

Scrutiny Standing Panel Agenda



Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel Monday, 11th September, 2006

Place: Committee Room 2, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

Time: 5.30 pm

Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry, Research and Democratic Services
Tel. 01992 56 4246, email: ahendry@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Members:

Councillors S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, D Bateman, Mrs P Brooks, Councillor Mrs D Borton, Mrs H Harding, Mrs J Lea, G Mohindra, Mrs P Richardson, Mrs J H Whitehouse and J Wyatt

Epping Forest Tenants & Leaseholders Federation: Mrs M Carter

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS MEETING IS OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS TO ATTEND

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

(Head of Research and Democratic Services) To report the appointment of any substitute members for the meeting.

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(Head of Research and Democratic Services). To declare interests in any items on the agenda.

In considering whether to declare a personal or a prejudicial interest under the Code of Conduct, Overview & Scrutiny members are asked pay particular attention to paragraph 11 of the Code in addition to the more familiar requirements.

This requires the declaration of a personal and prejudicial interest in any matter before an OS Committee which relates to a decision of or action by another Committee or Sub Committee of the Council, a Joint Committee or Joint Sub Committee in which the Council is involved and of which the Councillor is also a member.

Paragraph 11 does not refer to Cabinet decisions or attendance at an OS meeting purely for the purpose of answering questions or providing information on such a matter.

4. NOTES OF LAST MEETING - 27 JULY 2006 (Pages 3 - 8)

Attached.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE (Pages 9 - 10)

To note the Terms of Reference for this Panel.

6. CHOICE BASED LETTINGS (Pages 11 - 18)

(Head of Housing Services) To consider the attached reports. Please note paragraph 4 of the covering Scrutiny report, which points out that the draft Specification is to be circulated separately in advance of the meeting.

7. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

To consider which reports are ready to be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting.

8. FUTURE MEETINGS

To consider the forward programme of meeting dates for the Panel. They are:

31 October 2006
30 January 2007
30 April 2007.

**EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
NOTES OF A MEETING OF HOUSING SCRUTINY STANDING PANEL
HELD ON THURSDAY, 27 JULY 2006
IN COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CIVIC OFFICES, HIGH STREET, EPPING
AT 7.05 - 8.55 PM**

Members Present: S Murray (Chairman), Mrs R Gadsby (Vice-Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, Councillor Mrs D Borton, Mrs J Lea, G Mohindra, Mrs P Richardson, Mrs J H Whitehouse, J Wyatt and Mrs M Carter (Epping Forest Tenants and Leasholders Federation)

Other members present: D Stallan

Apologies for Absence: Mrs P Brooks and Mrs H Harding

Officers Present A Hall (Head of Housing Services), J Gilbert (Head of Environmental Services), S Stranders (Environmental Services), L Swan (Environmental Services) and A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in attendance:

1. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (COUNCIL MINUTE 39 - 23.7.02)

The Panel noted that there were no substitute members.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Panel noted that there were no declarations of interest.

3. NOTES OF LAST MEETING - 27 APRIL 2006

The minutes of the last meeting were noted. The Head of Housing Services reported to the Panel that the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2006 had been signed off by the Housing Portfolio Holder incorporating the Housing Scrutiny Panel's comments.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE / WORK PROGRAMME

Noted that the item on the Housing Service Strategy on the Private Rented Sector (item 4 on the work programme) will now go to the October meeting. The Housing Harassment Strategy is to be added to the work programme, as it was to be covered at this meeting.

Further information on item 12 of the work programme 'Implementation of Choice Based Lettings', relating to the proposed specification of the Choice Based Lettings Service should be ready in early September and a special meeting should be arranged for this item in September.

RESOLVED:

That a Special meeting of the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel be arranged for Monday 11 September 2006 starting at 5.30 p.m.

