



RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

21 JULY 2004

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RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

23 June 2004

Members of the Committee Present: Councillors J.R. Ashmore, Ms D.V. Clarke, J.M. Edwards,
Mrs C.E. Gant, Ms R.E. Haylor, Miss M.N. Heath, M.W.V. Meares,
R. Pate and P.J. Waddell

Members of the Committee Absent: Councillor Mrs Y.P. Lay

Other Members of the Council who had attended the Annual Meeting were also present.

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that -

Councillor P.J. Waddell be Chairman of the Committee for the Municipal Year 2004/05.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that -

Councillor H.W.V. Meares be Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the Municipal year 2004/05.

Chairman

Runnymede Citizens Advice Bureau

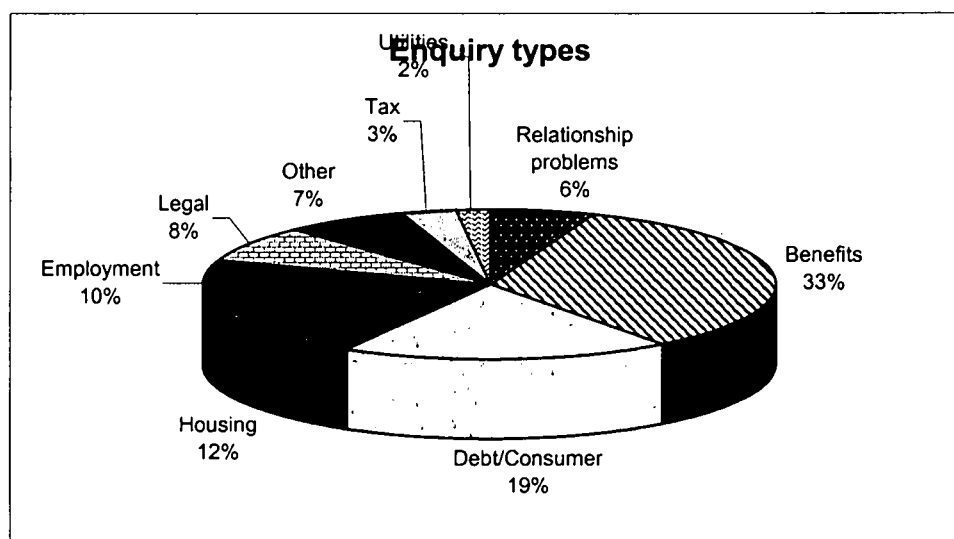
July 2004

Client Enquiries

The Background – type and volume of case work

A significant section of the UK population is grappling with unmanageable debt. Our Bureau has seen a rise of over 90% in debt enquiries since 1999. We recently carried out a time recording exercise comparing the time spent on debt and non debt clients. The non debt clients took an average of 1 hour 10 minutes per visit whilst debt cases needed 1 hour 50 minutes per session. Clients in the latter category need ongoing support at least 2-3 times per month whilst negotiations were continuing and thereafter whenever circumstances change.

We continue to provide a very wide range of advice and assistance –



We divide our work into categories depending on whether the query is one that requires us to represent a client e.g. at a tribunal. Our workload in all categories demonstrates a marked increase in the need for more in depth advice. The growth in the two main categories 3 & 4 is as follows: -

Category 4 - Information/advice and negotiation with outside bodies.

2001/02	747 cases
2002/03	1172 cases

i.e. an increase of **425 cases**

Category 5 - Representation work. This includes industrial tribunals, social security and medical appeal tribunals, housing benefit reviews, choice of school appeals and representation in court.

2001/02	73 cases
2002/03	264 cases

i.e. an increase of **191 cases**

Our debt cases are often lone parents with dependant children, social housing tenants or low waged or benefit dependant. The impact of debt on their lives has severe consequences, including mental and physical breakdown, ill health, homelessness, relationship and family breakdown. They are, of course, deserving of all the help we can give: however the length of times spent giving ongoing support does have resource implications for other client's wishing to be seen. We are constantly looking at ways to manage what appears to be an increasingly difficult problem.

Client Case Outline

The following case illustrates the work undertaken and the benefits/outcomes that are achieved -

Mr S was a teacher but had to resign due to ill health. Due to his illness he did not realise he had to sign on and he was unable to deal with his bills and mortgage payments. Arrears and debt built up and he finally came into the bureau when he received an order for the possession of his home.

What did we do?

1. Possession Order – too late to stop proceedings, so compiled a strong case for the day of the hearing. Telephoned and wrote to all parties concerned to say we were now involved.
2. Claimed Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance.
3. Wrote to all creditors after working out pro rata offers for priority and non priority debts.
4. Represented client at court.

How much work as involved?

Telephone calls	9
Letters	12
Client Appointments	6 (1 hour each for debt and possession)
Client Appointments	3 (4 hours form filling)
Time in Court	1 hour
Casework Time	13 hours

Outcomes

Possession was suspended on affordable terms – client keeps home.
Successful claims for IB and DLA
Creditors agreed to minimum repayments until client gets back on his feet.

Financial Gain

Benefits £4,921 a year
24 hours of adviser time = £288
This is an average client case, some need less input but others need more.

Case Complexity

Much of our work involves 'picking up the pieces' left by other agencies. We are also heavily involved when major changes are made to benefit administration. The massive reorganisation at Jobcentre Plus is resulting in much administrative confusion and the attendant stress and worry for the client. The following cases illustrate this -

Mr J wanted to claim JSA but was refused, as he did not know his National Insurance number. Client is illiterate – no offer was made to help. CAB tracked down his number the same day and helped him with a HB and CTB claim. The Jobcentre told us that they could offer our client an appointment to help with his insurance number in 2 months.

Impact on Client – Financial hardship, stress and anxiety
Yearly income gained - £5,787

Mrs D claimed incapacity benefit but Jobcentre staff failed to tell her to claim income support in case she did not qualify for IB. It turned out that she did not and weeks later with our help claimed IS, Housing and Council Tax benefit.

Impact on Client – Financial hardship

Yearly income gained - £5,787

Mr Coates had been receiving Incapacity Benefit for 10 years following an appeal, suffered the humiliation of having his IB book taken from him at the post office. He presumed he was no longer entitled to benefit. He came to see us weeks later on another matter and we picked up his entitlement to Incapacity Benefit and had it reinstated, we also discovered he was entitled to Housing and Council Tax Benefit, Carers Allowance and Disability Living Allowance for his partner.

Impact on Client – Stress and anxiety

Yearly income gained - £11,785

Our intervention enables many clients to get the benefits that they are entitled to. This helps them in a number of other ways but also has benefits for the wider community and other agencies as it ensures that they do not progress to having problems with their health, accommodation or social welfare.

