

Housing and Community Services Committee

Wednesday 13 January 2010 7.30pm

Council Chamber
Runnymede Civic Centre, Addlestone

Members of the Committee

Councillors P J Waddell (Chairman), Mrs R M Denby and J M Edwards (Vice Chairmen);
J R Ashmore, C J Chapman, R J Edis, P A Francis, R N Jones, L C Pouyanne and
A S T Ridge-Newman

AGENDA

Notes:

- i) Any report on the Agenda involving confidential information (as defined by section 100A(3) of the Local Government Act 1972) must be discussed in private. Any report involving exempt information (as defined by section 100I of the Local Government Act 1972), whether it appears in Part 1 or Part 2 below, may be discussed in private but only if the Committee so resolves.
- ii) The relevant 'background papers' are listed after each report in Part 1. Enquiries about any of the Agenda reports and background papers should be directed in the first instance to **Mr M L White, Department of Administration and Leisure Department, Runnymede Civic Centre, Station Road, Addlestone (Tel: Direct Line: 01932 425623). (Email: malcolm.white@runnymede.gov.uk).**
- iii) Agendas and Minutes are available on a subscription basis. For details, please ring Mr B A Fleckney on 01932 425620. Agendas and Minutes for all the Council's Committees may also be viewed on www.runnymede.gov.uk.
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

TERM	EXPLANATION
ACC	Surrey Adults and Community Care Services formerly known as Social Services.
ALMO	Arms Length Management Organisation. This is an organisation established specifically to manage Council stock. The properties remain Council owned and tenants retain their secure tenancies. This can provide opportunities for extra funds to meet the Decent Homes Standard if all government requirements are satisfied.
BHM	Balancing Housing Markets. This assessment looks at the whole housing market, considering the extent to which supply and demand are “balanced” across tenure and property size.
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic Groups. This is a collective name used by various bodies.
BNAM	‘Basic Needs Assessment Model’. This is the main method for calculating affordable housing requirements suggested in Government guidance – <i>“Local Housing Needs Assessment: A guide to Good Practice”</i> .
CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessment. A way of assessing local public services in England. It examines how well councils are working together with other public bodies to meet the needs of the people they serve. CAA is a joint assessment made by a group of six independent watchdogs including the Audit Commission. The first results are due out in December 2009.
CLG	Communities and Local Government. Government department responsible for local government and housing functions. See the CLG website at www.communities.gov.uk .
COMPACT	This is a requirement of Central Government. It entails developing an agreement between the Council and tenants or voluntary organisations about the way in which they will be consulted on the services they receive or deliver.
DFG	Disabled Facilities Grant. This is a grant made available to disabled persons to provide adaptations to their property. Dependent on the type of work, it is a mandatory grant. The amount of grant awarded is subject to a test of resources of the disabled person.
DHCS	Director of Housing and Community Services.
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions (Government Department)
ESP	Existing Satisfactory Property. This scheme involved working with a Housing Association to purchase low cost housing in the private sector. Originally the scheme involved the repurchase of ex-Right to Buy Council properties. However, the scheme was broadened to include any low cost housing in the Borough.
GOSE	The Government Office for the South East. This is the local office of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (formerly the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions) for the South East region of England. Its role includes development of the Regional Housing Strategy.
HMO	House in Multiple Occupation. In general terms this is a property that is let to three or more tenants. However, for an exact definition reference must be made to the Housing Act 2004.

