

CULTURE, HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION PORTFOLIO

DECISION RECORD

24th March 2006

Present:

Councillor Robbie Payne (Culture, Housing and Transportation Portfolio Holder)

Officers: John Mennear, Acting Assistant Director (Cultural Services)
Alastair Smith, Head of Technical Services
Penny Garner-Carpenter, Housing Strategy Manager
Joan Wilkins, Principal Democratic Services Officer
Steve Hilton, Assistant Public Relations Officer

82. Congratulations to the New Assistant Director (Community Services)

The Portfolio Holder passed his congratulations onto Mr Mennear for his appointment as the new Assistant Director (Community Services) and indicated that he was looking forward to working with him in the future.

83. Local Transport Capital Programme 2006/07 - *Head of Technical Services*

Type of decision

Key decision (Test i applies)

Purpose of report

To outline the 2006/7 local transport capital settlement and seek approval for the proposed budget allocations and programme for integrated transport as structural maintenance.

Issue(s) considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Head of Technical Services outlined details of the 2005/06 local transport capital allocations, proposed budget allocations and provided a summary of the Government's assessment of the Council's provisional Second Local Transport Plan (LTP) and Annual Progress Report 2005. In

relation to the Government's assessment of the provisional LTP and the Annual Progress Report the Head of Technical Services indicated that the classifications given were 'promising' and 'fair' respectively and that these reflected those given to most LTP areas.

Details were provided of the new formula for the distribution of integrated transport block funding between councils and attention drawn to the effect that the assessment of the provisional second LTP and Annual Progress Report 2005 (APR) had on the allocation for 2006/7. It was highlighted that of the three categories set for the LTP ('very promising', 'promising' and 'needs substantial improvement') only those councils with a 'very promising' rating would receive any increase in allocation (+12.5%) all others, including Hartlepool, would see no change. For the APR the effect was as follows with Hartlepool's 'fair' rating to result in a £63,000 decrease in its allocation:

Excellent = 12.5%

Good = 5%

Fair = -5%

Weak = -12.5%

A tabular representation of the provisional and Final Planning Guideline for 2006/07 was included in the report with indications that the settlement illustrated the Government's continued support for the transport strategy outlined in the first LTP. Details were also provided of proposals for the distribution of the LTP capital allocations for each scheme type.

In addition to the information provided the Head of Technical Services confirmed that Council officers had met with representatives from the Government Officer North East to discuss in more detail the allocations and reported that indicates were that the allocation structure would remain the same for the next few years.

Following consideration of the information provided the Portfolio Holder noted the report and requested that the Transportation Team Leader be written to and commended on his work in relation to this.

Decision

- i) It was noted that good progress had been made towards the implementation of the fourth year of Hartlepool's first Local Transport Plan.
- ii) The local transport capital settlement for 2006/7 was noted and proposals for the distribution of allocations, as outlined in table 2 of the report, approved.

84. Hartlepool Transport Interchange – Head of Technical Services

Type of Decision

Non-key.

Purpose of Report

To outline progress in relation the Interchange and seek approval for the appointment of a Contractor for the subway in-fill works following post Tender negotiations and the proposed method of procurement of the shelters and associated street furniture.

Issues considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Head of Technical Services presented a detailed report outlining the process completed so far in relation to the construction of Hartlepool's Transport Interchange. As part of the process tenders for the advance contract for sub way infilling were invited in August 2005. Delays in completing the various legal agreements needed for works to commence, however, prevented the contract from being let and the period for which Tenderers offers remain open expired in the end December 2005.

With hopes that legal agreements would be complete in the next 6 weeks consideration was now being given to the award of the subway infill works. When contacted the preferred tenderer indicated that price increases, particularly for civil engineering materials, meant that he would be unable to hold his tendered Target Cost beyond the Tender acceptance period. He was, however, still keen to carry out the works and following negotiations a revised Target Cost was agreed.

In addition to the civil engineering works, a major cost element was the supply of shelters and associated street furniture with a cost anticipated to be in the region of £600,000, which was based on a budget quotation for a suitable proprietary "off the shelf" system. Given the substantial cost, procurement rules dictate that a procurement process be undertaken and options for this were:

- a) Preparation of a detailed design and specification which could be priced by in with the main Works Tenders; or
- b) A separate procurement process involving specialist suppliers quoting on the basis of proprietary products that meet a HBC performance specification. The supply and erection would then be phased in with the main Works Contract.