Pat Thompson
Runnymede CAB

Runnymede Citizens Advice Bureau - Runnymede Service only

Projections for the financial years 2004/05 to 2007/08

Inflation Assumption	Forecast income and expenditure							Notes
	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10		
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	
Expenditure								
Staffing	54,178	53,362	54,696	56,063	53,959	55,308	Reduced paid hours from 2008	
Travel Expenses	4,068	4,170	4,274	4,381	4,300	4,300	Budget cash limited from 2008	
Training, information & memberships	3,256	3,337	3,421	3,506	3,500	3,500	Budget cash limited from 2008	
Telephone	3,124	3,202	3,282	3,364	3,448	3,535		
IT Costs	4,900	5,023	5,148	5,277	5,409	5,544		
Printing, stationery & postages	3,367	3,451	3,537	3,626	3,500	3,500	Budget cash limited from 2008	
Equipment maintenance	1,843	1,889	1,936	1,985	2,034	2,085		
CAB Information Database	1,869	1,916	1,964	2,013	2,063	2,115		
Miscellaneous	1,989	1,500	1,538	1,576	1,200	1,200	Budget cash limited from 2008	
Insurance	823	844	865	886	908	931		
Advertising	518	531	544	558	572	586		
National CAB Initiatives (CASE)	5,000	500	513	525	538	552	Set up costs in 2004/05, maintenance thereafter	
Gross Expenditure	84,935	79,724	81,717	83,760	81,432	83,155		
Miscellaneous Income								
One Off Grants	(9,700)	0	0	0	0	0		
Interest receivable	(500)	(500)	(500)	(500)	(500)	(500)		
Donations and fundraising	(500)	(1,420)	(1,200)	(1,400)	(1,400)	(1,400)		
Net Expenditure	74,235	77,804	80,017	81,860	79,532	81,255		
Runnymede Grant Funding								
Core Funding - Current	(63,550)	(65,139)	(66,767)	(68,436)	(70,147)	(71,901)	Based on inflation only increase	
Proposed Increase		(5,392)	(8,464)	(8,675)	(8,892)	(9,115)	Requested additional grant ("Option 3")	
Operating deficit in the year	10,685	7,273	4,786	4,748	492	240		
Summary of Reserves								
Start of the Year	62,500	51,815	44,542	39,755	35,007	34,514		
Surplus/Deficit in the year	10,685	7,273	4,786	4,748	492	240		
End of the Year	51,815	44,542	39,755	35,007	34,514	34,275	Minimum sufficient working capital is £35,000	

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GRANT AGREEMENT
BETWEEN RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL (RBC) AND
RUNNYMEDE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU (CAB)

1. Services

The CAB will provide a free, impartial and independent service of generalist advice, information, support and representation in a confidential manner to those people in the area of the Borough of Runnymede who so need it.

2. Period

This agreement will cover the five financial years 2005/6, 2006/07, 2007/8, 2008/9 and 2009/10.

The financial year runs from 1st April to 31st March.

3. Opening Hours

Civic Offices Addlestone

Monday 10am - 12.30pm telephone and appointments

Tuesday 10am - 3.30pm telephone appointments
and drop in

Wednesday 10am - 3.30pm telephone appointments and drop in
Wednesday evenings every fortnight 5pm - 7.30pm appointments
only (telephone service available in the future)

Friday 10am-12.30pm telephone appointments
and drop in

Literary Institute Egham appointments only

Wednesday 10 am - 12.30 pm

Thursday 11.30 am - 1pm

(NB the time advice is given is flexible)

Members of the public may have access to the services from CAB by:

- a) telephoning advice centres
- b) visiting advice centres, both fixed and outreach
- c) writing to advice centres
- d) Dedicated appointment telephone/message line with answer phone
(not for advice)

The public also benefit from a dedicated CAB service for people with mental health needs at the Abraham Cowley Unit. One advisor from this separate CAB service can provide advice at the Runnymede CAB, on a Friday morning by arrangement.

The CAB can seek advice on behalf of clients from services such as the Surrey Law Centre, local solicitors, SHELTER and Surrey Welfare Rights.

4. Type of Service Provided

The type and level of service to be provided is at Appendix 1.

5. Housing Advice Protocol

A separate protocol document is being negotiated between Runnymede Borough Council Housing Department, and the CAB regarding the provision of housing advice. The type and level of service to be provided under this protocol is likely to cover the housing advice referred to in Appendix 1 of this service level agreement.

6. Grant Guarantee

RBC will pay an annual base grant in each of the three financial years of by no later than the 30th April of each year.

The grant will be subject to annual adjustment for the following factor:

Inflation

If the agreed sum is not available or will be reduced, 6 months notice will be given for Runnymede CAB to make alternative provision or terminate the agreement as necessary.

7. Quality of Service

The CAB will be subject to annual external audits to ensure that it is meeting the standards required for the Community Legal Service Quality Mark at the General Help level.

The CAB will continue to use an enquiry questionnaire as per the Citizens Advice guidelines (formerly NACAB), to ascertain the level and quality of service given by them. The survey should be carried out, once a year.

The analysis of the results will be reported to the Community Partnership Officer.

The Council will be introducing a Mystery Shopper policy for schemes over £25,000 as per the Joint Funding Protocol shortly.

The CAB will operate a procedure for representations and complaints about the service in accordance with Citizen Advice guidelines, and shall take all reasonable steps to bring this to the attention of their service users.

The number and type of complaints will be reported to every CAB Management Committee meeting.

Any serious complaints shall be reported to the Council immediately.

A meeting will be held annually between both parties to review/monitor the Service Level Agreement.

The CAB will provide the Council with copies of the annual report. The statistics at appendix 2 will be provided on an annual basis at the beginning of the new financial year.

8. Accounting Requirements

A copy of the CAB Annual Accounts, duly audited, must be sent to the Director of Finance within six months of the end of the financial year.

The CAB Trustees will run the financial affairs of the charity, in accordance with the good practice guidelines of the Charity Commission. In particular the CAB will maintain a suitable level of balances, to meet its day to day needs and provide a reasonable contingency sum.

9. Accommodation

Currently the CAB's office accommodation is at the Civic Offices, Addlestone. Plans are being progressed to provide replacement council offices, which do not necessarily include office provision for the CAB. The Council will assist the CAB to identify alternative accommodation options.

The CAB will be given 6 months notice to re-locate their offices.

The CAB also have use of Chertsey Hall, Chertsey (for training sessions held twice a week, and storage), and the Literary Institute, Egham on Wednesdays and Thursdays (for appointments with the members of the public).

10. Dispute Resolution

Both parties will endeavour to resolve disputes in a fair and equitable manner in the spirit of this agreement.

11. Legal Relations

This Document is a statement of the arrangements which both parties intend to operate but is not intended to create legally enforceable obligations between the parties.

