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<b>REPORT TO EXECUTIVE</b>			
<b>PORTFOLIO AREA: ENVIRONMENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORT</b>			
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>		7/7/2003	
<b>Public</b>			
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes	<b>Recorded in Forward Plan:</b>	Yes
<b>Inside Policy Framework</b>			

**Title:** HOUSING STRATEGY

**Report of:** HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

**Report reference:** EPS.44/2003

### Summary:

The report sets out the observations received from Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the Regulatory Reform Order and the Homelessness Strategy following their meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2003. Officers responses to the observations are incorporated in the report.

### Recommendations:

Members are recommended to approve the proposed amendments as part of the Council's Homelessness Strategy and future policy for private sector renovations and improvements and that they be forwarded to Council for formal adoption.

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## 2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

1.1. The draft Regulatory Reform Order and the Homelessness Strategies, report numbers EPS.31/03 and EPS.33/03 respectively were considered by

Members of Executive at their previous meeting when it was agreed that both reports be forwarded to a special meeting of Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2003. Attached to this report are the minutes of the special meeting and the subsequent Officers proposed amendments to both reports to meet the observations of Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

1.2. Appendix 1 to this report contains the minutes from Overview and Scrutiny Committee which are addressed in order in the following proposed amendments and alterations.

### 1.3. Regulatory Reform Order

1. Should Government guidelines be forthcoming, these will be taken into consideration, and should they deviate markedly from the Consultation document produced in June 2002, then officers will report back to both Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committees with adjustments to the policy as necessary.
2. Representations will be made to Government Office North West, and to ODPM with regard to the monitoring of Housing Policy. However, as all Local Authorities have complete discretion as to how to formulate their Housing Policy, this may not produce a definitive response.
3. It is considered appropriate that all avenues remain open to the City Council to take forward Housing Renewal as part of the wider Regeneration/Supporting Communities remit. To this end, a mixture of area based work and individual property renovation is considered to be the most appropriate course of action, bearing in mind the extensive information which is at our disposal.

It is also considered imperative that partnership arrangements are adopted to carry forward these initiatives, as it must be accepted that this Council cannot solve the problem on its own. The owner/occupier of the property must take ultimate responsibility for the condition of their property.

4. The waiting list was reported to Committee in February 2002, in anticipation of the proposed transfer of the Council's housing stock, and the possible reduction in funding for Housing Renewal, resulting in additional applications for assistance being made.
5. The loopholes in the test of resources (or means test) are at present being considered, and a further report will be presented to Executive/Overview and Scrutiny Committees for consideration, once a practical method for assessment of resources has been collated. It is also our intention to discuss with Government, the Statutory test of resources for Disabled Facilities Grants, which Local Authorities have no control over.
6. A careful check is made on the Renewal budget on a monthly basis to ensure that adequate resources are in place to service the number of applications that are in progress at any one time. Should we require to amend any qualifying criteria, a report will be provided for Members.

The points system identified in the waiting list details, can be implemented at any time to address particular pressure on the allocated funds.

7. The Consultation process did not generate the anticipated feedback, to

what is considered an important document in the Council's process. Any comments for Officer's would be appreciated from both Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

8. We have a strong partnership with Cumbria Constabulary, which is having a marked effect on such matters as Distraction and general Burglaries. We are hoping to expand this partnership with new initiatives in the near future.
9. Constant monitoring of the housing situation within the Council's area will continue, with any areas showing signs of decline, brought to the attention of the relevant partners who can effect a solution. Should Relocation grants require consideration in the future, this will be the subject of a further report to Members.

### 3. Homelessness Strategy

1. Already dealt with
2. Formalisation of the out of hours service to homeless people will be developed in line with the review of the hostels service. The resource implications for this and the provision of improved Aid and Assistance Service can be a part of this process. An additional point can be added to the Action Plan under objective 6, page 36 covering the above with a projected timescale of November 2003.
3. The key issues and gaps in service (paragraph 5.6) can be cross referenced with the Action Plan and appear as an additional column. An Executive Summary can be placed at the front of the document with the cross referenced Action Plan as part of it.
4. The formalisation of partnership arrangements with other agencies has already been identified within the Action Plan under objective 3 – strategy, page 33.
5. The reference to Warwick Bridge as a large village on page 1 can be deleted.
6. The provision of life skills training is seen as part of the support and resettlement service which is being developed.
7. An additional point can be added to the Action Plan under objective 6 – Action, page 36 to ensure appropriate accommodation services for disabled people are provided.
8. Future working identified with Social Services in the Action Plan, objective 7 – Action, page 37 can be extended to include the comments made.
9. This point is noted and can be built into our working procedures when establishing such services.
10. This is covered under the Action Plan, objective 6 – Action, page 36.
11. Reference to housing provision by voluntary and partner agencies is detailed in chapter 5 – Meeting the needs: The present (pages 19-28).
12. Update reports will be provided accordingly.