HOMES AND COMMUNITIES AGENCY (HCA)	This is the National Housing Agency for England. It is a Government Agency and has replaced the Housing Corporation.
HRA	Housing Revenue Account. This is a statutory account that sets out the expenditure and income arising from the provision of social housing by the Local Authority as a landlord. Expenditure in the HRA includes repairs and improvements, and management expenses. Income is mainly from rents. HRA subsidy is a significant item in the HRA.
LDF	Local Development Framework. Government replacement for the Local Plan.
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership – Leads on the Community Strategy.
NROSH	The National Register of Social Housing (NROSH) is a system for collecting social housing data on individual properties directly from local authorities and housing associations.
PFI	Private Finance Initiative. A long-term contractual private/public partnership under which the private sector takes on the risks associated with the delivery of public services in exchange for payments tied to agreed standards of performance. This can provide an opportunity to raise extra funds for investment in housing stock. Several Councils are currently acting as pathfinders.
PPG3	Planning Policy Guidance. This is Guidance issued by the Secretary of State detailing National Planning Policy within existing legislation. There are many examples of Guidance and PPG3 is the one that is the most relevant to housing. This sets out the requirements relating to the provision of affordable housing.
RARP	Runnymede Accommodation Referral Panel. This group has been established to assess the accommodation requirements of people with mental health, learning disability and physical disabilities. The group considers each individual case and makes a recommendation as to the level of support required. Representatives on the group include the following: Officer from the Borough Council's Housing Department. Officer from the Community Support Team (Social Services). Officer from the Community Mental Health Team (Social Services/Health). Occupational Therapist.
RCRA	Runnymede Council Residents Association, formerly the Tenants' and Leaseholders Services Group. This group was formed in February 1999. The members of the group are Council Tenants and Leaseholders. They meet prior to each Housing and Community Services meeting to consider policy and management issues that impact on Tenants and Leaseholders.
RHB	Regional Housing Board. The RHB has been established by the Government to prepare and oversee the Regional Housing Strategy. The Strategy for the region will set out the approach to housing investment and give a clear framework for spending decisions. One RHB exists for the whole of the South East of England.
RSL	Registered Social Landlord. This is a Housing Association which is entitled to bid for Social Housing Grant. The RSL is established for the purpose of the provision, construction, improvement or management of social housing and is a not for profit organisation.
RTB	Right to Buy. The regulations that allow Council tenants to purchase the freehold or leasehold of their home.

SAP	Standard Assessment Procedure. This is the Government's procedure for assessing the energy efficiency of a property.
SHG	Social Housing Grant. This is the main public subsidy paid to Registered Social Landlords by Central Government, through the Homes and Communities Agency to finance new homes. It can be used to pay for rented schemes as well as low cost home ownership schemes.
SMART	How targets should be set if they are to be effective – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely.
SNHSG	The Special Needs Housing Strategy Group was established to look at the level of housing needed by people with special needs. This includes those with mental health problems, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, young people leaving care, victims of domestic violence, those with drug and alcohol problems, and older people. The group has representatives from a number of different agencies. The Chairman from each of the Local Special Needs Forums is also represented on the Special Needs Housing Strategy Group.
TPAS	Tenant Participation Advisory Service. The independent tenant advisers. Their role is to help tenants understand the complexities of the stock options and to audit the Council's statements and figures.

1. FIRE PRECAUTIONS

The Chairman will read the Fire Precautions which set out the procedures to be followed in the event of fire or other emergency.

2. NOTIFICATION OF CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

3. MINUTES

To confirm and sign, as a correct record, the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5 November 2009. These Minutes were included in the December 2009 Summons/Minutes Book.

4. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

If Members have an interest in an item please record the interest on the form circulated with this Agenda and hand it to the Legal Representative or Committee Administrator at the start of the meeting. A supply of the form will also be available from the Committee Administrator at meetings. Members who have previously declared interests which are recorded in the Minutes to be considered at this meeting need not repeat the declaration when attending the meeting. Members need take no further action unless the item in which they have an interest becomes the subject of debate, in which event the Member must leave the room if the interest is personal and prejudicial.

6. CONCESSIONARY BUS FARES : INCREASE IN PAYMENTS TO BUS OPERATORS (DF)
(Minutes of the Corporate Management Committee dated 30 October 2008, page 355, para 273 of the December 2008 minute book)

1. **Purpose of Report**

1.1 **The purpose of this report is to**

- a) **inform the Committee of an increase in the payments made to bus operators for concessionary fares;**
- b) **request a supplementary estimate for the increase in costs in 2009/10 and note the impact in 2010/11;**

- c) **set out the Government proposals to change the age limit for qualification for a bus pass; and**
- d) **report the Government announcement on the proposed changes to responsibilities for administering the concession following the consultation on this issue earlier in 2009.**