Signed on behalf of CAB _____

Position _____

Date _____

Signed on behalf of RBC _____

Position _____

Date _____

Runnymede Borough Council and Runnymede CAB Grant Agreement APPENDIX 1

This appendix contains a description of the services to be supported by the grant.

1. Welfare Advice

Benefits eligibility inc. Income Support, disability, sickness, retirement benefits and Jobseekers Allowance.

Appeals Tribunals – advice for clients on appeals and reviews for Social Security and Disability.

2. Money and Debt Advice

The service provider will offer Money and Debt Advice including:

Entitlement advice – assist clients in accessing available entitlement e.g. benefits and tax.

Income assessments – help clients to budget available income and make appropriate payments to creditors.

Debt prioritisation – assist clients in prioritising essential debts such as Council Tax, utility bills and housing/mortgage costs.

Creditor negotiation – support or act on behalf of clients in setting up payment arrangements with creditors.

Legal assistance – explain legal processes to clients, assist in completion of court forms, refer to other agencies where appropriate.

3. Employment Advice (for employer and employees)

The service provider will offer advice on Terms and Conditions of Employment including advice on statutory and contractual rights; advice on legislation relating to race, sex and disability discrimination.

Dismissal – advice on causes of unfair dismissal and how to appeal. Assist client in recovery of owed wages and where necessary to negotiate with the employer.

Redundancy – advise clients on statutory redundancy rights, payments available and rights during notice. Advise clients on debt restructuring and available benefits as a result of redundancy.

4. Housing Advice

A Housing Advice Protocol with the Housing Advice section of the

Council is currently being negotiated with the CAB and is likely to cover the following advice on Housing Issues:

Welfare Benefits – advice on all benefits plus reviews and appeals.

Money and Debt Advice – complete check of all benefit entitlement to maximise income.

Housing Debts – advice on rent arrears and mortgage arrears.

Housing legislation – advice on homelessness/emergency housing, private sector landlord and tenant's rights; tenancy rights on relationship breakdown, purchase/owner occupation procedures, mortgage agreements, council tenants rights ie the right to buy, repair, consult, exchange, assign, succeed; overcrowding, houses in multiple occupation, disrepair, statutory nuisance, illegal eviction. The CAB have access to legal advice in all areas of housing law.

Housing grants/funds – advice on renovation grants, disabled facilities grants and home repair assistance.

Other support/advice services – offer negotiations with clients with debt collection agencies, housing department, housing benefits etc

Local Housing Information – advice on private sector rents, shared ownership, residential/nursing homes, housing associations and RBC allocation policy.

5. Family or Personal Advice

The service provider will offer advice on Family or Personal matters including:

Death and bereavement – advice on wills, how to obtain probate and what to do after a death. Where necessary refer for legal advice and/or counselling.

Change of name or Adoption – advice on legal procedures.

Divorce or separation – advice on legal aspects and procedures, housing rights, child support including contact and residence orders, maintenance and the Child Support Agency.

Children/Young People rights and responsibilities.

6. Legal Services

The service provider will offer advice on Legal Issues, including:

Legal proceedings – advice on small claims and County Court

procedures and enforcing judgements.

Comprehensive/personal injury claims – advice on how to proceed after accident or personal injury either from the other party or through the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. Specialist claims to be referred to a local solicitors.

General legal advice – advice on CLS eligibility. Referral to solicitor if specialist advice is required.

7. **General Tax Advice**

The service provider will offer advice on General Tax issues including:

Tax system – advice on income tax and applicable rates, tax exempt and taxable income, income tax allowances, PAYE system, fringe benefits, income tax and letting accommodation, capital gains tax.

8. **Disability/Health Advice**

The service provider will offer advice on Health issues including advice on benefits and grant giving charities and community care information.

Advice for Disability Tribunals and support with Health Service complaints.

Assistance with claim forms and appeals for Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance.

9. **Consumer Advice**

The service provider will offer Consumer Advice including:

Problems with Buying Goods – advice on delays in supplying goods, labelling, buying at home, unsolicited goods, private and second-hand sales, quality cancellations, prices, hiring, safety of goods, and mail order.

Problems with Buying Services – advice on broken appointments, cancellations, starting or finishing on time, prices, call out charges, quality, safety, returning property.

Problems with Financial Services – consumer advice on banks, insurance, credit and pension.

Pursuing your Rights – advice on guarantees, codes of practice, trading standards, regulatory bodies, arbitration, the Ombudsman and court action.

10. **Human Rights**

The service provider will advise on human rights with regards to all information they provide where appropriate.

11. **General Information**

The service provider will hold general information on issues relating to Community Care, Education, Transport and Travel, Immigration and Telecommunications.

12. **Social Policy**

The service provider will continue to feed information to NACAB on issues of Social Policy.

The service provider will produce, monitor and raise issues affecting the Borough of Runnymede, with the relevant departments of the Council (eg Housing/Benefits and Council Tax).

13. **Initiatives**

The service provider shall endeavour to liaise with relevant interested departments relating to any project/campaign, which could further assist any disadvantaged group. The service provider will participate in the activities of the Runnymede and Spelthorne Community Legal Service Partnership, and other relevant networks in order to enhance the service provided to local residents.

Runnymede Borough Council and Runnymede CAB Grant Agreement.

Appendix 2

Statistics will be made available to RBC as soon as possible after the close of the financial year.

Total amount of clients

Total client issues

Client issue count will be broken down as follows:

Benefits	}	
Consumer	}	
Employment	}	
Housing	}	
Legal	}	Issues can be broken down further by request
Relationship	}	
Tax	}	
Utilities	}	
Misc	}	

A further breakdown of housing issues can be found in the Housing/CAB protocol.

In addition the CAB will supply:

The number of clients referred to Shelter

The number of clients referred to The Surrey Law Centre

The number of clients referred to other solicitors.

The number of staff hours available to the public per annum.

UNISON

Runnymede Branch
Civic Offices
Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey
KT15 2AH

Tel: 01932 838383
ext. 5946 or
01932 425946 (24hrs)

Branch Secretary
Claire Pinnock

Our ref:

Best Value Review of Community Services

Your ref:

When telephoning
please ask for

09 July 2004

Mrs D Blowers
Director of Housing and Community Services

Dear Debbie

**Best Value Review of Community Services – Housing and Community Services
Committee 21 July 2004.**

Thank you for involving UNISON in the consultation process in respect of the Best Value Review of Community Services. Set out below are our comments:-

Sheltered Housing

Although there are many uncertainties at this stage with regard to the future provision of sheltered housing with shared facilities, UNISON is in favour of where possible reducing the number of units available where there are shared facilities to convert them into self contained units in preference to redevelopment of the sites at Beomonds and Pinefields which it is likely would be disruptive for both staff and residents. In any future provision, account needs to be taken of the fact that there are a large number of residents with higher care needs than was originally intended.