Following consideration of the options it was suggested that shelters and associated street furniture should be procured independently from the civils works and to ensure the necessary aesthetics, quality and cost the

procurement process it was recommended that:

- Expressions of interest be invited through advertisements in an appropriate journal, requiring submission of sufficient information to allow vetting of the applicants to exclude those who are unsuitable.
- Design submissions including full prices, time requirements and other relevant information to allow an assessment of the proposals be invite from those deemed suitable.
- A panel comprising at least 3 Council Officers assesses the submissions and marks them in accordance with a pre-determined scoring matrix, based on a quality:price weighting of 80:20.
- The outcome of the process be reported to the Contract Scrutiny Panel and the supplier with the best score appoint.

In relation to the financial implications of the proposal it was noted that the revised Target Cost for the Subway Infill Works was within the Scheme budget and that the scheme budgeting for the Shelters and associated street furniture was based on using a proprietary system. Following consideration of the report the Portfolio Holder:

- Indicated that he was uneasy about the re-negotiation of the Target Cost with the preferred tenderer. It was, however, noted that it would cost the authority more to go to the second tenderer and it was usual to add inflation to tender prices. As such re-negotiations with the preferred tenderer was an appropriate course of action.
- Asked that a press release be produced expressing the Council's disappointed in the delay with the Interchange. That it be emphasised that the delay had been totally out of the Council's control and it was hoped that the process would now start to proceed.
- Requested sight of the documentation to be sent out to tenderers before it was circulated.

Decision

- i) The appointment of the preferred Tenderer for the subway Infill Works, on the basis of the revised Target Cost was approved.
- ii) The procurement of shelters and associated street furniture through a quality/cost-based assessment, as outlined above, was approved.

85. Clavering Road – Safer Streets Scheme – Head of Technical Services

Type of Decision

Non-key.

Purpose of Report

To seek approval for the proposals to implement traffic calming and a 20mph zone on Clavering Road, subject to no objections being raised.

Issues considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Head of Technical Services reported, in response to concerns regarding the speed and volume of traffic on Clavering Road in the vicinity of Clavering Primary School, outlined a proposal for the implementation of a 20mph Zone in the vicinity of the School.

In view of the requirement for 20mph speed limits to be self-enforcing it was intended to implement traffic calming measures in order to achieve an average speed of 20mph or less. These measures were to take the form of a series of Speed Cushions, which would allowed buses, fire appliances and ambulances to straddle the hump without impeding their journey or causes discomfort to passengers. It was also proposed to:

- Introduce parking restrictions around the junction radii at the access road to the rear of No's 45 – 55 Clavering Road, which would ensure that continued access and visibility at this junction, and
- Extend existing restrictions on Clavering Road at the northern end of the scheme by 8 metres to prevent parking in the vicinity of the speed cushions.

In relation to consultations on the proposed scheme the Head of Technical Services indicated that residents, Ward Councillors and Clavering School had been sent a letter and plan outlining the above proposals. It was also noted that the estimated cost of the scheme was £10,000, which would be funded through the North Neighbourhood Consultative Forum.

Decision

The implementation of the scheme as detailed in the report was approved, subject to no objections being raised through the consultation process.

86. Neighbourhood Services Departmental Plan (Culture, Housing and Transportation) Update December 2005 – Director of Neighbourhood Services

Type of Decision

Non-key.

Purpose of Report

To outline performance of the Neighbourhood Services Departmental plan for 2005/2006, covering the period from the 1st April 2005 to 31st December 2005.

Issues considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Departmental Plan Update set out the department's aims and objectives and included performance to the end of December against a range of key national and local indicators. The plan also detailed service development initiatives that were planned for the year. These were the product of a developing culture that emphasises the importance of outcomes and a focus on customers in planning service delivery. A summary of the progress achieved up to the end of December 2005 had been recorded against these service improvements. A copy of the update plan was appended for the Portfolio Holders attention.

Decision

The update to the Plan was approved.

87. Supported Bus Services 5 and 822/828 – Head of Technical Services

Type of Decision

Non-key.

Purpose of Report

To seek approval to tender for a new supported bus service 5 and seek costs for a revised supported bus service 822/828.

Issues considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Head of Technical Services submitted a report outlining the background to the removal of the No. 5 service (West View to the Headland) and representations received for its reinstatement to provide bus links from West View to the new health care facility on the Headland. Attention was also drawn to the background for the removal of the 828/829 School Services (Hucklehoven Way/Burbank Street) and work undertaken to address concerns raised regarding the absence of a local bus service for school pupils from the Burbank Street area, particularly those attending Brierton and English Martyrs.