2. Background Information

- 2.1 The enhanced statutory minimum bus concession commenced on 1 April 2008. The concession is for free off-peak local bus travel anywhere in England for people aged 60 and over and eligible disabled people, who are resident in England. This applies to travel from 9.30am to 11pm on weekdays, and all day at weekends and on bank holidays.
- 2.2 The 11 District Councils in Surrey, together with the County Council, operate a joint countywide scheme of concessionary bus travel. This is a long established partnership arrangement.
- 2.3 The Surrey partnership is advised by consultants – the TAS Partnership – who advise on arrangements with the bus operators and collect and audit data from the bus companies. The arrangements with TAS were reported to the Housing and Community Services Committee in November 2007.
- 2.4 On 4 November, the Minister of State for Transport, Sadiq Khan, announced the launch of a consultation regarding the distribution of the concessionary travel special grant allocations to local authorities for 2010/11. The consultation paper proposes a revised methodology for distributing the special grant in 2010/11. The change would reduce the amount of grant receivable under the three-year settlement by Runnymede Borough Council in 2010/11 from £170,000 to £100,000, a reduction of £70,000. A report was submitted to the Corporate Management Committee meeting on 26 November 2009 setting out a proposed response. The response is reproduced at Appendix 'A'.
- 2.5 In April 2009, the Department for Transport published a paper entitled *Possible Changes to the Administration of Concessionary Travel*. This Committee approved a response to the Consultation Paper at its meeting on 16 June 2009.

3. Payments to Bus Operators

- 3.1 The major cost element in providing this service is payments to bus operators. This is to reimburse the bus operators for income foregone as a result of accepting concessionary fare passengers.
- 3.2 Bus operators are reimbursed on the basis of actual usage, with the bus operators being reimbursed 65% of the normal fare for each journey undertaken. Each Surrey District is charged for journeys starting within their Borough boundary.
- 3.3 TAS has now provided data on the second quarter usage and cost apportionment for 2009/10. The result is a significant increase in the payments to bus operators payable by Runnymede. The report made by TAS is copied in Appendix 'B'.
- 3.4 The TAS report states the introduction of new ticket machines by the new local operator "Abellio" have resulted in a significant increase in recording of concessionary journeys. Paragraphs 2.1.4 and 2.1.5 of the TAS report explain the reasons more fully.
- 3.5 The original estimate for payments to bus operators in 2009/10 was £330,000. The result of the increased recording of journeys is an increased annual cost to Runnymede estimated at £64,000 in 2009/10. A supplementary estimate will be required to finance this increased cost.
- 3.6 Furthermore the full year effect for 2010/11 is likely to see RBC annual costs increase from £330,000 to around £415,000 (excluding the impact of inflation). The potential reduction in Department for Transport (DfT) special grant is £70,000 and, taken together,

this could mean that in 2010/11 RBC is worse off by £155,000 compared to the position in the Financial Forecast.

- 3.7 The Financial Forecast included the risk that the transfer of responsibility of this service to the County Council would result in an increase in net expenditure. This is because of the loss of both the special grant and the potential reduction in Formula Grant would exceed the transfer of cost. However, the combined impact of the reduction in grant and the increased payments to bus operators is more than the worst case scenario outlined in the Financial Forecast.
- 3.8 Clearly, this is a very unwelcome development and will add to the savings required by the Council to balance income and expenditure in the short to medium term.
- 3.9 A further response has been sent to the DfT pointing out the impact of this cost increase on the Council, and explaining that this is further evidence that a change in the special grant arrangements would be unfair.
4. Age limit qualification for a bus pass
- 4.1 The Chancellor announced in his Pre-Budget Report 2009 that £60 million would be saved by 2012-13 from the costs of concessionary travel by aligning eligibility with forthcoming changes in the state pension age. No one currently receiving these benefits will be affected.
- 4.2 It has been reported that the age limit for eligibility for a concessionary fare pass will rise from April 2010. The age limit is currently 60. The limit will rise in stages starting at 60 years and one month in April 2010. Thereafter, the age limit will be raised by a month every two months until 2020 when it will be in line with the pensionable age for men and women of 65.
- 4.3 It is not clear whether the savings from this change will accrue to central Government, i.e. by paying local authorities less grant, or can be enjoyed by local authorities directly.
- 4.4 It is only possible to make a very broad estimate of the savings from this change in 2010/11. Based on a very crude apportionment of existing costs, it could save around £5,000 in 2010/11.
5. Future responsibility of the scheme
- 5.1 The DfT received over 200 responses to the consultation paper it issued in April 2009 on the way in which concessionary travel will be administered from 2011. An announcement on the outcome of this consultation was published on 9 December 2009, and this is published at Appendix 'C'.
- 5.2 The Government have decided to shift responsibility for administering the statutory minimum concession from shire district councils to county councils. The change in the administrative arrangements will come into force from 1 April 2011. The DfT will present orders under section 9 of the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 to Parliament to enact the changes.
- 5.3 The Financial Forecast included the risk that the transfer of responsibility of this service to the County Council would result in an increase in net expenditure. This is because of the loss of the special grant and also the potential reduction in Formula Grant which would exceed the transfer of cost. The Forecast indicated a potential net expenditure increase of £100,000. The DfT announcement states that the DCLG will consult on how the financial implications of the change will be dealt with in the next local government settlement.