Councillor Stellan reported that in the last municipal year Councillor Mrs Whitehouse had requested a review of the Handypersons scheme, which had been agreed by the previous Portfolio Holder. Councillor Stellan had recently raised this issue with the Task and Finish Panel on Older Services, but that Panel had said that it was unable to undertake a review. However, it was understood that Councillor Mrs Whitehouse had recently indicated that she may not now wish this review to be carried out. The Chairman left it with Councillor Mrs Whitehouse to pursue the matter if she still wanted the review to take place. If so, it was noted that she would have to make a formal request to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to see if this extra piece of work could be taken on by a panel, and if agreed, the Committee would have to decide to which Panel it would go to.

5. HOUSING ETHNIC MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Housing Services introduced a report on the Ethnic Monitoring of the ethnicity of applicants on the Housing Register, compared with the ethnicity of those allocated accommodation. The reason for the review is to identify whether or not there are any indications that suggest the Council may be discriminating against any one ethnic group.

It was noted that although around 15.2% of housing applicants do not disclose their ethnicity, it is evident from the analyses shown in the report that the ethnic make up of the Housing Register mirrors the allocation of vacancies sufficiently for the Council to be confident that its Allocation Scheme does not racially discriminate, either directly or indirectly. Therefore, no adjustments to the Allocation Scheme were recommended.

RESOLVED:

1. That no recommendations be made concerning amendments to the Council's Allocations Scheme as current figures do not show a significant disparity between the ethnicity of applicants in housing need in the District and those allocated accommodation through the Housing Register; and
2. That, in future years, in accordance with the recommendations arising from the Race and Diversity Impact Assessments within Housing Services, the ethnicity of applicants offered sheltered accommodation be monitored and reported separately.

6. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING STRATEGY

The Principal Team Leader from Environmental Services introduced the report on the Private Sector Housing Strategy. The draft Strategy will lead to substantial changes in the enforcement of private sector housing standards and the arrangements for giving financial assistance to promote the repair and improvement of sub-standard private sector housing.

Until the Regulatory Reform Order 2002, the Government set very clear rules, which governed the way that local authorities could give financial help. With effect from July 2003, the Order set aside these rules and gave local authorities much greater freedom to offer financial assistance in ways that reflect local needs, circumstances

and resources. To do this, however, a local authority had to prepare a Private Sector Housing Strategy and Renewal Policy, which looked at evidence of local circumstances and linked local priorities with national, regional and other local strategies.

In 2005, a general House Condition Survey was carried out which provided a substantial amount of information on the condition of local private sector housing stock. In addition, an additional survey of empty homes was carried out. With the benefit of up to date local information, and in the light of the significant changes introduced by the Housing Act 2004, the pressure to tackle decent homes and national trend towards introducing private sector finance, a fundamental review of the Strategy had become necessary.

It was noted that:

- For the medium term move from giving grants to equity release, negotiations will be required with a specialist not for profit financial provider and it is hoped that the system will be organised in conjunction with other local authority partners;
- the Disabled Facilities Grant would be raised from £300k to £500k for 2006/07;
- GO-East has confirmed that a capital grant of £447k targeted at improving non-decent private sector properties will be made available for 2006/07, with a further £223k for 2007/08. Any of these additional funds not spent can be rolled into future years provided there is a plan in place showing how they are to be spent, and a commitment to deliver the plan;
- It is anticipated that the spend over the next two years will total £2,129k;
- Existing staffing resources are not adequate and should be increased by 1.5 FTE and a specialist consultant is needed for which £20k had been initially allocated.

The Panel wanted to know if the £20k set aside was enough to provide the services of a consultant. The Principal Team Leader from Environmental Services said that they were not sure if it was enough but they hoped to form partnerships with another local Council, which would help with the costs. The consultant (in consultation with other Local Authorities) in turn would help the council chose the best Equity Release mechanisms to use in conjunction with the strategy.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse wondered if would be possible to introduce the householders to the current Essex Savers scheme currently operating.