Further consideration was now sought of options for the reinstatement of Service no. 5 and the 828/829 School Service. In relation to the No. 5 service it was highlighted that if reinstated the basic timetable would have to be extended to around 0800 in the morning to cover Health Centre

opening hours, with subsequent financial implications. There had also been requests for an evening service 5, in addition to an enhanced daytime service, to replace the service withdrawn when government funding ended at the end of March 2005. It was suggested that an evening service could be included as one of the options in the tendering process and in terms of the time scale for reinstatement the tendering process would take around one month, followed by a period of time for the Portfolio decision making process. The service would then have to be registered by the successful operator, giving 56 days notice to the traffic commissioner (in some circumstances the 56 day might be waived, but this was at the discretion of the Traffic Commissioner, and there were no guarantees this would be granted). The reinstatement process would thus take up to 3 months from the start of the tendering process to the commencement of the service.

In relation to the School Services 822/828 two options were identified to address the school time changes at Brierton, while still catering for the school pupils in the Burbank Street area. The options were:

1. The provision of an additional service 822 journey operating from Huckelhoven Way at 08:00 picking up at the various points details of which were outlined in the report.
2. To cater for pupils attending English Martyrs School living in the Burbank Street area, the 08:25 Service 828 departure from Wainwright Walk would start from Hucklehoven Way, with the 15:38 departure from English Martyrs being extended from Wainwright Walk to Hucklehoven Way. These journeys formerly catered for Brierton and English Martyrs pupils but, since the school time changes, would only be suitable for English Martyrs pupils.

Details of the financial implications of proposals for the No. 5 Service and 828/829 Service were outlined in the report.

Following consideration of the information provided that Portfolio Holder indicated that the most appropriate course of action would be let the tender for the No 5 service and seek confirmation of costs for the revised school services 822/828. When the costs of both services were known a decision could then be realistically taken in relation to the revised school services 822/828. It was, however, also requested that costs be prepared and presented to the Portfolio Holder of the provision of services along:-

King Oswy Drive
Davison Drive
Warren Road
Winterbottom Avenue
Headland

Decision

- i) That tender's be let for a new service 5.
- ii) That confirmation of costs be sought from Stagecoach for revised school services 822/828 and reported back to the Portfolio Holder.
- iii) That details of costs for services along the routes identified above also be provided for consideration by the Portfolio Holder.

88. Stockton Road/Russell Walk Parking Improvements

— Head of Technical Services

Type of Decision

Non-key.

Purpose of Report

To seek approval for a parking improvements scheme at Stockton Road/Russell Walk.

Issues considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Head of Technical Services reported that funding had been allocated from the New Deal for Communities programme to enhance the viability of local businesses in this area of Stockton Road.

With one of the main concerns expressed by businesses being the lack of available car parking for both customers and staff, a scheme was developed comprising the provision of parking areas to both the front and rear of Stockton Road. Details of the proposals were outlined in the report along with the consultation process being undertaken and financial implications of the scheme.

In relation to the consultation exercise the Portfolio Holder expressed concern that Ward Councillors had not been involved and requested that the issue be raised with the relevant officer(s).

Decision

The implementation of the proposed parking improvements in Stockton Road and Russell Walk was approved.

89. Revised Fares Leven Valley Supported Bus Contract – Head of Technical Services

Type of Decision

Non-key.

Purpose of Report

To seek approval to apply revised fares on the Borough Council supported Leven Valley service 518 bus contract.

Issues considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Head of Technical Services submitted a report outlining the background to a request for revised fares on the Borough Council supported Leven Valley service 518 bus contract.

The evening service from Hartlepool Marina to Elwick via Dalton Piercy (no. 518) was operated by Leven Valley Coaches and supported by the Council, with funding from the Government's Rural Bus Subsidy grant. Whilst Stagecoach Hartlepool had in August 2005 had implemented a fare rise on its commercial services, and supported bus contracts, Leven Valley Coaches had held their fares at pre August 2005 levels. Increasing cost pressures, however, meant that Leven Valley Coaches now needed to implement a fare rise, with effect from 27th March 2006, to bring fares in line with other bus operators.

Proposed fare increases were as follows and could be implemented with no financial implications to the Council:-

Current Fare	Revised Fare
45p	50p
65p	75p
75p	85p
90p	£1
95p	£1.05
£1	£1.10
£1.05	£1.15

Following consideration of the report the Portfolio Holder expressed support for the proposed fare increases.

