

**HOUSING FUTURES: Council Housing Options Appraisal
Member Briefing Note
(Edition 4: April 2008)**

Welcome to the fourth edition of the **Housing Futures: Member Briefing**, the purpose of each briefing note is to ensure Members are kept up to date throughout the options appraisal process and provide you with appropriate contact points should you have any questions, queries or comments.

PROGRESS OVERVIEW

Although things may seem to have gone quiet over recent months much has been happening. In summary:

Housing Futures Project Team

The Housing Service has brought together a dedicated project team to lead and drive the Housing Futures work forward. The Project Team brings together those officers who successfully delivered the recent small-scale stock transfer of sheltered housing (Jane Edmonds, Chris Davey and Ann Pursey – contact details on page 3 of this Briefing Note). The project team report directly to Julie Allport (Head of Housing) and are supported by key Officers from other Council service teams including for example Finance, Regeneration, Legal and Asset Management.

The project team also work closely and are supported by Officers within Tristar Homes Limited.

Customer Involvement

'Housing Futures Customer Group' has been established; this group brings together a range of interested tenants from different locations across the Borough. The group generally meet fortnightly and are supported by an **Independent Tenant Adviser** (ITA). The role of the ITA is to provide independent information, advice and support to tenants through the options appraisal exercise and ensure that the views of tenants inform the decision making process. Over recent months the ITA has also attended various tenant and residents group meetings to explain the ongoing options appraisal.

In addition to meetings and information sharing, the Housing Futures Customer Group have undertaken a number of site visits to organisations who have or are currently undertaking options appraisal exercises. The group have met with tenants and leaseholders from Durham, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough and Wansbeck to learn from and share their experiences. Glen Wilby (Strategic Housing Adviser) from Government Office North East has also attended a recent meeting of the Group to discuss the potential implications of the Governments Housing and Regeneration Bill (which is currently passing through Parliament).

'Your Home, Your Say' workshop was held towards the end of 2007. The event was organised on the Councils behalf by the ITA in conjunction with Stockton Residents and Community Groups Association (SRCGA). Invitations were sent to active tenants and residents organisations across the Borough. In excess of 50 attended the day, which sought tenants/residents views on the future of housing in the Borough and consider the options available to the Council.

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To date, three 'Your Home, Your Say' Newsletters have been issued to all council tenants and leaseholders and copies circulated to all ward Councillors. The first of these newsletters included a questionnaire seeking tenants views about what was important to them in terms of (i) Your Home and Neighbourhood and (ii) Your Environment. The response rate was overwhelming with over 1600 questionnaire returns. Results have been analysed and a detailed overview provided back to tenants in the recently issued edition 3 of the 'Your Home, Your Say' Newsletter.

Finalising the Options Appraisal Objectives

In the initial report to Cabinet (August 2007), Cabinet agreed the 'draft' options appraisal objectives pending further consultation with Members and tenants. Following consultation with Members (at the Housing Seminar Sept 07) and discussions with the Housing Customer Futures Group a revised and final set of objectives were agreed. These were circulated with Member Briefing Note 1.

Stock Condition Survey

A comprehensive stock condition survey has been undertaken to identify the future investment needs of the stock over the next 30years. This survey has recently been updated to take into account recent investment work in some of the high-rise stock.

Sustainability Modelling

Key to the future stock investment strategy will be 'sustainability' of the housing stock – i.e. is the housing stock fit for purpose and will it continue to meet current and prospective tenants needs and aspirations?

Sustainability (in accordance with Government requirements) is being considered in the widest context i.e. "a place where people want to live and work, now and in the future" and takes into consideration the diverse needs of existing and future residents, the environment and the need to be safe and well planned. As members will recall one of the key objectives of the options appraisal was to appraise all potential options against the 'sustainable communities agenda'.

Communications with CLG and Government Office

All 'stock owning' local authorities were written to in December 2007, to reaffirm the role of both the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) and local Government Officers in the Options appraisal process. Subsequently contact has been made and it is expected that both will continue to over-see the process.

PROJECT TIMESCALES

The complexity of this options Appraisal has resulted in it taking longer than had been originally anticipated. This has occurred as, unlike previous options appraisals, we need to consider more than simple housing investment and the decent homes standard, we need to consider the long-term sustainability of our housing stock and local neighbourhoods.

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We need to specifically:

- Look post-decent homes and consider how we can bring about further improvements in the stock and services to tenants.
- Consider and deliver estate transformation.

As a direct result of the above, the options appraisal is considering both the 'traditional' methods of investment and 'new investment models' (such as regeneration delivery vehicles). Such models are new and subsequently detailed and bespoke evaluation needs to be undertaken to consider what opportunities for public and private investment they offer and how they would deliver against both the options appraisal objectives and the wider regeneration vision for the Borough.

The delays in the project timetable have also been affected by the belated release of CLG consultation papers. For example the 'Housing Revenue Account, Self Financing' pilot evaluation was originally anticipated late 2007/early 2008, however the consultation paper was not formally released until March of this year. A detailed review of this paper is now ongoing.

What next?

Members should be reassured that progress is being made and the process is moving forward as quickly as possible.

A detailed financial appraisal of all potential options is now being undertaken by Savills (the Authorities appointed Lead Adviser), once complete a detailed review will be undertaken internally to consider the 'deliverability' and potential 'impact' of each option on the Authority.

Once complete a series of member consultation and briefing meetings will be held over the summer months, which will inform on the Options appraisal. We are currently working on a report back to Cabinet late summer 2008.

ANY QUESTIONS, OR FURTHER INFORMATION REQUESTS

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact the Options Appraisal Project Team:

Jane Edmonds
(Housing Strategy Manager)

Chris Davey
(Project Officer)

☎ 52-6682

☎ 52-6776

✉ jane.edmonds@stockton.gov.uk

✉ Christopher.davey@stockton.gov.uk