

Meeting: Environment and Economy Scrutiny Sub-committee
Date: 08 June 2005
Subject: Position Statement on Housing Stock Options Appraisal
Responsible Officer: Director of Strategy, Urban Living
Contact Officer: Rebecca Caprara
Portfolio Holder: Planning, Development and Housing
Key Decision: No
Status: Part 1

Section 1: Summary

Decision Required

1.1 That the report be noted

Reason for report

1.2 This report provides an update on progress on the options appraisal work in progress to meet the government deadline for sign off by end July 2005.

Benefits

1.3 The key benefits to Harrow of the options appraisal process are:

- Greater resident involvement in the decision making process about the future improvement, management and maintenance of the housing stock;
- The outcome will provide a clear position as to what the Council needs to achieve and how to achieve it, providing a clear strategic direction for the future of its housing stock

Cost of Proposals

1.4 Costs have been detailed in Appendix A.

Risks

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| 1.5 | In order to achieve successful sign off by Government Office for London, all the criteria set out in the ODPM guidance must be followed and evidenced. Failure to achieve this will result in failure of the options appraisal process. |
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Implications if recommendations rejected

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| 1.6 | Failure to achieve Cabinet approval to the preferred option will result in failure to meet the government deadline of sign off by July 2005. The knock-on implications for the council are unclear at this time, but are likely to have a considerable impact on the council's comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) rating and subsequent access to government funding. |
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Section 2: Report

Brief History

The Housing Stock Options Appraisal Working Group that was established has met regularly and has looked, in detail, at the cost of meeting the Decent Homes Standard by 2010, the funding the Council can achieve and the gap between what is available and what is needed. The Working Group has also looked at the different options available to achieve funding to fill the gap and what additional funding may be available for improvement works over and above Harrow's decent homes standard.

First Call Housing, the Independent Tenant Advisor, has been working closely with resident representatives and has provided a programme of training sessions around the different options, including finance, governance and tenants' rights. They have also met with Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs) and held meetings with tenants in sheltered accommodation.

An event took place on 26 May at the Harrow Quality Hotel, to inform the wider resident population about Harrow's work towards decent homes and the options available to Harrow. As well as inviting all tenants and leaseholders to the event, a publicity campaign of adverts, press releases and posters has helped to increase awareness of the event, which was attended by 189 tenants and leaseholders from across the borough.

Further implementation of the Communication and Consultation Strategy (see Appendix B) is evidenced by the organisation of a bus around the estates during the week commencing 30 May, to maximise tenant awareness of the options. Evening meetings have also been arranged on a number of estates during the first two weeks of June.

This stage of the strategy is to maximise awareness of the Council's position and the options available to achieve decent homes. The next stage is to test the opinion of all tenants and leaseholders and report back on the preferred option, for approval by Cabinet. A detailed report will then be produced and submitted to ODPM. The timetable to meet the submission deadline is attached at Appendix C.

Options considered

The Working Group has considered each option in detail. A summary table showing key criteria to consider against each of the options is attached at Appendix D.

Consultation

The Communications and Consultation Strategy is being implemented through the aforementioned publicity campaign and consultation events.

The next stage of consultation is to test the opinion of tenants and leaseholders through a postal survey, scheduled to be sent out on 06 June 2005. A draft version of the test of opinion survey, recommended by the Working Group, is attached at Appendix E.

Financial Implications

Financial implications of each option have been considered as part of the options appraisal process. An independent assessment by Weedon Grant financial consultants has been prepared and will be presented at the next meeting of the Working Group.

Legal Implications

Legal implications exist in some way with each of the options the council is considering. The Housing Improvement Options Advisory Panel will consider legal implications of each of the options in detail at its next meeting.

Equalities Impact

Consideration has been given to different groups in the communication and consultation stage of the process. The event was organised as a drop in session

with children's activities available, to allow families with children to attend and to provide flexibility to allow working residents to attend. Transport was also available for those who wouldn't otherwise be able to attend. Language interpreters and a sign language interpreter were also present and were busy throughout the event.

For those who were unable to attend on the day, the bus is visiting a large number of estates over a four day period to provide information and advice to residents unable to travel to the event.

Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents

- Appendix A Financial Summary
- Appendix B Communication and Consultation Strategy
- Appendix C Timetable for submission of the final report to ODPM
- Appendix D Summary Table of Options against key criteria
- Appendix E Draft Test of Opinion Survey and summary information
- Appendix F Resident Empowerment Strategy