Decision

Approval was given for a fares increase on the Borough Council supported Leven Valley service 518.

90. Housing Capital Programme 2006-2008 – Head of Public Protection and Housing

Type of decision

Key decision (tests i and ii apply)

Purpose of report

To outline details of Housing Capital finance and seek approval of the two year Capital Programme, a copy of which was appended to the report.

Issue(s) considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Head of Public Protection and Housing submitted a report outlining details of the proposed Housing Capital Programme for 2006/08 and drew attention to Council's success with three Single Housing Investment Pot bids (two in partnership with the other Tees Valley Authority's and one individually). Details of each of the bids were outlined in the reports.

It was highlighted that whilst there had been success with three bids there had been a slight reduction in housing capital finance for renovation and insulation work and reduced flexibility in spending the grant as a result of the bidding process. It was also, despite success in attracting funding, not going to be possible to achieve decent homes targets, with a shortfall of approximately £300000 annually. It was also noted that:

- The move from the formulaic approach it was becoming increasingly complex to access housing capital funds and it was anticipated that the Council's bids would have to significantly improve, to show further innovative approaches, to achieve success. The Regional Housing Board was, however, fully aware of the issues facing Hartlepool and supportive of Hartlepool's projects.
- Should sufficient funding not be available from the Regional Housing Board after 2008 the Council would face significant and difficult decisions over funding and performance targets for housing.

Decision

The Housing Capital Programme for 2006/08 was approved and the financial issues around achieving decent homes targets noted.

91. Private Sector Housing Renewal Assistance Policy – Head of Public Protection and Housing

Type of Decision

Key decision (tests i and ii apply)

Purpose of Report

To consider the amendment of the Private Sector Renewal Assistance Policy to take into account government strategic and funding objectives.

Issues considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Head of Public Protection and Housing reported that the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 gave Councils' discretion over the types and amounts of assistance they could provide for the improvement, repair, acquisition and demolition of private houses. The ability to provide financial assistance was, however, subject to the availability of external funding and to secure central government funding for 2006-08, authority's were required to submit bids to the North East Housing Board.

Councils were also expected to investigate the use of alternative funding methods and in particular, the use of loans rather than, or in addition to, grants. In order to make progress towards maximising available funding it was being suggested that the opportunity should be taken to introduce assistance in the form of part loan/part grant. This would be 70% grant and 30% loan, be interest-free and entered as a Land Registry charge on the property with a condition for repayment upon the sale or disposal of the property.

Detail of the following areas of assistance to be affected by the proposals were outlined in the report and approval of the proposals sought:

Renovation Grants
Reoccupation Grants
Empty Homes Partnership Fund
HomePlus Grants
Warm Front Top-Up Grants

Following consideration of the report the Portfolio Holder indicated that whilst this was the route down which the Council would have to travel it would not be the way given a choice.

Decision

- i) The Private Sector Renewal Assistance Policy was approved as outlined in the report.
- ii) The introduction of grant/interest-free loans was approved, with their impact to be monitored and a review report brought back to the Portfolio Holder before April 2007.

92. Vehicular Access Along Public Footpath No. 4, Seaton Parish (Blackberry Lane) – Director of Adult and Community Services

Type of Decision

Non-key.

Purpose of Report

To seek approval to prevent vehicular access along Public Footpath No 4, Seaton (also known as Blackberry Lane) whilst the Council seeks to register private vehicular rights for allotment tenants at the Land Registry.

Issues considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Director of Adult and Community Services submitted a report outlining the route of the footpath in question and a history of vehicular use since 1960 to access Station Lane allotments.

A highway barrier with padlock was erected by Hartlepool Borough Council in 2000 to prevent fly tipping and illegal use of the Public Footpath by motorbikes, with keys given to the allotment tenants and two private residents to the south of the allotments. However, a request by residents in 2004 for clarification of legal and technical points relating to the footpath and vehicular access resulted in an investigation into ownership of the land over which the Public Footpath runs and associated private rights of access. Despite strenuous efforts it had not been possible establish ownership of the land between Station Lane and Network Rail's land and the Council or any legal rights of private vehicular access.