Councillor Borton wondered how EFDC selected the houses that were in need of rejuvenation? It was explained that the new Housing Act required Local authorities to go and find the non-decent properties in their area and assess them. They may find residents who don't want to know, but the Housing Act places a duty on Local Authorities who in turn can take enforcement action if unsafe conditions are found in a property and can serve a hazard awareness notice to the house-holder. Councillor Borton asked how they would assess the need for a grant and was told that several criteria was used including, age, disability, children etc. The Head of Environmental Services added that they were not trying to create a "Housing Police" – the government is just trying to bring unfit and unsound housing back into use. Most referrals would come through from complaints.

Councillor Angold-Stephens said that some people were nervous about equity release schemes. He also asked if there would be powers to go down the enforcement route for owner occupiers, which may not be welcome. He was told that

officers were aware of the problems associated with many equity release schemes and any enforcement with regard to housing standards would be reasonable and in line with the Council's Enforcement Concordat. Councillor Gadsby said that equity release was a complicated procedure, would there be adequate advice given? It was confirmed that the Council's C.A.R.E agency would help people through the process, that and the use of our consultant and working with not for profit organisations would also help ensure that people got the best, impartial advice.

Councillor Stallan noted that recommendation 3 was asking to increase the establishment by 1.5 FTE in order to deliver the strategy, would that be for this year? He was told that the posts were to be phased in, but there was an immediate need of 0.5 of a post to apply for new grants to set up the scheme. But they would be looking to increase it in 2007/08.

The Chairman wanted to know if the £20,000 to be spent on the consultant could also help develop in-house expertise. He was told that it would happen as a by-product as they would learn in-house as the scheme progressed.

The Panel wanted to clarify if the money in recommendation 3 was to be for this year or next year. This would be clarified in conjunction with the Chairman of the panel at a later date. Subject to this clarification, the reports recommendations were agreed.

RESOLVED:

- (1) The Panel recommend to Cabinet that the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy should be adopted as Council policy;
- (2) The Panel agreed to accept a further report setting out a detailed Housing Assistance Policy which will regulate the manner in which financial assistance is given to private sector households;
- (3) The Panel recommend to Cabinet to increase the establishment by 1.5 FTE in order to deliver this Strategy at cost of £61,971;
- (4) The Panel recommend to Cabinet that the capital allocation for DFG's be kept at £500k per annum; and
- (5) The Panel recommend to Cabinet that a DDF allocation of £20,000 be made to engage a specialist consultant to support the delivery of this strategy.

7. EMPTY PROPERTY STRATEGY

The Principal Team Leader from Environmental Services introduced the draft Empty Property Strategy, explaining that they were seeking approval in principle for the draft strategy. She explained that the money secured by the GO-East bid was not required to be paid back, but that the new proposed grant will have to be repaid if the owners of the empty properties sells up within a certain time period. The maximum eligible expense will be £10,000 with landlords only qualifying for a maximum of 50%.

Councillor Wyatt asked if these were rented out to council tenants, would it be a secure tenancy. He was told that only Local Authorities could provide secure tenancies. Councillor Wyatt also asked if any safeguards could be put in place to stop landlords receiving more than one grant per property. The Principal Team Leader said that some sort safeguards could be put into place, requiring the landlord

to put the property back into use and to take council nominated tenants and restrict the payment of £1,000 Finders Fee per property on a once only basis.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse wanted to know what sort of tenancy agreement would they have and would EFDC have an oversight. The Head of Housing Services said that the landlord would provide an Assured Shorthold Tenancy, and they would not be council tenants, but would be taken of the housing applicants list. The Council rent officer would set the rate.

Councillor Stallan welcomed the strategy but asked why the extra (0.5 FTE) was needed. The Head of Environmental Services replied that it was complicated and they may have to produce a fuller report to make a case for the extra staff asked for. The need for extra resources across private sector housing is not only due to the changes in the law but is also a catch up exercise where the Council has not delivered a private sector enforcement service in the past.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse asked that a follow up report be provided to the Panel six months after the scheme had started. It was agreed that a follow up report would come to the panel in October 2007.