Unison supports the views of staff that the provision of an additional extra care scheme should be investigated in order to meet the future needs of older people across Runnymede.

In recognition of the stress and practical difficulties that living on site can cause, it appears that the majority of Sheltered Housing Managers would prefer to live off site. Therefore, it would be sensible to take the approach as set down in the report to review the situation as and when vacancies arise. However, UNISON is concerned that staff should not be adversely affected in respect of their living arrangements or terms and conditions of employment if re-located off site. When units are designed in future it would be advisable to provide the Manager with separate living accommodation or, if on site, on the ground floor with a separate access to enable proper time off.

Community Alarm and Concessionary Bus Fares

UNISON is content with the proposals as set down in the report for both these services.

Community Meals and Dial-a-Ride

UNISON welcomes the prospect of these services being brought back in house and considers that the proposals as set down are an acceptable way forward.

Day Centres

There are a number of options and the outcome is unknown at this stage. However, UNISON's initial view is that there is little justification for a depreciation in the level of service provision based on the statistical information in the report.

Although Day Centre provision is a discretionary function, it is very highly valued and UNISON is opposed to the closure of any of the Day Centres as this would have a detrimental effect on both staff and the wider community. Once firm proposals are known UNISON will be in a better position to respond fully.

Runnymede UNISON Branch Committee
July 2004.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

DRAFT

VERSION II

**RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OPTION APPRAISAL**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Communication Strategy identifies the ways in which Runnymede Borough Council will communicate about the decision making process of option appraisal. All Councils with stock have to carry out an option appraisal before July 2005, which must be signed off by Government Office for their region.

The option appraisal process needs clear communication and consultation as the future of its stock and housing services is one of the biggest decisions a Council has to make. Government Office will want to be sure option appraisal has been carried out appropriately.

The following principles will be adopted in all communications:

- Integrity and honesty
- Clarity
- Openness and accessibility
- Inclusiveness
- Listening and responding
- Accountability
- Impartiality
- Consistency
- Accuracy

The objectives for communication are:

- To enable everyone affected - tenants, leaseholders, elected members, staff and all other stakeholders - to understand the reason for, and participate fully in, the option appraisal process.
- To raise awareness of the issues and challenges faced by the Council, together with potential solutions.
- To ensure open and accessible channels of communication between stakeholders and decision makers which in turn shape and inform the Council's views.
- To encourage, listen and respond to the views of all stakeholders.
- To increase opportunities for tenants and residents to contribute to service development and decision making through this process and not just to consider the investment issues related to option appraisal
- To ensure independent advice for tenants through this process.

Communication will take place with key stakeholders, and stakeholders may increase as the appraisal progresses. Methods of communication may include :

- Written
- Electronic
- Verbal
- Internal communication

Access to information and confidentiality are considered to ensure sensitive information is shared appropriately and personal information is not shared publicly.

The relationship with the media needs to be clear and responsibility is designated to ensure clear communication in a timely fashion, including ensuring information is available to the media following significant decisions being made by Housing and Community Services Committee and Full Council.

The views of stakeholders, particularly tenants and leaseholders, staff and elected members, need to be gathered and fed into the decision making process and will be carried out in the following ways and through the following groups:

For tenants:

Insight Group
Roadshows
Meetings with sheltered housing tenants

For staff:

Team briefings
Provision of written guides
Lunchtime information sessions
Consultation with Unions

For elected members:

Reports and presentations to members
Consideration of options and recommendations by Housing and Community Services Committee
Decision made by Full Council

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the communication strategy

Runnymede Borough Council recognises the importance of open and effective communication, both internally and externally, to:

- ensure full accountability
- achieve strategic objectives
- deliver effective, high quality services
- ensure a clear and effective option appraisal process

This document identifies how the Council will communicate about the very important decision making process of the Housing option appraisal.

An option appraisal is the way the Council will make a decision (working with tenants and other people affected by that decision), on the future of its housing service and housing stock.

The Government has said that every Council should carry out a rigorous and objective option appraisal by July 2005, and that tenants should be at the heart of the process. Guidance¹ has been issued by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on how councils should carry out their appraisal. The option appraisal process must be 'signed off' by Government Office.

The option appraisal process will cover the evaluation of the needs of the housing service and housing stock including housing need and demand, set against the resources available for management and maintenance through the HRA. The appraisal process will look at all options available to the Council to ensure the best service for the future.

Options will be considered against the Council's strategic and key operational objectives and priorities and issues identified by tenants through the Tenants' Insight Group. These options or a mix of options will be tested to see which best deliver the objectives and priorities and which are most likely to succeed. Tenants will have an opportunity to shape the decision on which form or type of landlord or management structure is most appropriate to deliver the preferred option for Runnymede.

A decision on which options to take forward for further consideration will be made at a Full Council meeting on 16 December 2004, based on recommendations from the Housing and Community Services Committee. To comply with Government timescales for application for a place on the programme for an option or options an expression of interest may be sent in prior to the Council decision being made.

¹ Delivering Decent Homes – Option Appraisal Guidance for local authorities ODPM June 2003

We welcome the support and advice of the Community Housing Task Force, lead consultants Pennington FMCS Ltd, and Independent Tenants' Advisor (ITA) Simon Martin, on behalf of TPAS.

We recognise the role of the Government Office South East in ensuring that the Council option process complies with the Government's aspirations and criteria for rigour and objectivity.

1.2 The importance of effective communication

Without effective communication the option appraisal process cannot work properly. The future of its housing services and housing stock is one of the biggest decisions a Council can make and a number of groups and individuals (stakeholders) have to be fully involved in the process. Poor communication undermines the appraisal and consultation process and could ultimately lead to a poor decision being made or based on inaccurate or poor information.

Government Office will want to be sure that the option appraisal process has been appropriate, rigorous and objective before signing off the report which details the process and outcomes of the appraisal. Effective communication and accurate information are the keys to ensuring the decisions made on option appraisal and the consultation process that underpins it are the right decisions for Runnymede Borough Council and all its stakeholders, including tenants and staff.

2. PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STRATEGY

2.1 Principles of communication

The following principles will be adopted in all our communications on option appraisal:

- **Integrity and honesty** – providing a true picture of the situation; being proud of our achievements, but admitting to limitations; not raising unrealistic expectations; respecting confidentiality and data protection.
- **Clarity** – use of jargon-free language and glossaries.
- **Openness and accessibility** – providing information for all those that are affected by any decision we may make; ensuring processes are in place to give everyone the information they need to contribute to decision-making.
- **Inclusiveness** – giving careful consideration to who we are communicating with; ensuring that we use tools and mechanisms appropriate to our audience, e.g. commitment to minimum font sizes, ensuring we make contact with 'hard to reach' groups, etc.
- **Listening and responding** – to all views and questions; recognising that all have a right to express valid views.
- **Accountability** – giving clear messages about who is responsible for making decisions and explaining how decisions will be reached.
- **Impartiality** – providing sufficient information to stakeholders to allow balanced decision-making.
- **Consistency** – to ensure that reports, publications and all other documents and letters are clearly identified as Option Appraisal material
- **Accuracy** – ensuring information is accurate and up to date.