In view of this situation and in order to take a fair and even-handed approach to all users and adjacent landowners, the Council was seeking to prevent all vehicular access at this time by changing the padlock on the highway barrier. This would allow time for the issue of a Statutory Declaration to the Land Registry to register private vehicular rights for allotment tenants only across this land and once this was complete the padlock would be changed and keys issued to allotment tenants. In relation to private landowners, however, they would be required to claim their own private vehicular rights of access which when proven would result in the issue of a key to the gate.

The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that this was the correct course of action and requested that the issue be dealt with quickly.

Decision

Prevention of vehicular access along Public Footpath No 4, Seaton (also known as Blackberry Lane) whilst the Council seeks to register private vehicular rights for allotment tenants at the Land Registry was approved.

93. Creation of a New Public Bridleway at North Hart Farm, Hart Parish – Director of Adult and Community Services

Type of Decision

Non-key.

Issues considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Director of Adult and Community Services indicated that the item was to be withdrawn as the decision sought was outside the Portfolio Holder's remit. The issue was to be referred to the Planning Committee for further consideration.

Decision

The item was withdrawn

94. Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) – Head of Public Protection and Housing

Type of Decision

Non-key.

Purpose of Report

To outline the provisions of the Housing Act 2004 in relation to Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs).

Issues considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Head of Public Protection and Housing reported that in addition to existing Council powers to secure the re-occupation of empty dwellings the ability to make Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO) was to come into effect from 6 April 2006. It was intended that this would be an additional tool to help tackle the problems associated with long term empty dwellings, and would be used along side voluntary leasing agreements. Details of the criteria for the implementation the orders, the types available, grounds for authorisation exceptions and financial implications were outlined in the report.

EDMO's were to provide a useful additional tool for dealing with problematic long-term properties and could act as a deterrent. It, however, anticipated that agreements would be reached with proprietors before the final EDMO stage and suggested that as the Council no longer had a role in the management of housing it would be necessary to work with a partner housing provider in order to manage properties subject to EDMO's. In view of this it would be beneficial to establish arrangements

with a registered social landlord both for the managing of properties and as a possible agency to manage other dwellings on a voluntary leasing basis.

The Portfolio Holder was clear in his view that he felt that even with the new orders the powers available to the Council to deal with derelict properties did not go far enough. In addition to this, in relation to the selection of a registered social landlord with which to enter into a management agreement it was confirmed that a tendering process would be undertaken and a further report presented to the Portfolio Holder for his consideration.

Decision

- i) It was agreed that the decision to apply to a Residential Property Tribunal for an Empty Dwelling Order would be made by the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Housing Services.
- ii) It was agreed that discussions to establish suitable arrangements for managing properties that are subject to EDMOs.

95. Housing Health and Safety Rating System and Enforcement of Housing Conditions – Head of Public Protection and Housing

Type of Decision

Non-key.

Purpose of Report

To outline the provisions of the Housing Act 2004 and the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (England) Regulations 2005, with regard to enforcement of housing conditions in the private rented sector.

Issues considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Head of Public Protection and Housing submitted a report outlining the background to the introduction of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) on the 6th April 2006 as a replacement for the fitness standard.

The HHSRS was to be based on statistical data on the impact of housing conditions on health with an assessment of the likelihood of an occurrence that could cause harm and the probable severity of the outcome of such an occurrence within a 12-month period. Dwellings were to be assessed to identifying if any of 29 hazards present were present with each hazard scored and placed in one of 10 bands A to J. Hazards scoring within a band A, B or C were classified as Category 1 Hazards, which the local

authority had a duty to act upon, whilst those falling in bands D to J were to be known as Category 2 Hazards which could be dealt with at the authority's discretion. Details of each of the hazards, with an indication of the vulnerable person to which the hazard relates were outlined in the report together with a summary of enforcement action available and options available in the event of non-compliance with a notice or order.

Attention was drawn to the options available to the Local Housing Authority to make reasonable charges to recover administrative and other expenses incurred in taking enforcement action. Whilst it was estimated that charges could be around £40 per hour for officer time the Government had not set a maximum charge and in the interests of fairness a maximum charge of £200 was being recommended. It was also noted in relation to the delegation of powers that the most junior member of staff to be responsible for the service of Improvement Notices, Hazard Awareness Notices, Emergency Prohibition Orders and taking Emergency Remedial Actions to be the Senior Environmental Health Officer (Housing). With regards to the use of Demolition Orders and the declaration of Clearance Areas it was recommended that the Portfolio Holder should be responsible for Housing Services. Full details of the delegation scheme in relation to taking action with regards to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System under the provisions of the Housing Act 2004 were also outlined in the report.