AGREED:

- 1) Officers to add in safeguards into the report that goes to Cabinet to stop landlords receiving more than one grant per property; and
- 2) That the Panel receive a follow up report in October 2007.

RESOLVED:

- (6) The Panel agrees to recommend to Cabinet that the draft Empty Property Strategy (with additional safeguards) should be adopted as Council policy;
- (7) The Panel recommends to Cabinet to increase the establishment by 0.5 FTE in order to deliver this Strategy at a cost of £20,657; and
- (8) The Panel recommends to Cabinet that a CSB growth of £5000 for 2007/8 be made to fund the Finders Fee Scheme for five properties per annum.

8. HOUSING SERVICE STRATEGY ON HARASSMENT

The Head of Housing Services introduced a report on the Housing Services Strategy on Harassment. The Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel was asked to consider the strategy and provide any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder. It was noted that the Tenants and Leaseholder Federation and the Anti Social Behaviour Violent Crime and Tasking Group are also to be consulted on this strategy.

It was noted that Housing Services condemns all forms of harassment and bullying and recognised that harassment is defined by the impact on the victim of harassment, not by the intentions of the alleged perpetrator.

Councillor Mrs Whitehouse asked what sort of support could the Council provide. She was told that that EFDC could offer a transfer within our district, called a Priority Transfer, but this is only given if endorsed by the police.

RESOLVED:

That the Housing Scrutiny Panel have no comments to make on the draft Housing Service Strategy on Harassment and recommended its adoption by the Housing Portfolio Holder.

9. REPORTS TO BE MADE TO THE NEXT MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Housing Scrutiny Ethnic Monitoring Report;
Private Sector Housing Strategy;
Empty Property Strategy; and
Housing Service Strategy on Harassment.

10. FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that a special meeting of the Panel would be held on 11 September 2006 starting at 5:30pm to discuss the report on Choice Based Lettings.

It was also agreed that all future meeting of the panel would begin at 5:30pm.

The next meetings of the Housing Scrutiny Standing Panel are:

11 September 2006,
31 October 2006,
30 January 2007, and
30 April 2007.

TERMS OF REFERENCE - STANDING PANEL

Title: Housing

Status: Standing Panel

Terms of Reference:

(1) To undertake reviews of public and private sector housing policies on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Housing Portfolio Holder or Head of Housing Services and to make any recommendations arising from such reviews to the Housing Portfolio Holder or Cabinet as appropriate.

(2) To undertake specific projects related to public and private sector housing issues, as directed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and to make any recommendations arising from such reviews to the Housing Portfolio Holder or Cabinet as appropriate.

(3) To consider and provide comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder on the following matters, prior to consideration by the Cabinet:

- (i) Draft Housing Strategy (to be adopted by full Council in accordance with the Council's Constitution)
- (ii) Draft Private Sector Housing Strategy
- (iii) Draft Private Sector Housing Grants Policy
- (iv) Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme

(4) To consider and provide comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder on draft versions of the following documents:

- (i) Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan
- (ii) Local Supporting People Strategy
- (iii) Housing Service Strategies

(5) To undertake the Annual Ethnic Monitoring Review of Housing Applicants and Housing Allocations, in accordance with the Code of Practice in Rented Housing.

(6) To monitor progress with the actions plans contained in the following documents, on a six-monthly basis:

- (i) Housing Strategy
- (ii) Local Supporting People Strategy
- (iii) Private Sector Housing Strategy
- (iv) Housing Services Development Plan

(7) To consider the Housing Portfolio Holder's draft response to any consultation papers relating to public or private sector housing that the Housing Portfolio Holder considers warrants a response from the Council.