2.2 Objectives for communication

Our objectives for communication are:

- To enable everyone affected - tenants, leaseholders, elected members, staff and all other stakeholders - to understand the reason for, and participate fully in, the option appraisal process.
- To raise awareness of the issues and challenges faced by the Council, together with potential solutions.

- To ensure open and accessible channels of communication between stakeholders and decision makers which in turn shape and inform the Council's views.
- To encourage, listen and respond to the views of all stakeholders.
- To increase opportunities for tenants and residents to contribute to service development and decision making through this process and not just to consider the investment issues related to option appraisal
- To ensure independent advice for tenants throughout this process.

3. METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

3.1 Key stakeholders

Communication will take place with a number of key stakeholders – groups, agencies and individuals. The key stakeholders identified to date are:

- Tenants
- Prospective tenants
- Leaseholders
- Tenants' Insight Group which will represent tenants' views on option appraisal
- All constituted Tenant and Resident Associations
- Owner occupiers and others in the wider community
- Elected members
- Staff
- Recognised Unions
- Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and associated groups/sub committees
- Government Office South East (GOSE)
- Community Housing Task Force (CHTF)

Stakeholders may increase as the option appraisal progresses and to reflect this the Officers' Steering Group, and Members' Working Group will consider this strategy regularly and ensure necessary changes to the document and to key stakeholders are undertaken.

3.2 Methods of communication

3.2.1 Written communication

Runnymede BC will maximise the effectiveness of written communication and will:

- Ensure that all written communication is useful and meaningful
- Use respectful language and avoid patronising statements
- Use plain English, avoiding jargon or providing glossaries where necessary
- Seek to simplify complex subjects, e.g. legislation, policy, application processes wherever possible whilst retaining the substance of the issue
- Ensure that information is concise and relevant
- Ensure that information is consistent
- Develop a range of information to meet needs and answer questions people may have
- Ensure that information provided is timely to allow people an opportunity to contribute to decision making
- Provide documents to the Community Housing Task Force (an advisory agency and part of Government) and Government Office South East for comment
- Ensure that documents are available in a range of formats and can be provided (at least in summary) in other languages if requested to respond to diversity within the Borough

- Ensure (and publicise) the Council's recycling principles are followed with regard to hard copies of information produced once the decision making process is complete.

Written information will include:

- Newsletters for tenants and staff
- Pocket guide to option appraisal (bullet points on the main options and their impact)
- Desk guide to option appraisal (more detailed guide to the main options and their implications)
- Frequently asked questions list (FAQ)
- Glossary of main terms used in option appraisal
- Project plan for key actions to be undertaken
- Outcomes of the STATUS survey

3.2.3 Electronic communication

By making the best of opportunities to use e-communication Runnymede BC will:

- Use the Council's Website and Intranet and the TPAS website to deliver useful, accurate and up to date information about the option appraisal process
- Treat external e-mail correspondence as we would postal correspondence, e.g. keeping a log and applying the same response time targets
- Recognise that not everyone is comfortable using email and the Internet and that not everyone has access to this form of communication

Electronic communication will include:

- Special page on Council Website www.Runnymede.gov.uk
- Information on Council Intranet
- Publicity for TPAS website **address**
- Council email: **address**

3.2.4 Verbal communication

Runnymede BC will not lose sight of the importance of face to face contact and conversation. To ensure the importance of verbal communication we will:

- Ensure staff have consistent, accurate information on which to answer questions from stakeholders
- Publicise the ITA and meetings of the Insight Group
- Ensure tenants are aware of officers who can be contacted to discuss questions and ideas relating to option appraisal and service delivery
- Run roadshows to offer face to face contact in urban and rural parts of the Borough
- Publicise freephone hotlines
- Establish a database which will record questions and ideas which are given verbally as well as in writing by stakeholders

- Remember that people may worry about the impact of the appraisal process and keep reminding people that they can talk concerns and ideas through at different events and with officers, other stakeholders and the ITA.
- Arrange site visits to other authorities to see and discuss the impact of stock transfer and the establishment of an ALMO

Verbal communication will include:

- Team briefings for staff
- Tenant Insight Group meetings
- Freephone hotline
- Meetings with Trade Unions
- Exhibitions and roadshows and possibly a conference (where written information will also be available)
- Presentations and seminars for tenants, staff and elected members
- Meetings at all sheltered housing schemes
- Publicity for the exhibitions and roadshows amongst vulnerable tenants
- 'Talking papers' – using existing services for people with a visual impairment to explain about, and seek views on, options
- Interpretation if requested for those whose first language is not English, or those who have a hearing impairment where a signer is requested

3.2.5 Internal communication

Effective communication within the Council will deliver consistent messages and create an environment where all options can be debated and considered. To achieve this Runnymede BC will:

- Ensure staff are fully informed of and understand the option appraisal, its process, principles and objectives
- Establish regular meetings between members of the Officers' Steering Group and representatives of the recognised Unions to discuss the implications of the appraisal process and its outcomes
- Fully inform staff of all important developments impacting on the option appraisal and actively seek their opinions
- Increase knowledge and understanding of the issues, problems and solutions available to the Council
- Communicate effectively with all elected members
- Ensure that elected members and staff have easy access to the information they require to inform decision-making.
- Provide open channels for elected members and staff to communicate their views, express their ideas and offer suggestions
- Ensure that elected members have regular, timely and relevant information from officers in order to fulfil their democratic role

- Ensure that the local knowledge, experience and relevant professional expertise are channelled into the option appraisal to enhance its effectiveness
- Maintain clear communication channels between elected members and officers to ensuring consistency in messages to other stakeholders.
- Ensure that staff and other partners dealing with tenants and customers are fully briefed so that they can answer enquiries on the option appraisal in a consistent and accurate way.

In response to the need to work to a timetable allowing a decision to be made on the likely future options(s) at the Full Council meeting on 16 December 2004 it is important that staff and elected members play their part in responding to the issues of option appraisal by:

- Making every effort to keep informed of the process and issues around Options Appraisal
- Informing their Managers (staff) or the relevant Director or Chief Executive (elected members) if there appears to be a problem in accessing the information they require
- Being prepared to voice ideas, suggestions and viewpoints in the knowledge that their comments will be welcomed
- Making use of briefings, written material and guidance on the Option Appraisal, so that when tenants and constituents ask for information they are able to offer, or signpost people to, accurate and balanced information

3.2.6 Access to information and confidentiality

The majority of information gathered during the option appraisal process will be made publicly available. The information on which decisions are to be made will be available to all stakeholders.