6. Equalities

- 6.1 The part of the report on payments to bus operators deals with the financial aspects of the concessionary fares scheme only. There should not be a negative impact on equalities from the purely financial aspect of the proposals.
- 6.2 The proposals to increase the age qualification limit clearly will have an impact. However, this is a Government change. The financial constraints on the Council mean that it is not realistic to use our discretionary powers to offset this change.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 The Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 came in to effect on 1 April 2008. Under this Act, travel concession authorities (District Councils in Shire areas) must provide all residents over the age of 60 and people with qualifying disabilities with free travel on buses between 9.30 am to 11 pm on week days and all day at weekends. Bus operators are obliged to honour the statutory concessions but must be reimbursed on a cost-neutral basis for doing so.
- 7.2 The Transport Act 1985 provides local authorities with discretionary powers to extend the scope of these concessions, although operators cannot be compelled to participate in an enhanced scheme.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -

the Corporate Management Committee be requested to approve a supplementary estimate in the sum of £64,000 to meet the additional cost of reimbursing bus operators for concessionary travel in the 2009/10 financial year

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

Report from TAS on "Surrey Concessionary Fares: Quarter 2/2009 Reimbursement Costs", December 2009 (DF)

7. REVENUE ESTIMATES FOR 2010/11 (DF)

Members are asked to consider the draft Revenue Estimates for 2010/11.

A budget is the expression in financial terms of the Council's policies over the next year and is a statement of intention against which achievement can be compared. The main objectives of budgeting are:

- Satisfaction of statutory requirements
- Determining the amount which needs to be raised from Council Tax or rents
- Assisting in the planning and policy making process
- Policy implementation and control
- A means of measurement, and
- Strategic planning

The report is attached as Appendix 'D'. This Appendix is circulated separately with the Agenda to Members of this Committee and relevant Officers only. A copy has been placed on the website for other Members and public. The estimates are separated into the following sections:

- i) Housing Revenue Account (Annex '1', pages 1 – 38);
- ii) General Fund Housing Services (Annex '2', pages 39 – 64);
- iii) Community Services (Annex '3', pages 65 -101); and
- iv) Current and proposed fees and charges (Annex '4', pages 102 – 107).
- v) Assumptions used in setting the budgets for 2010/11 (Annex '5'. pages 108 - 113)
- vi) Equality Impact Assessment (Annex '6', pages 114 - 116)

The Officers' Recommendation covers all the above service areas.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that –

- i) the draft Revenue Estimates for 2010/11 be approved and the Corporate Management Committee be requested to make provision accordingly; and**
- ii) the proposed increases in rents and charges for 2010/11, as set out in Annex '4' to the Estimates, be approved to be effective either from the first rent week of April 2010 or 1 April 2010 as appropriate.**

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

- 1. Draft Housing Revenue Account (Item 8) and Draft Housing Revenue Account Subsidy Determinations 2010-2011: (DCLG) dated 9 December 2009.
 - 2. Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Circulars HB/CTB S2/2009, dated January 2009; HB/CTB S4/2009 revised) dated June 2009, and HB/CTB S6/2009 dated December 2009.
 - 3. Letters from Supporting People Team on funding from April 2009 dated 1 April 2009 and 5 March 2009.
 - 4. The Homelessness Revenue Grant determination 2009/10 (No 31/1362), DCLG, 20 April 2009.
8. CONSULTATION DOCUMENT ON THE NEW REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL HOUSING IN ENGLAND (DHCS)
- 1. Purpose of Report
 - 1.1 **The purpose of the report is to consider the Tenant Services Authority's consultation paper on the regulation of Social Housing in England and approve a response.**
 - 2. Background Information
 - 2.1 The Department of Communities & Local Government has recently confirmed the Secretary of State's intentions to bring local authority landlords within the regulatory requirements of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) from the 1 April 2010. The effect of this is that local authorities will be required to meet the new standards from the 1 April 2010.
 - 2.2 At the last meeting of this Committee, a document received from the TSA outlining the proposals was considered. The TSA have now followed this up with a new paper which outlines the 10 principles which will shape the new regulatory regime. It also sets out the 6 standards that the TSA will use to regulate Social Housing providers.
 - 3. Report