Work Programme 2006/07

Item	Priority	Report Deadline
(1) Annual Ethnic Monitoring Review of Housing Applicants	Medium	July 2006
(2) Updated Draft Housing Strategy	High	Was July now October 2006
(3) Empty Property Strategy	High	July 2006
(4) Housing Service Strategy on the Private Rented Sector	Low	July 2006
(5) Housing Services Strategy on Empty Council Properties	Low	Was July now October 2006
(6) Annual Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme	High	October 2006
(7) Six-monthly Progress Report on Local Supporting People Strategy Action Plan	Medium	October 2006
(8) Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy	High	October 2006
(9) Six-monthly Progress Report on Housing Strategy Action Plan	Medium	January 2007
(10) Updated draft HRA Business Plan	High	April 2007
(11) Updated Draft Local Supporting Peoples Strategy	High	April 2007
(12) Implementation of Choice Based Lettings	High	Final Report – April 2007

Chairman: Cllr Stephen Murray

Report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of Meeting: 11 September 2006

Portfolio: Housing

Subject: Choice Based Lettings

Officer contact for further information: Roger Wilson, ext. 4419

Committee Secretary: A Hendry, ext.4246



Recommendations:

- 1. That, the Housing Scrutiny Panel considers the Specification for the implementation and day to day operational requirements of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme for the external Choice Based Lettings Agency and passes on any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder prior to it being approved; and**
- 2. That, the progress made on the implementation of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme for all the Council's vacant social rented properties be noted.**

Report:

1. At its meeting on 24 May 2004, the Cabinet agreed the recommendations of the former Overview and Scrutiny Committee (1) that the Council adopts a move towards a Choice Based Lettings system in principle. This followed detailed examinations of the principles and issues at a number of meetings by the former Working Group on Housing.
2. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have set a work programme for the Housing Scrutiny Panel for 2006/2007, which requires the Panel to oversee the implementation of Choice Based Lettings.
3. The Panel is asked to consider the attached report to the Housing Portfolio Holder that sets out the current position with the implementation of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme. In particular, attention is drawn to the draft Specification for the day-to-day management of the scheme by an external Choice Based Lettings Agency. The Panel is asked to consider the draft Specification and pass on any comments to the Housing Portfolio Holder prior to his approval
4. Since the draft Specification had not been finalised by the date of despatch, it will be circulated to Members of the Panel separately in advance of the meeting.

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Decision by Portfolio Holder



Epping Forest
District Council

Report reference: H/ /2006 - 07
Date of report: 12 September 2006

Portfolio: Housing – Councillor D Stallan

Author: Roger Wilson ext 4419
Committee Secretary: Gary Woodhall

Subject: Choice Based Lettings

Decision:

1. That, following detailed consideration by the Housing Scrutiny Panel and taking into account its views, the draft specification for the operation and management of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme by the external Choice Based Lettings Agency be approved; and
2. That, following any requested changes made by the partner authorities in the Consortium, the Head of Housing Services be authorised to agree on behalf of the Council the final version of the Specification, generally in line with the draft version.

ADVISORY NOTICE: <i>A Portfolio Holder may not take a decision on a matter on which he/she has declared a prejudicial interest. A Portfolio Holder with a personal interest must declare that interest when exercising delegated powers.</i>	
I have read and approve/do not approve (delete as appropriate) the above decision:	
Comments/further action required:	
Signed:	Date:
<i>Personal interest declared by Portfolio Holder/ conflict of interest declared by any other consulted Cabinet Member:</i>	<i>Dispensation granted by Standards Committee: Yes/No or n/a</i>
Office use only: Call-in period begins:	Expiry of Call-in period:

**After completion, one copy of this pro forma should be returned to
Democratic Services IMMEDIATELY**

Reason for decision:

1. The implementation of a Choice Based Lettings Scheme is necessary in order to meet the requirements of Government that such a scheme be in place by 2010 at the latest. In addition, the Council has already accepted the principle of moving towards a Choice Based Lettings Scheme. The Council has agreed to working in partnership with neighbouring authorities, as this is recognised as good practice, cost effective and has enabled the Council to benefit from substantial Government funding to assist with the introduction of the scheme. The agreement of the Specification is a crucial stage in the implementation process. The Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation has considered the Specification in detail, and their views have been considered by the Portfolio Holder.