Some information will be treated as confidential. Information classed as confidential or with restricted availability will be determined by the Officers' Steering Group. This will include information such as the detail of discussions between recognised Unions, Human Resources and staff. A list of information that exists but is not available for public consideration is attached as Appendix 4 to this strategy, so that everyone can be aware of what will not be shared and why. This appendix may be amended at times when the strategy is reviewed.

Contact details for individuals will be recorded as part of the information collected for the database where possible, but will not be divulged in reports or other publicly available information.

4. Media Relations

The role of the press and other media to alert people to the option appraisal and to provide information as well as reflecting the discussions taking place is an important one. The Council is keen to ensure information reported by the press is as accurate as possible and to create effective links with the media to facilitate this. The Council will apply good practice and implement local protocols to help the Council achieve effective and positive information about its decisions, policies and services for local people in the press by:

- Ensuring that reactive media enquiries are dealt with speedily, consistently and accurately by the press office through liaison with Director of Housing and Community Services (and in her/his absence the Head of Tenant Services)
- Providing information that is targeted and designed to provide accurate information to local people about the Council's decisions
- Ensuring that local people know who is making the decisions on behalf of the Council, by direct reference to the Officers' Steering Group, Members' Working Group, Tenants' Insight Group, Housing and Community Services Committee and the decision to be made by Full Council
- Monitoring information presented in the local and housing press and other media in relation to option appraisal to facilitate appropriate and timely responses and making the information available to Steering and Working Group members
- Adhering to sensible protocols which mean that:
 - i) Pro-active information releases or briefings are drafted by the Head of Tenant Services in consultation with the Director of Housing and Community Services
 - ii) Press releases or statements to the media follow established Council guidelines, both in terms of content and style
 - iii) The media will be invited to put their enquiries to the Director of Housing or the Head of tenant Services.
 - iv) Media enquiries received at any other point or level in the Council on the option appraisal are referred immediately to the Director.
 - v) Council staff at any level do not write personal letters intended for publication to the press (or through other media sources) that comment on any aspect of the option appraisal or in response to any article in the press

5. Turning communication into consultation

No matter how good the communication around option appraisal, if the views of stakeholders are not sought, evaluated and utilised in the decision making process then the option appraisal will not succeed.

A large part of the option appraisal process is one of information sharing. Information is given so that stakeholders can genuinely understand the reason for option appraisal and be involved in the decisions that need to be made as part of the process. Information giving is not an end in itself. The Council is committed to feeding back to stakeholders throughout and at the end of the process, explaining how views have been used in making the final decision.

The views of stakeholders, and particularly of tenants, staff and elected members need to be ascertained and fed into the decision making process at relevant points. This will be done in a number of ways, using initiatives already identified as part of the wider communication strategy.

5.1 Tenants and leaseholders

This section should be read in conjunction with the Tenant Empowerment Strategy which looks in detail at how tenants and residents should be supported and prepared for the role they play in deciding on options as part of the appraisal process. There are a number of tenants groups who will all have a role to play in the option appraisal.

Tenants' Insight Group

The Insight Group consists of individual tenants and residents who have an interest in the option appraisal process and outcome. Individuals do not have to be members of any tenant or resident association to join the Insight Group. The Group will work closely with the ITA to identify issues of importance for the appraisal and will make formal recommendations to the Housing and Community Services Committee via a report to the Officers' Steering Group and Members' Working Group relating to the options available to the Council.

Insight Group members have the chance to go on site visits to other authorities to identify different issues relating to the range of options and will receive a significant amount of information to enable them to fully consider the options available, the impact on tenants, and to come to a decision on which option(s) to recommend.

The Insight Group's membership is open to all individual tenants and residents who wish to join.

Information about the group and how to join in can be obtained in the following ways:

- Going along to road shows, sheltered scheme meetings, inviting the ITA to community/tenants' groups
- Attending Insight Group sessions
- Freephone hotline

- ITA website
- Newsletters and talking papers
- Writing to the ITA – **insert address**
- Contacting the Council's Tenant Participation Officer
- Contacting formal tenant groups, subject to their agreement

Meetings at Sheltered Housing schemes

As part of the option appraisal process Runnymede BC have identified the importance of involving older and vulnerable people in the consultation process. Representatives of the Council will visit each sheltered housing scheme to discuss options with tenants and to invite tenants to form part of the Insight Group and therefore have more formal involvement in the decision making process.

Roadshows

Roadshows will take place in July and August and may be run again later in the process, depending on their effectiveness and need for further information and consultation with the wider tenant group. Alternative events may also be established, depending on the response to roadshows and their usefulness in aiding the information giving and consultation process.

Roadshows will run through the day and evening and will allow tenants to consult with Officers and the ITA on the option appraisal process and ways they can be involved. Information on options will also be available, as well as the chance to discuss those options with staff.

Questions and issues identified at the roadshows will be gathered and entered on to a database of all queries and issues identified through the appraisal process. Reports will be produced detailing the information held on the database to inform and guide formal recommendations.

Site visits

Site visits will be organised and will include visits to a stock transfer organisation and an ALMO during July/August. Representatives of tenants, staff and elected members will be invited to attend and feed back to others on what they found out.

Freephone Hotline Number needed here

RBC and the ITA will provide hotlines which any tenant (or anyone else) can ring to ask about option appraisal and issues of concern or ideas. Queries will be logged and fed back to the data base so reports can be compiled on the main issues for Runnymede BC.

Websites

Both RBC and the ITA will ensure their websites give information on option appraisal and a message board on which people can log comments and queries.

Independent Tenants' Adviser

TPAS are the Independent Tenants' Advisor, represented by Simon Martin. They are paid from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) (tenants' rents) but are independent so they can advise tenants and residents with no conflict of interest. The ITA's role is to offer independent advice, to support tenants and residents in understanding the implications of option appraisal and to enable tenants and residents to make formal recommendations regarding the option(s) they wish to be taken forward.

Telephone research

TPAS undertook a telephone survey of more than 200 tenants during 2003 during which people were asked what they would like to see in addition to the Decent Homes Standard. Key issues were kitchens, bathrooms and security measures.

5.2 Staff

The role of staff is important in two main ways in option appraisal. Firstly they have a key role in providing information and reassurance to tenants and other stakeholders about the process and outcomes of option appraisal, and secondly they are involved as changes in services may result in changes in structures and staff roles. As well as informing staff so they in turn can advise and support tenants, Runnymede BC understands the need for staff to feel comfortable with the information available on option appraisal and the implications of different options on them. Staff need to be consulted and involved through a range of methods which ensure their views can be fed through as part of the decision making process.

Team briefings

Team briefings are a key way in which information should be shared with staff, and this will be used as part of the option appraisal process. The benefit of team briefings is they give staff a chance to consider and respond as a team as well as on an individual basis.