- 3.1 The TSA have produced 3 documents on the new regulatory framework. A copy of each of these has been placed in the Members' Room.
- 3.2 The 10 principles to shape regulation are as follows:
- i) National standards will be established based on clear criteria.
 - ii) The TSA's national standards will be clear, succinct, based on outcomes and avoid prescribed detailed processes.
 - iii) The national standards framework will require providers to agree local standards with their tenants for the areas of service that are relevant to them locally.
 - iv) The TSA expects providers to understand and respond to particular needs of their tenants and to demonstrate how they have taken into account the needs of tenants across the 6 diversity groups (ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age, gender and religion/ beliefs).
 - v) The TSA will promote transparency in reporting of performance by providers for tenants in Local Authorities (in their strategic role) in the areas they operate.
 - vi) The TSA have stated that good governance is a universal principle and is essential to the quality of service delivery, financial robustness and value for money.
 - vii) The TSA want to promote effective forms of independent validation, audit and bench-marking of performance to encourage providers to continually improve and free the best from unnecessary red tape.
 - viii) For the national service delivery standards, the TSA will focus their resources in 2010/11 on identifying and addressing the worst performing providers, where tenants are being let down by their providers' performance.
 - ix) The standards framework must support the principles of sector led improvement. Where problems are identified the provider will usually be offered an opportunity for speedy self improvement.
 - x) Registration criteria should encourage new entry into the Social Housing sector consistent with the TSA's objectives in the 2008 Act.
- 3.3 The TSA have rationalised the 14 standard areas that were proposed earlier this year into 6 overarching standards. These are referred to in greater detail below.
- 3.4 Local authorities and other social housing providers will be expected to set out by October 2010 how they plan to consult their tenants on local standards that will exceed the national standards. These standards will need to be in place by April 2011 at the latest.
- 3.5 Landlords will be required to publish an annual report of standards that sets out clearly performance against both the national standards and any local standards that have been set. Landlords will also be required to provide details of their improvement plans for the stock. The TSA intends to publish the assessments of landlords' performance but it is still considering how it will grade them. There is ultimately, however, an intention to give tenants the opportunity to compare performance between landlords.
- 3.6 One of the three TSA documents sets out its approach to regulation and the use of its powers under the Housing & Regeneration Act 2008. It has made it clear that these powers will be used to tackle the worst performing landlords as judged against national standards.

- 3.7 A large section of the main consultation document is dedicated to how the TSA intend to use their powers to set standards and codes of practice. The requirements are broken down into both national and local standards.
- 3.8 National Standards
- 3.8.1 It is proposed that the national standards will cover the following areas:
- i) Tenant involvement in empowerment.
 - ii) Home (i.e. the quality of repair and maintenance of the property).
 - iii) Tenancy (i.e. allocations, rents and tenure).
 - iv) Neighbourhood and community (neighbourhood management, local area co-operation and anti social behaviour).
 - v) Value for money.
 - vi) Governance and financial viability.
- 3.9 The standards for rents and governance/financial viability will only apply to RSLs and not to Local Authorities. A copy of all of the other standards is attached at Appendix 'E'. The following is a brief summary of the standards.
- 3.10 Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standards
- 3.10.1 The TSA require landlords to offer opportunities for the involvement of tenants in the management of their homes. It requires landlords to support tenants and build capacity to allow tenants to make meaningful contributions. It makes the point that *involvement* and *empowerment* are not the same things and that *empowerment* requires a more proactive approach which allows for tenants to take an active part in making decisions regarding the services they receive. There is also an expectation that landlords will understand their tenants' requirements by ensuring that they have meaningful and up to date information about their tenants' needs.
- 3.11 Home Standard
- 3.11.1 This standard will require landlords to ensure all homes are warm, weatherproof and have modern facilities. It also explicitly requires homes to meet the Decent Homes standard or higher and for the repairs and maintenance service landlords will be required to have an objective to complete repairs right first time.
- 3.12 Tenancy Standard
- 3.12.1 This standard covers the allocation of properties, rents and tenure. However, it should be noted that the requirements in relation to rents do not apply to Local Authorities.
- 3.12.2 Under this standard landlords must let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way.
- 3.13 Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- 3.13.1 This standard will require landlords to tackle anti social behaviour effectively in partnership with others. They will also be required to keep communal areas clean and safe.
- 3.14 Value for Money Standard
- 3.14.1 This standard requires landlords to demonstrate that they are managing resources cost effectively, efficiently and providing quality services.