**Initialed as original copy by
Portfolio Holder:**

Options considered and rejected:

2. Not to endorse the draft Specification for the operation and management of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme by an external Choice Based Lettings Agency.
3. Not to give delegated authority to the Head of Housing Services to agree, on behalf of the Council, the final version of the Specification following any changes made by the partner authorities in the Consortium, generally in line with the draft version.

Background Report:

4. At its meeting on 24 May 2004, the Cabinet agreed the recommendations of the former Overview and Scrutiny Committee (1) that the Council adopts a move towards a Choice Based Lettings system in principle. This followed detailed examinations of the principles and issues at a number of meetings by the former Working Group on Housing.

5. On 15 September 2005, the Housing Scrutiny Panel considered a draft report on Choice Based Lettings to the Housing Portfolio Holder. The Panel made recommendations to the Portfolio Holder prior to the executive decision being made. The Portfolio Holder agreed the following :

- That the principle of introducing a Choice Based Lettings Scheme operated through an agreement with a Choice Based Lettings Agency for all applicants on the Council's Housing Register be agreed;
- That the Choice Based Lettings Scheme and Agency be commissioned in partnership with neighbouring local authorities within the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region;
- That, following the consideration of comments from neighbouring partner authorities, the Head of Housing Services be authorised to agree the final version of a joint bid and submit the bid to the Government's Choice Based Lettings Regional Fund, generally in line with the draft version of the bid attached as an appendix to the report;
- That the Council be prepared to act as the host authority for the engagement of a consultant to act on behalf of all neighbouring authorities; receive the Government's funding; and make appropriate payments on behalf of the authorities;
- That, if the bid is successful, the Head of Housing Services be authorised to appoint a consultant to project manage the implementation of the joint Choice Based Lettings Scheme, funded from the ODPM grant; and
- That a further report be submitted to the Housing Scrutiny Panel and Housing Portfolio Holder to consider:
 - The outcome of the bid to the Government's Choice Based Lettings Regional Fund;
 - The detailed operation of the joint Choice Based Lettings Scheme;
 - The joint contract arrangements with other authorities;
 - The joint commissioning arrangements for the appointment of the Choice Based Lettings Agency;
 - Budgetary requirements for the establishment and on going operation of the scheme
 - The timescale for the Project.

6. On 3 March 2006, a further report was submitted to the Housing Scrutiny Panel setting out progress made on the implementation of Choice Based Lettings, which in summary was as follows:

- Under the Council's Constitution, the Cabinet had approved that the functions relating to the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium, a partnership with five other local authorities, be delegated to the Head of Housing Services.
- In December 2005, the ODPM had notified the Consortium that the bid to the ODPM for funding had been successful and the grant of £96,000 has now been received. The Council was holding the funding, and would make payments, in accordance with the Scrutiny Panel's and Portfolio Holder's decision.
- The Consortium had set up an Officer Operational Group comprising of a representative from each of the six partner authorities and two housing association representatives, which had been charged with setting up the Choice Based Lettings Scheme had drafted a Consultancy Brief which would be approved finally by the Group at its meeting on 7 March 2006. A copy of the current draft was made available for information.

7. On 25 May 2006, the Housing Portfolio Holder, following a rigorous selection process undertaken by the Consortium's operational group based on price and quality, agreed the appointment of PCA Holdings Limited (PCA) as the Project Management Consultants for the implementation of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme for the Herts and Essex Housing Options Consortium. PCA were the lowest tenderer at £58,000 which leaves a balance on the grant received from the DCLG of £38,000. The Portfolio Holder needed to agree the appointment as the Council is the "host" authority for the receipt, making of payments and contractual arrangements of the consultant.