Staff will also be able to receive email information and the corporate staff bulletin, which is produced every two months will also contain information on option appraisal. The Internet will be used as a way to pass on and seek information. The Council's Intranet will be used to share information with staff.

Information sessions

Initial briefings will be provided for staff before the roadshows take place. These sessions will provide verbal information to staff along with written information in the form of desk and pocket guides, FAQs and glossaries of the jargon used on option appraisal. These ways of providing information to staff will not only enable staff to support tenants and residents, but will be part of the consultation process by informing staff who can then ask questions and consult with their Union as well as talking to Managers about the options and offering their views.

Questions and issues from staff will be fed into the database and will be reported separately to those from tenants and residents and other stakeholders so the difference between issues for tenants and staff or elected members and staff will be clearly shown

Consultation with Unions

Because option appraisal may have implications for staff roles, Runnymede BC intends to consult directly with the recognised Unions as well as with staff through other methods. An initial meeting will take place to explain the reason behind option appraisal, the process being used in Runnymede, the influence staff will have on the process and how the decision making process will work. Union representatives were invited to, and attended, the staff briefing sessions.

Runnymede BC are keen to have a process which supports, informs and consults staff and sees close working with the Unions as a crucial part of this process.

5.3 Elected members

Elected members through the Full Council meeting on 16 December 2004 will make the decision on which option(s) Runnymede BC will take forward. As such the views of elected members and their need for information on option appraisal generally and on the implications for Runnymede before the decision is made are crucial.

Additionally, elected members, like staff, will be asked for advice and information by other stakeholders and will need to be able to provide information or signpost people to wherever that information is best provided.

Members will be encouraged to consider and identify issues through seminars and information provided, but the formal consultation role for members will come through the Members' Working Group, which has already been established, the Housing and Community Services Committee and the decision of Full Council.

5.4 Other key stakeholders

Information sent to tenants will be circulated to all stakeholders to ensure understanding about the option appraisal process and the reason the process has to be undertaken. The Council is keen to ensure that the views of wider stakeholders are heard and considered, and that stakeholders are able to signpost others to sources of information.

Views will be welcomed and recorded in a separate field of the database and will be reported alongside other database information at regular intervals.

5.5 The Officers' Steering Group , Members' Working Group, Housing and Community Services Committee and Full Council

The Officers' Steering Group is made up of Officers of Runnymede BC supported by Pennington FMCS Ltd, the Council's lead consultants and the ITA. Membership of the group and the meeting timetable can be seen in Appendices 1 and 3. Officers will be able to give their views as part of the consultation process for staff.

The Officers' Steering Group manages the operational side of the option appraisal process, advises and reports to the Housing and Community Services Committee. Senior Council Officers will be able to give their views as part of the consultation process for staff.

The Stock Options Appraisal Member Working Group is a cross party group that has been special convened for the duration of the Stock Options Appraisal process. The Members of this group are listed in appendix 1. The group will assist in overseeing the project and will consider issues that arise between Committee meetings.

The Hosing and Community Services Committee is the principle Committee involved with the Stock Options Appraisal process and will receive regular reports on the progress of the project. Details of the Members of the Committee are given in appendix 1.

Full Council will make a decision on which option(s) to pursue at a meeting on 16 December 2004. This may include following up expressions of interest for particular options which were made to ensure the full range of options remained open when the decision was made.

Formal consultation with elected members will be through the decision making process. Other consultation and the chance for elected members to ask questions and consider the options available will be through seminars and responses to information provided.

DECISION-MAKING AND THE ROLE OF DIFFERENT GROUPS

Officers' Steering Group

The Officers' Steering Group (OSG) is made up of Officers of the Council supported by Pennington FMCS Ltd and TPAS. Pennington are the Council's lead consultants for the option appraisal process and TPAS are the Independent Tenants' Advisor.

The OSG will manage the option appraisal process and ensure regular reports are provided to the Members' Steering Group, Housing and Community Services Committee and The Chief Executive's Management Team. The consultation process is led by the OSG through the communication and tenant empowerment strategies and in line with the wider Project Plan for the appraisal process.

Information for staff and tenants is developed by the Steering Group members with the ITA.

Members of the group are:

Group Member	Role
Deborah Blowers	Director of Housing and Community Services
Ian Blowers	Head of Tenant Services
Robert Hanger	Assistant Director of Finance (Accountancy & Payments)
Helen Stewart	Tenant Participation Officer
Sarah Keenan	Senior Legal Assistant
<i>Supported by</i>	
<i>Mark Seaborn</i>	Managing Director Pennington FMCS Ltd
<i>Simon Martin</i>	ITA

Members' Working Group

The Members' Working Group will have oversight of the process of option appraisal from a members' perspective and ensure political representation across all the political groups represented within the Council at the point where detailed discussions take place to support option appraisal.

All Group members are members of the Housing and Committee Services Committee.

The Group will be supported by members of the Officers' Steering Group detailed above and Pennington FMCS Ltd.

Group Member
Cllr Peter Waddell (Chair)
Cllr Hugh Meares (Vice Chair)

Cllr John Ashmore
Cllr Claire Gant
Cllr Rod Pate (tbc)

Tenants' Insight Group

The Insight Group will consider and evaluate the options available and all relevant information from a tenant's perspective. Recommendations will be made by the Insight Group which will be forwarded to the Officers' Steering Group, and then incorporated into the option appraisal report to Housing and Community Services Committee and thus into the recommendations to Full Council.

The membership of the group is open to all tenants and residents living in Council housing.

Housing and Community Services Committee (H&SCC)

The Committee will take responsibility for considering the recommendations on option appraisal and recommending the way forward to Full Council. Details of the meetings to take place can be found in Appendix 3.

All meetings of the H&SCC will be open meetings.

H&SCC members
Cllr Peter Waddell (Chair)
Cllr Hugh Meares (Vice Chair)
Cllr John Ashmore
Cllr Dolsie Clarke
Cllr John Edwards
Cllr Claire Gant
Cllr Ruth Haylor
Cllr Marisa Heath
Cllr Yvonna Lay
Cllr Rod Pate

Full Council

The importance of the decision that relates to option appraisal is of such significance that it will be made by Full Council.

Full Council comprises all elected members of all parties across the Council. The meeting at which the decision on option appraisal is made on 16 December 2004 will be an open meeting.

RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL

OPTION APPRAISAL MEDIA PROTOCOL

Objective

To ensure consistent, accurate, fair and co-ordinated public information to and from all parties in relation to the Council's consultation on stock options.