3.14.2 Landlords will be required to report to their tenants on how they are allocating and prioritising their expenditure each year and this information will also have to be submitted to the TSA.

4. Local Standards

4.1 The TSA will require that landlords supplement the national standards with local standards which they develop in partnership with their tenants. Specific service areas that landlords will be expected to develop local targets for are as follows:

- i) The home standard in relation to quality of accommodation and repairs and maintenance.
- ii) The neighbourhood and community standard in relation to neighbourhood management and anti social behaviour.
- iii) The value for money standard.

4.2 Landlords will be expected to consult with tenants and establish for each of these areas the following:

- i) Local performance targets.
- ii) How performance will be monitored and communicated to and scrutinised by tenants.
- iii) How performance will be compared with other registered providers.
- iv) What happens if local standards are not met.
- v) Arrangements for periodically reviewing the local standards.

4.3 Landlords will be required to publish their plans for the development of local standards.

5. Monitoring and Compliance

5.1 The TSA has indicated that it will allow the monitoring and compliance arrangements to evolve over time and that they wish to start initially with landlords undertaking their own self-assessments.

5.2 When deciding whether to use their regulatory powers the TSA will have regard to complaints received, particularly where these include a failure of the landlord to agree standards with tenants groups or a failure to respond to a group of tenants' complaints about estates cleaning and tackling anti social behaviour. The TSA will work closely with the Audit Commission who will undertake any inspections that might be required of landlords who are not performing adequately.

5.3 The TSA has the following general powers in relation to Local Authorities who are under performing:

- i) Direction to Homes & Communities Agency not to invest.
- ii) Collect information and documents.
- iii) Place restrictions on disposals or transfers of property.

5.4 The Government also intends to give the TSA the following additional powers in relation to Local Authorities:

- i) Appoint advisors to a Local Authority.
- ii) Enforcement Notice action.
- iii) Censure of Local Authority during or following an Inquiry.

- iv) Direct a tender of management.
- v) Direct a transfer of management.

6. Request for Feedback

- 6.1 The TSA have asked for feedback on their proposals and want details to be submitted by the 5 February 2010. The document at Appendix 'F' sets out the key consultation questions that the TSA has raised and the proposed response. Members are requested to consider this response and to either approve it or suggest amendments.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 In the last consultation response the Council made the point that if Government continues to take £6 million of negative HRA Subsidy from the Housing Revenue Account each year then it will be difficult to achieve the same standards as other Social Landlords. In the longer term, the payment of negative subsidy will affect the Council's ability to maintain the Decent Homes standard and also impact on a range of other service standards. It is therefore important that this point is made, again, in response to this consultation.

- 7.2 Although some of the requirements within the standards are already met there will undoubtedly be new areas that will require additional resources:

- i) The Council already has Tenant Participation arrangements in place but it seems probable that these will have to be significantly enhanced in order to satisfy the TSA requirements. This may entail appointing a dedicated Officer for tenant participation. The cost of this new post would have to be met from the HRA, thereby reducing the funds available for improvements to homes.
- ii) It is understandable that tenants might wish to have repairs fixed on the first visit and, this is a current aim, but to achieve this for all repairs is going to be difficult and is likely to increase the cost of the service. This is because contractors will need to retain large stocks of components and their contract price will reflect this.
- iii) A tenants' census has already been undertaken to identify tenants' characteristics but further work will be required to achieve and maintain the level of information expected by the TSA (see below).

8. Equality Issues

- 8.1 It is very clear from the consultation document that the TSA expects landlords to be aware of tenant's ethnicity, disability, sexuality, gender, age and religion and to provide responsive services that take account of these needs.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 The TSA has now provided more detail on the standards that they would expect Social Landlords to achieve. They are inviting feedback on these prior to implementing them in April 2010. The new requirements will impact on the Council's services and may require additional resources, however, it is too soon to determine the extent of any new requirements. Officers will carry out an assessment of current performance against the requirements and if further resources are needed a further report will be brought to the Committee.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -

the Committee approves or amends the proposed response to the consultation document as set out at Appendix 'F'.

