra 30% of useable space (additional bedroom?).

The total cost is expected to be 85% of the normal cost indicator and is therefore a further benefit.

Thus:

- The Housing Association benefits through lower cost.
- TDBC benefit with additional affordable housing built relatively quickly.
- Tenants benefit with a new and well proportioned house.

If this experiment is successful three similar sites have been identified in Wellington, Bishops Hull and Monkton Heathfield.

Whoever said that there was no initiative and blue sky thinking in Taunton Deane!

4. Deane Helpline

The success of the Deane Helpline continues, we have received verbal confirmation from South Somerset District Council that we have been successful in winning a monitoring contract for 4000 homes. This contract is due to commence from April and is worth £55k revenue (with no additional costs).

The growth of the Deane Helpline can be summarised as follows:

2002	TDBC connections	3500
2002	Mendip	2300
2003	Torrige DC, Mid Devon DC, North Devon Homes, Western Challenge Housing Association	4200
2004	S. Somerset DC	<u>4000</u>
		14,000

An impressive performance, Pat Potter and her team are to be congratulated. The Deane helpline started from modest beginnings in 1983 relying on volunteers and sheltered housing staff until it became self-sufficient. The service is operational 24 hours a day throughout the year and also has a dedicated emergency response service for TDBC clients.

Councillor Greg Garner