## **1. CONSULTATION**

1. Consultation to Date.

Tenants and residents organisations registered social landlords, Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. Consultation proposed.

Nil.

## **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members are recommended to approve the proposed amendments as part of the Council's Homelessness Strategy and future policy for private sector renovations and improvements and that they be forwarded to Council for formal adoption.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

To ensure that the Authority has in place both the required Regulatory Reform Order and Homeless Strategy to meet the Government's July timetable.

## **3. IMPLICATIONS**

- Staffing/Resources – Overview and Scrutiny Committee's observations regarding out of hours contact points and housing aid and assistance services are likely to have a staffing implication which will require to be resourced.
- Financial – Additional resources will be required to meet any further staffing requirements.
- Legal – The Authority is under legal obligation to provide both the Regulatory Reform Order and the Homelessness Strategy by the end of July, 2003.
- Corporate – The Council has an ongoing corporate responsibility for Housing Strategy of which both the Regulatory Reform Order and the Homelessness Strategy provide an integral part.
- Risk Management – The risks are incorporated in the Council's Risk Register.
- Equality Issues – Both the Order and the Homelessness Strategy address issues of equality in the delivery of housing services.
- Environmental – Nil
- Crime and Disorder – The effective operation of a Homelessness Strategy can have beneficial impacts as regards issues of crime and disorder.

## **APPENDIX 1**

## **COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE 2003 AT 10.00 AM**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Mallinson E (Chairman), Councillors Aldersey (as substitute for Councillor Hodgson G), Crookdake (as substitute for Councillor Parsons), Earp, Fisher, Hendry, Quilter (as substitute for Councillor Boaden) and Rutherford K.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Bloxham attended the meeting as the Environment Infrastructure and Transport Portfolio Holder.

Mr S Taylor, the Housing and Health Partnership Manager, Mr A Dixon, the Assistant Housing Services and Health Partnership Manager, Mrs M Mooney, Executive Director and Mr J Mallinson, Overview and Scrutiny Manager also attended the meeting to give advice and assistance.

### **COS.53/03 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Hodgson and Parsons.

### **COS.54/03 AGENDA**

**RESOLVED** – That consideration of dates for a workshop for the Democratic Engagement Best Value Review be accepted as an urgent item of business.

### **COS.55/03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Earp sought clarification on declarations of interest as he is a Member of the Management Committee of the Citizens Advice Bureau, but it was felt that as final decisions on the Strategies were not being made at this meeting, it was not necessary to formally declare an interest.

### **COS.56/03 HOUSING RENEWAL POLICY – REGULATORY REFORM ORDER**

With reference to the Executive Decision EX.101/03, the formal views of this Committee were being sought on the Housing Renewal Policy – Regulatory Reform Order, prior to the policy being considered by Executive and recommendations being made to the City Council.

Mr Dickson presented Report EPS.31/0, which dealt with consultative responses to the proposed content of the Council's Housing Renewal Policy. The Housing Policy related to the criteria for dealing with grant applications for promoting housing renewal in the City Council's area. The policy needed to be approved and in place by 18 July 2003 in order for the Council to be able to award grants.

Mr Dickson then gave a detailed explanation of the contents of the Council's Consultation document. He highlighted changes to present procedures in relation to Renovation Grants, Minor Works Grants (formerly Home Repair Assistance), Relocation Grants and general Grants. He reported that over 500 people and organisations had been consulted as part of the Consultation process, including all City Council Members, Parish Councils, Landlords, Registered Social Landlords and Voluntary and Charitable Bodies. Of the 500 documents sent out, 10 responses had been received and he considered that this was a poor response to the Consultation.

Members were asked to consider and comment on a number of aspects of the Policy.

Councillor Bloxham, the Portfolio Holder, added that he was disappointed that final Government Guidelines were not available and he commended officers on progressing the policy according to Government consultation, as it had to be in place for 18 July 2003. He asked the Committee to give particular consideration to and comment on means testing or testing of resources of applicants, and the area based approach to housing renewal. He then echoed the Officer's disappointment with the responses to the Consultation process.

Members then gave detailed consideration to the Policy, asking both the Officer and the Portfolio Holder for clarification on a number of areas, and it was –

RESOLVED – That the following be forwarded to the Executive as the formal views of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Housing Renewal Policy – Regulatory Reform Order :

1. The Committee supports the Housing Renewal Policy and commends Officers and the Executive for progressing the Policy, in order to have it in place by 18 July 2003, even though Government guidelines have not been published.
2. The Committee is concerned that the Government does not appear to have enforcement and monitoring arrangements in place in relation to local authorities delivery of these responsibilities.

The Executive and Officers are asked to formalise concerns about this lack of monitoring to the relevant Government Agencies.