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

None

9. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY (DHCS)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 **The purpose of the report is to approve a new Empty Homes Strategy for Runnymede.**

2. Background Information

2.1 The Government is keen that Local Authorities should compile and publish Empty Homes Strategies. Planning Policy Guidance note 3 states that Local Authorities should *"identify and bring into residential use empty housing and buildings in line with Local Housing Empty Homes Strategies and where appropriate, acquire properties under compulsory purchase procedures."*

3. Report

3.1 Long term empty homes can blight an area and cause problems with squatting, vandalism and anti-social behaviour. It is therefore in everyone's interest to ensure that such properties are dealt with. A new Empty Homes Strategy has therefore been prepared and is attached at Appendix 'G'.

3.2 The Strategy sets the context in which proposed action to deal with empty homes is required and concludes with a specific action plan.

3.3 The Housing Task Group that reports to the LSP has taken a particular interest in the reduction of empty homes. They considered the attached Strategy and support the proposed action.

3.4 The Committee is asked to consider the content of the Strategy, and to suggest any amendments or improvements.

4. Equality Issues

4.1 An Equality Impact Assessment on the proposed Strategy has yet to be undertaken. It is difficult to foresee any particular equality issues that might emerge at this stage, however, there will be a need for consultation and the Impact Assessment will need to be completed and shared with the Equalities Group before the Strategy is adopted. A further item will be made to this Committee if this process results in major changes. If there are no substantial changes then the Strategy will be implemented.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The Council's capital and revenue budgets for Private Sector Housing are determined by its Private Sector Renewal Strategy and Grants Policy. Both of these documents are due for renewal and will be presented to this Committee in March. It is proposed that the approach in relation to empty homes should be that the Council brings back properties into use by supporting home owners with advice and information and in rare cases through enforcement action. It is not intended that grants or loans will be made generally available to empty home owners although this matter will be considered further as part of the development of the Grants Policy.

6. Conclusions

6.1 A new Empty Homes Strategy has been compiled which sets out the current position in relation to empty properties in the Borough. It has within it an action plan for bringing units back into use. The approach is one of encouraging and supporting home owners to utilise their properties, but where this does not succeed then enforcement action will also be considered. Such cases will be referred to this Committee.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that -

subject to any comments received from the Equalities Group in relation to the Equality Impact Assessment, the Strategy at Appendix 'G' be adopted.

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

None

10. CHOICE BASED LETTINGS (DHCS)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 **The purpose of this report is to appraise the Committee of progress following the commencement of the Choice Based Lettings Scheme in November.**

2. Background Information

2.1 The Committee received a report at its November meeting advising it that the Choice Based Lettings Scheme (CBL) had commenced at the beginning of the month. The report provided details of the partnership with Spelthorne and Elmbridge Councils, together with the Elmbridge Housing Trust and A2Dominion Housing Group, together with an overview of how the scheme would operate.

2.2 As the scheme had only been operational a matter of days prior to the meeting, it was not possible to provide any details of how bids had been made or how the new arrangements had been perceived by both Officers and the public. It was agreed therefore that a further report be brought to this meeting.

3. Report

3.1 To ensure the Committee receives the most comprehensive and up to date summary of bidding statistics and outcomes, a summary of all bidding cycles, including the cycle that closes on the 4 January 2010, will be circulated at the meeting.

3.2 At the time of preparing this report, two complete cycles have been completed. It is, perhaps, too early for any meaningful patterns to have been established, but what is clear is that across all five partners, 95% of bids have been made on-line. As part of the equalities monitoring, Officers are able to break bids down into age profile, ethnicity and specific vulnerable groups. Officers are also able to monitor those applicants who have yet to bid, although early indications are that most applicants in the higher bands have been bidding for suitable properties.

3.3 The CBL 'surgeries' held in the Civic Offices were very well attended in the first week, but subsequent surgeries have been quieter, as applicants have quickly got to grips with the bidding process.

4. Legal Consideration

4.1 As indicated in the November report, the SEARCH Moves partnership took independent legal advice and is confident that the common allocations policy used by all partners meets the requirements of both statute and guidance. Policies and procedures will be kept under regular review to ensure continued compliance.

5. Equalities

5.1 As the November report indicated, Officers are aware that the shift of emphasis onto applicants having to actively bid for vacancies could adversely impact on certain vulnerable groups. Anticipating potential problems, Officers across all five partners have put in place procedures designed to overcome such difficulties, and active monitoring of vulnerable cases should ensure that nobody misses out on the opportunity to bid for a suitable vacancy.

