

LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES

CABINET

Agenda Item No.

8a

DATE: 9 NOVEMBER 2004

**REPORT OF: CABINET MEMBER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES
AND HOUSING AND JOINT ASSISTANT
DIRECTOR HOUSING**

**SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO THE SOCIAL SERVICES AND HOUSING
AFFORDABLE HOUSING TASK GROUP REPORT**

WARDS: ALL

KEY DECISION? No

1. Summary

This report responds to the Affordable Housing Task Group Report considered by the Social Services and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 September 2004.

2. Recommendation

That Cabinet:-

2.1 Welcomes the report of the Affordable Housing Task Group

2.2 Approves the suggested Cabinet Member and officer response as detailed in this report and

2.3 Through the Cabinet Member for Social Services and Housing delegates officers to report back to the Social Services and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee (SS&H O&S) on progress within 12 months or less where agreed and specified in the report.

3. Details

3.1 Table 1 below lists each of the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Group together with the suggested officer response.

| Rec No. | Recommendation | Response |
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| 1 | That the aggregated data on the Common Housing Register be incorporated in the next Housing Strategy and routinely made available to the Cabinet and | The current Housing Strategy 2004 – 2007 has been evaluated by the ODPM as Fit for Purpose and will therefore not be reviewed until 2007 at the |

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| | Scrutiny Committee | earliest. The Facts and Figures document referred to in the report will be updated annually and made available to members of SS&H O&S. Officers will review the data that is collected to ensure any gaps are addressed although no such issues were identified during evaluation of the current strategy. |
| 2a | That the Council should seek to provide affordable housing as the first priority when disposing of sites for residential development or earmark part of the capital receipts for the Affordable Housing Fund (AHF). | Five sites on the Council's current disposal programme are identified as having potential to be affordable housing schemes. Negotiations with registered social landlords are in progress. For other sites it is considered more appropriate to maximise capital receipts and to use these funds to support the wide range of Corporate and Community objectives delivered through the Capital Programme. It is believed that the balance struck between the two approaches is reasonable and should not change. |
| 2b | That the Director of Environment report regularly to Cabinet and the relevant Overview and Scrutiny committee(s) on the achievement of affordable housing targets. | Supported by officers. From this year the affordable housing targets will be formally presented as part of the Annual Monitoring Report of the UDP. This went to Environment Overview and Scrutiny committee on 20 October 2004 and will go annually thereafter. There are no current proposals for the report to go to Cabinet. |
| 3 | That the Council continue efforts to recruit a permanent specialist S.106 officer | Supported by officers. The post has been advertised in the recent past and a further advertisement is being published within the next few weeks. |
| 4 | That the role of Legal Services, at least in respect of more complex and higher value planning applications, be reviewed. | There is no need for a review. Legal services do not negotiate the agreements but rather document the detailed terms which have been agreed by the negotiating technical officers. This documentation is carried out by a highly experienced solicitor |

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| | | who is the editor of the Planning chapter of a leading publication on Local Government Precedents and Procedures. |
| 5a | That the current policy regarding education rebates be reviewed in the light of the Tetlow king report. | The Planning Contributions Strategy has been agreed for public consultation and the comments of the Task Group will be taken into account with other comments received prior to finalising the strategy. |
| 5b | That this review includes a corporate cost-benefit analysis on the current arrangements for providing education rebates to RSL developments. | As mentioned above comments from RSLs will be taken into account. The impact on the provision of affordable housing is not readily quantifiable therefore a cost benefit analysis would be of limited value. |
| 6 | That the Council explore the feasibility of a larger scale eco-development of social housing. Ideally this would involve use of one of its own sites but it could also encourage such a development on a site owned by other parties. | Officers will explore this though any such feasibility study is more likely to be taken forward on a Council owned or RSL site. |
| 7a | That the Policy and Design Section and Housing Strategy and Development Section should jointly be invited to study the New Economics Foundation report and advise on the local implications and potential value of the Community Land Trust model. | Officers would partially support this but must consider the timing of it within the context of available resources. Officers will undertake preliminary research on this but on the face of it an initial assessment indicates that it would be difficult to operate this in the Richmond market. |
| 7b | That the Director of Social Services and Housing should inform the Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee within six months about steps being taken to improve the provision for key workers with a view to ensuring that intermediate renting is given equal priority with other forms of tenure. | Officers would support the recommendation for a review but the priority must remain general needs accommodation. Equal priority could only be considered within the 25% element of the current affordable housing policy and only then after a need for intermediate renting had been clearly established. |
| 8 | That the Director of Social Services and Housing be asked to submit proposals for resolving the shortage of family accommodation and disincentives to uptake of | The sponsored moves scheme will be reviewed. In relation to resolving the shortage of family accommodation though both the current policy and practice is for |

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| | sponsored moves to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee within six months. | the provision of predominantly 2-bed family accommodation and any increase in such accommodation is therefore almost entirely dependent on development opportunities and resources. |
| 9 | That the Council take the lead in initiating discussion with key partners about the role and membership of the Housing Association Forum, with a view to clarifying its remit in the areas of housing finance and strategy. | It is not clear though how the recommendation arises from the report. The HA Forum has regularly and effectively contributed to the development of the Housing Strategy which as indicated earlier is Fit for Purpose. Officers will continue dialogue with its partners to clarify the issue. It is considered unlikely though that RSLs would be prepared to discuss financial matters in any more detail than they do at present. |
| 10a | That the management structure of Social Services and Housing be reviewed with the aim of strengthening leadership on housing matters. | The management structure will not be reviewed as it is not considered that the Housing leadership needs strengthening. The structural arrangements in Richmond work well and are increasingly common in many Councils. |
| 10b | That an Elected Member be nominated to take on affordable housing as a special area of interest. | The Cabinet Member already has responsibilities for this. |

4. Consultation

Consultation on this report has been undertaken with the relevant Departments.

5. Financial Implications

It is not possible at this stage to establish the financial implications of this report.

6. Policy and Equality Implications

The provision of affordable housing is a key priority in the Housing Strategy and assists both in ensuring the equality of housing service provision to its diverse range of customers and in meeting Community Plan targets.

7. Background Papers

Affordable Housing Scrutiny Task Group Report – Social Services and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee 9 September 2004.

8. Contacts

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