8. Following the appointment of PCA Holdings Limited, the Consortium's Operational Group have been holding regular monthly meetings with them to monitor progress. The consultants have drafted the Memorandum of Understanding between each of the six partner authorities which will be agreed by the Operational Group and will create the contractual arrangements.

9. In addition, a Specification has been drafted which sets out the detailed operation of the joint Choice Based Lettings Scheme and the service requirements for the provision of the routine operational management of the Scheme by an external Choice Based Lettings Agency (CBLA). The Housing Scrutiny Panel considered the draft Specification at its meeting on 11 September 2006, their recommendations will be reported to the Portfolio Holder orally. The Portfolio Holder is asked to consider the draft Specification attached as an appendix to the agenda. The main non- administrative issues to draw attention to appear to be:

- Two week advertising cycle of available properties (paragraph 1.6)
- Number of "bids" or expressions of interest per advertising cycle (paragraph 1.6)
- Option of including of photographs of properties (paragraph 2.5)
- Feedback to applicants showing the outcomes of properties advertised (paragraph 2.6)
- Ability to promote other housing options in the freesheet (paragraph 2.8)
- Provision of the Scheme User Guide (Paragraph 2.10)
- Various methods of "bidding" (paragraph 6.2)
- Arrangements for short listing applicants (Section 7)
- Monitoring "bidding" patterns of vulnerable applicants (Paragraph 9.3)

10. Although agreement is sought on the draft version, it should be noted that the final version cannot be agreed until all partner authorities have had the opportunity to consider the Specification.

11. The Specification is the key document that will be sent to tenderers, inviting bids on how they would act as the CBLA and at what costs. Other documents include:

- Tendering requirements
- Form of Tender (giving breakdown of costs)

12. It has been agreed by the Operational Group that each of the partner authorities will have its own contract with the Choice Based Lettings Agency, the detail of which will be agreed with the successful tenderer.

13. Members have agreed a budget of £40,000 for 2006/2007 to meet the set up costs. It is expected that the remaining DCLG grant of £38,000 will meet most of the remaining set up costs. However, the consultants estimate that an ongoing budget of around £25,000 will be required, the main costs being the periodic publication. Budget provision of £35,000 per annum is currently being included within the Housing Revenue Account from 2007/2008.

14. Following detailed consideration of the draft Specification by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, the Portfolio Holder is asked to endorse the Specification for the operation and management of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme by the CLA . In addition, due to the fact that other authorities within the Consortium may have differing views on the detail of the Specification, it is suggested that the Head of Housing Services be given delegated authority to agree, on behalf of the Council, the final version of the Specification, generally in line with the draft version.

15. When the Specification has been given final approval by all the partner authorities in the Consortium, the consultants will seek expressions of interest in accordance with the EU Procurement rules. Tenders submitted by interested CBLA's will, in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders, will be opened by the Portfolio Holder. The Operational Group will draw up a selection criteria based on quality and price and those short-listed will be invited to attend a selection interview. The selection panel will comprise of one officer representative from each of the partner authorities with the consultant being in attendance in an advisory role. A report will be submitted to the Housing Portfolio Holder seeking approval for the appointment of preferred the CBLA.

16. The Portfolio Holder is asked to note that, although the an initial target date for implementation was suggested at April 2007, due to the complexities of the implementation, which include meeting time-consuming EU Procurement rules, it is likely that there will be a delay. However, officers are confident that the scheme will commence some time during 2007/2008.

Consultation undertaken:

17. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation were consulted on an earlier draft of the Specification at their meeting on 29 August 2006; their comments will be reported orally. A further consultation exercise will be undertaken on the detailed operation of the scheme with all applicants on the Housing Register, all tenants and interested external agencies.

Resource implications:

Budget Provision: Set up costs and on going costs funded from the Housing Revenue Account £35,000 per annum

Personnel: N/A

Land: N/A

Community Plan/BVPP Ref : N/A

Relevant statutory powers: Housing Act 1996 Housing Acts 1985

Background papers: Specification attached

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act: N/A

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Portfolio Holder:**

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