What is covered

All public information, from both the Council and the ITA, including:

- Newsletters
- Questions and Answers booklets
- Consultation meetings and materials
- Internal information bulletins
- Media releases and briefing materials
- Briefs for personal contact

For press release/media briefings

- 1 Council drafts copy (Director of Housing and Community Services or Head of Tenant Services)
- 2 Draft circulated to Officer Steering Group members for comment
- 3 Comments to be made within 1 working day in writing (which can include email) to delegated officer
- 4 Director of Housing and Community Services or Head of Tenant Services incorporates comments into copy as appropriate
- 5 Final copy sent to Officers' and Members' Steering Group members, ITA and Insight Group Housing, Government Office South East and CHTF

For press inquiry/letter on letters' page/response to media questions

These may need an immediate response – to be facilitated through use of email and telephone contact as appropriate.

- 1 Information identified by press office or other officer/agency and brought to the attention of the Director of Housing and Community Services or Head of Tenant Services immediately.
- 2 Source of response to be identified by Director of Housing and Community Services or Head of Tenant Services
- 3 Response/letter drafted by agreed party (1 working day), and forwarded to Director of Housing and Community Services or Head of Tenant Services
- 4 Finalised response despatched by press office.
- 5 Interviews will be given only by the Director of Housing and Community Services or Head of Tenant Services

All Council consultation materials for tenants and residents, including Newsletter

- 1 Council draft provided by Director of Housing and Community Services or Head of Tenant Services and sent to ITA.
- 2 ITA consults Insight Group, and feeds in comments – 5 working days.
- 3 Council amends as appropriate and provides ITA with final draft.
- 4 Council circulates as appropriate.

All Council consultation materials for staff and elected members, including Newsletter

- 1 Council draft and share with Officers' Steering Group and Members' Working Group.
- 2 Steering Group and Working Group members respond – 3 working days.
- 3 Council amends as appropriate and develops final draft.
- 4 Council circulates as appropriate.

ITA consultation materials for tenants and residents, including Newsletters

- 1 ITA draft and consult Insight Group and Government Office South East and amend as appropriate.

- 2 ITA forward result to Steering Group members for comments to Director of Housing and Community Services or delegated officer within 3 working days.
- 3 Council comments via Director of Housing and Community Services– 2 further working days.
- 4 ITA amends – 1 working day.
- 5 ITA circulates final copy to Council.
- 6 RBC circulates to tenants

MEETING SCHEDULE – OPTION APPRAISAL

DATE/ MEETING	Officers' Steering Group	Members' Working Group	Insight Group	H&SCC	Full Council	
JUNE	22nd	22 nd	To Be confirmed			
JULY	12th			21st	7.30 p.m.	
AUGUST	26th					
	9th	4th				
	23rd					
SEPTEMBER	6th	14th		8th	7.30 p.m.	
	20th					
OCTOBER	4th	TBA				14th
	18 th					
NOVEMBER	1st	TBA		3rd	7.30 p.m.	
	15th					
	29th					
DECEMBER	13th	TBA			3rd	
					7.30 p.m.	

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

The communication strategy identifies clearly that the option appraisal must be an open process with accurate and consistent information at its core. There will be occasions when information should not be shared publicly because information pertains to personal details such as salary levels, contract terms or a personal address or telephone number.

Information which will not be made publicly available must be agreed by the Officers' Steering Group. This information will include:

- Detailed discussions between Council representatives and the Unions which detail staff circumstances or refer explicitly to individual staff members
- Personal information provided to staff relating to their employment, pension etc. as part of the option appraisal process
- Addresses or other contact details for individuals expressing a view or raising questions in relation to the option appraisal

**STOCK OPTIONS APPRAISAL
MINUTES OF MEMBERS' WORKING GROUP MEETING**

22 June 2004

Those present:- Cllr Meares, Cllrs Mrs Gant, Cllr Ashmore, Deborah Blowers, Ian Blowers, Jane Margetts, Mark Seaborn (Penningtons),

Apologies: Cllr Waddell

ACTION	BY	WHEN
1. Deborah outlined the stock options process and reminded everyone that the appraisal will need to be signed off by the Government in July 2005.		
Briefings		
2. Several briefing sessions had been held for staff and Members and these had been well received. A further session of 2 meetings would be held on Friday 25 th July for those who had not been able to attend the earlier sessions. CAB had also been invited to the sessions on the 25 th .	IB	25 th June
Timetable		
3. The Group looked at a draft timetable and Mark Seaborn explained the elements of the work. Mark and his colleagues were currently reviewing the stock condition information and the financial details that had been sent. A new business plan model had been issued by the Government and was in the process of being used to update the RBC plan. The base line assessment of the Council's financial position, and its ability to meet the Business Plan requirements, would be available by September 2004.		
4. Although the outcome of the appraisal would not be known for sometime it was necessary to plan ahead for a range of potential outcomes. If the appraisal outcome were to lead to ALMO/LSVT/PFI it would be necessary to bid to the Government for funding. The bidding round has in the past been during December and it was felt prudent to aim to reach a decision by December 2004 in order that the Council could bid if it needed to do so. This has therefore been factored		

into the timetable.

Consultation Strategy

5. Deborah took the Group through the Consultation Strategy. The Council is required to consult widely with a range of stakeholders. The question was raised "should we consult with private residents' associations?". It was agreed that officers would check to see how many Associations existed and to see if it was possible to include them. It was also agreed that arrangements should be made to consult with the LSP as they would have links to local groups.

JM

4th August

DB

6th September

6. The current draft of the consultation strategy had to be approved by GOSE before it could be implemented. Members were therefore asked to feedback comments on the draft within the week.

All

29th June

Tenant Consultation

7. Jane ran through the history of consultation so far -
- A letter was sent to all tenants asking people if they wanted to get involved in the process.
 - A group of 57 residents who are keen to be involved was established. The group includes Members of the TSG
 - A group of 20 tenants and leaseholders met to choose TPAS as the Independent Tenant Adviser.
 - A group of 7 tenants attended a training event in Portsmouth run by Community Housing Task Force (a government office).
 - Articles have been included in the tenants news letter 'Streets Ahead'. This newsletter is also sent to Housing Register applicants so prospective tenants will also be familiar with issues.

TPAS now plans to hold regular monthly meetings with the group of 57 and in addition will invite all tenants and leaseholders to meetings at various venues throughout the Borough in July and August.

There will also be two full-day events held in September. TPAS intend to hold exit surveys at these events to get some idea of what tenants want after the Decent Homes Standard is achieved. Any additional requirements will need to be factored into the financial assessment and options appraisal.

Separate sessions will be held for Sheltered Housing Schemes. There will also be a need to assess the cost of dealing with some of the Council's less popular Sheltered Housing schemes.

8. TPAS have yet to compile the Empowerment Strategy. A draft of this will be reported to the next meeting of the group.

9. **Date of Next Meeting**

Wednesday 4 August 2004 at 6.00 pm - Meeting to approve Empowerment Strategy.

Tuesday 14 September at 6.00 pm - Meeting re results of Mark's research.