3. The Committee supports a mixture of area based renewal techniques and the so called "pepper potting" approach of responding to individual applications, which it was recognised addressed cases of greatest need. Where area based approaches are adopted, the Council should seek to take every advantage of potential partnership arrangements for these approaches.

4. The Committee is pleased to hear that there is a points based waiting list system in place to apply to any enquiries where the demand for grant assistance necessitates the implementation of a waiting list. This points based system should ensure that the most vulnerable people receive grants.
5. The Committee is concerned that there are some loopholes in relation to the Renovation Grants and Disabled Facility Grants, which could mean that the system was open to abuse. The Executive and officers are asked to lobby the Government on the need to deal with the closure of these loopholes.
6. There is a recognition that currently applicants had to be aged over 60 to qualify for Minor Works Grant assistance, the main reason for this age restriction had been that the budget could not cope with applications for all ages. However, in the future there may be a need to review the age limit and increase it to over 70's to ensure that grant assistance is given to the most vulnerable people.

It is also recognised that the points system would come into play should a waiting list develop and that this point system would give additional points to older people.

7. The Committee is concerned at the poor response to the consultation on the policy, and asked that this response rate be noted to inform future consultations, and the poor response rate fed into the Democratic Engagement Best Value Review.
8. The Committee is pleased to see that Crime and Disorder implications had been given high importance in the policy.
9. The Committee recognises that currently there is not a need for Clearance and hence Relocation Grants but there is a need to keep an eye on situations in specific areas and identify and recognise the future needs of areas which may move into a spiral of decline.

(10) The Committee's thanks to Mr Dickson and Councillor Bloxham were placed on record.

## **COS.57/03 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

Further to Executive Decision reference EX.102/03, the views of this Committee was being sought on the Homelessness Strategy, prior to consideration of the Strategy by the Executive and recommendations being made to the City Council.

Mr S Taylor presented report EPS.33/03 and advised that, under the Homelessness Act 2002, each Local Housing Authority has a statutory obligation to carry out a review of homelessness in their area and have in place a Homelessness Strategy by 31 July 2003. The report included a draft of the Homelessness Strategy which had been sent out to a number of individuals and organisations for consultation.

The process for developing the Strategy had included a review of Homelessness in the Carlisle area, the setting of objectives, the identification of key issues and gaps in services and the development of an Action Plan to meet future needs. The Strategy

and Action Plan, once approved, would be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

Councillor Bloxham added that from 9 October 2003, Carlisle City Council would be a strategic housing authority. The Homelessness Strategy would form an important part of the overall Housing Strategy. It would provide a mechanism for the Council to document and monitor what it, and other partner agencies, will do to further prevent and alleviate homelessness and to assist and support people who are homeless.

Members then discussed a number of aspects of the Homelessness Strategy and Mr Taylor and the portfolio holder answered various Members' questions.

**RESOLVED** – That the following be forwarded to the Executive as the views of the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Homelessness Strategy:

1. The Committee supports this Homelessness Strategy and is pleased that it has been developed in accordance with Government Guidelines.
2. There needs to be a formalised delivery plan and clarification of resources implications for the out of hours contact for homeless persons and the provision of improved Advice and Assistance services to homeless people (paragraph 5.1.1).
3. The Key Issues and Gaps in Service (paragraph 5.6) should be cross referenced with the Action Plan to show the actions which are being taken to address the gaps in service. This cross referenced document could then form part of the Executive Summary and would make the Strategy more user friendly.
4. Partnership arrangements with other agencies need to be formalised, particularly in relation to priority needs groups (paragraph 2.2.2)
5. The reference to Warwick Bridge as a large village is an incorrect classification.
6. The Committee would like to see quality training put in place for people moving from hostel accommodation to housing (reference was made to a scheme in place in Barrow).
7. There should be a reference in the Action Plan to the provision of appropriate accommodation services for disabled people.
8. The draft joint assessment protocol for 16-17 year olds which has been developed by Social Services and Housing was recognised (paragraph 5.3.2) but the Committee would like to see that linkage with Social Services progressed further and extended to cover all ages.
9. The Council should ensure that it receives funding from other authorities if services are provided on behalf of another authority.
10. There should be more provision for those who are homeless as a result of domestic violence (page 54).



11. There should be clear reference in the Strategy to voluntary and partner organisations which provide services to homeless people.
12. The Committee will monitor the Homelessness Strategy a report was requested in 6 months time.
13. The Committee's thanks to Mr Taylor and Councillor Bloxham were placed on record.

### **COS.58/03 DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT BEST VALUE REVIEW**

RESOLVED – (1) That Councillors Parsons, Hendry and Hodgson be nominated as the Members having particular involvement with this Review.

2. That the first choice of date for a workshop session of the Committee on the Review be 22 July in the afternoon, but if this not suitable for the Review Team, the second choice of date be 11 July 2003. The Overview and Scrutiny Manager to discuss this matter with the Democratic Engagement Review Team.

The meeting ended at 11.45am