In relation to the impact of the new system it was anticipated that the greatest issue would be a rise in the number of landlords expected to provide heating systems and/or energy efficiency measures and to deal with hazards resulting from damp and mould growth. This could result in legal challenges from landlords who were required to comply with more onerous requests than previously. An increase in dissatisfaction from tenants whose properties did not meet the criteria for action was also expected, however, every effort was to be made to minimise this.

Following consideration of the report the Portfolio Holder expressed concern regarding the use of the term 'most junior officer with delegated powers' and requested that this be considered and an alternative reported back. The Portfolio Holder also requested that:

- Power to authorise a person for power of entry be delegated to the Head of Public Protection and Housing in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder.
- Regular reports on the work of the HHSRS be presented to the Portfolio Holder.
- The £200.00 maximum enforcement charge was too low and that the per hour charge for officer time be set at £50.00, not £40.00 as suggested, with indications that the charge would be increased if necessary.

Decision

- i) That the introduction of a charge for enforcement when landlords make no attempt to comply with informal action and formal action had to be taken be approved.
- ii) That when informal action proceeds formal action, landlords be notified that a charge would be levied in respect of formal action where there had been a failure to comply with informal action.
- iii) That a charge of £50 per hour to cover officer enforcement costs be levied, with a maximum enforcement charge of £200 per dwelling, in addition to any other professional costs for reports, etc.
- iv) That the level of charges be reviewed annually.
- v) That formal action in respect of Category 2 hazards only be taken where:
 - The Council was already dealing with Category 1 hazards at the premises, and the hazard rating falls within Band D; or
 - There was a likelihood that the condition would deteriorate within a year resulting in a Category 1 Hazard.
- vi) That for Hazards falling in Bands E to J, the Council would continue to notify landlords by means of an informal letter that remedial works were required, with the occupying tenant to be advised that formal action would only be considered if conditions deteriorated.
- vii) The scheme of delegation, appended to the report, was approved subject to the amendment of the delegation for 'Authorised Person for Power of Entry' to read the Head of Public Protection and Housing in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder.

96. Progress of the Supporting People Programme – Head of Public Protection and Housing

Type of Decision

Non-key.

Purpose of Report

To outline progress on the implementation of the Supporting People Programme since the Audit Commission inspection in October/November 2005.

Issues considered by the Portfolio Holder

The Head of Public Protection and Housing reported that as part of the Audit Commission inspection of the Supporting People (S.P.) service a number of concerns were identified in relation to the governance, processes and lack of progress in the administration of the S.P. Programme.

The Portfolio Holder was advised that substantial progress had been made since the inspection to address the concerns raised with the formulation and approval of an action/implement plan and the introduction of policies and procedures to provide a framework to enable service reviews. Details of the policies approved by the Commissioning Body (CB) were outlined in the report with particular attention drawn to the Communication Strategy, the purpose of which was to establish and maintain communication processes for the C.B. and the target audience. Within the Communications Strategy it was agreed the minutes of each C.B. would be forwarded to the Portfolio Holder for information and in accordance with this requirement copies of the minutes of the meetings held on the 17th January and 14th February 2006 were appended to the report.

In relation to service reviews undertaken the Portfolio Holder was advised that 38 had been completed and that a further 22 to be presented to the C.B (14 on the 14th March and the remaining 8 on the 28th March). Whilst this meant that all service reviews would be completed and approved by the CB in time for submission to the ODPM by the 31st March 2006 deadline it was expected that a further inspection of the Supporting People Service would be undertaken in the summer of 2007. With substantial work required before the inspection to improve the current rating as a 'poor' service, with uncertain prospect for improvement, concern was expressed that it was unlikely that satisfactory progress would be made without the inclusion of a dedicated officer to co-ordinate the various actions needed. It was recognised that this needed to be addressed in the near future, and could be the subject of a further report once the future of Housing Services in general, was clearer. It was also expected that a consultant's report on the future of Housing Services would be made available shortly.

Following consideration of the information provided the Portfolio Holder emphasised the importance of his awareness of the work of the Commissioning Body and it was agreed that an invitation would be extended to him to attend all future meetings of the body in addition to receiving the minutes. In addition to this the Portfolio Holder asked that his congratulations be passed onto staff for their work in achieving what had been done.

Decision

The Portfolio Holder noted the contents of the report and progress made.

J A BROWN

CHIEF SOLICITOR

PUBLICATION DATE: 13th April 2006