(FOR INFORMATION)

Background Papers

None

11. WINDOW REPLACEMENT – SELECTION OF CONTRACTOR (DHCS)

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 **The purpose of the report is to advise the Committee of the selection of a contractor to undertake window replacement on the Holbrook Meadow Estate in Egham.**

2. Background Information

2.1 The old Charta Road Estate in Egham was re-developed by the Council in the early 1990's, creating a new mixed development, including the Council owned properties, properties built for sale, and the provision of a sheltered scheme by Hanover Housing Association.

2.2 The windows of the Council properties now need replacement. They are first generation, wooden double-glazed units, and by replacing them with modern PVCu doubled glazed units we will not only improve the SAP rating of the properties, but will also reduce future maintenance liabilities. Additionally, as the old units are externally beaded, the modern replacements will improve security.

3. Report

3.1 Four tenders were received: -

Anglian Windows - £176,630
Sovereign Group - £177, 728
Piper Windows - £180, 419
Radway Windows - £211,060

3.2 The two lowest tenders were subjected to a tender analysis, which confirmed that the Anglian tender had been accurately assembled. As this was the lowest price submitted, it was accepted.

3.3 The contract started in early November and is scheduled to be completed in March 2010.

4. Financial Considerations

4.1 Provision has been made in the HRA Business Plan and the 2009/10 Budget for this work.

5. Legal Consideration

5.1 Even though Officers have already accepted the lowest tender, Standing Order C9.6 requires that details of the tenders received are reported to this Committee.

6. Equalities

6.1 There are no identified equality issues relating to the acceptance of this tender.

(FOR INFORMATION)

Background Papers

None

12. RUNNYMEDE COUNCIL RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION – CHAIR'S ALLOWANCE (DHCS)

1. **Purpose of Report**
- 1.1 **To approve the payment of an allowance to the Chair of the Runnymede Council Residents' Association (RCRA).**
2. **Background Information**
- 2.1 The RCRA have been in existence since the Stock Options Appraisal exercise, formed from an amalgamation of the old Tenants' Service Group and the then newly formed group of residents that took part in the stock options consultation.
- 2.2 The RCRA have a formal constitution and appointed Officers, including a Chairman. Jenny Hill has been the Chair of the RCRA since its inception, and has worked tirelessly in promoting residents' views on all matters of Council policy and procedures. As the Chair of the RCRA she –
 - i) Attends all meetings of the Housing and Community Services Committee,
 - ii) Organises and attends all meetings of the RCRA,
 - iii) Attends the Housing Task Group (a sub group of the Local Strategic Partnership)
 - iv) Attends the Surrey-Wide involvement Group (SWIG) meetings on behalf of RBC residents,
 - v) Has taken an active role in helping to select contractors for major contracts and staff for key posts,
 - vi) Has organised responses to Government consultations aimed at tenants and attended seminars on such issues; the most recent being the TSA's 'single conversation' with tenants,
 - vii) Has supported other residents groups by providing advice and information.
3. **Report**
- 3.1 For many years the Government have encouraged local authority landlords to involve their tenants in the delivery of services. The report elsewhere on this agenda relating to the new standards to be set by the Tenant Services Authority makes it clear how important this is to the Government and how they wish to see tenants further involved and empowered to make meaningful contributions to policy. The RCRA will take a key role in taking this work forward.
- 3.2 Within the HRA are budgets to assist Officers to develop resident involvement. These budgets help support individual groups, pay for printing of the residents' magazine, '*Streets Ahead*', and the annual calendar and generally pay for any items that might be required to help support and develop participation and involvement of our tenants and leaseholders. The budget for 2010 is £16,000.
- 3.3 In the recent past, Officers have approved a modest payment to the Chair of the RCRA from within this budget. Mindful of the enormous amount of work the current Chair undertakes on behalf of tenants, Officers feel a more formal arrangement should be considered, with perhaps a more generous allowance being paid. The sum of £1,168 per annum (i.e. 50% of a Members Allowance) is suggested.
- 3.4 If this suggestion is approved, the cost would be borne by the Tenant Participation budget within the HRA.
4. **Legal Consideration**

- 4.1 Until May 2003, the Tenant's representative was a co-opted non-voting member of the Committee but Council then determined that the representative could best fulfil the role as an invitee without the need for formal co-option.
- 4.2 Paying this modest remuneration is in line with the Government "*push*" for tenant participation and can be justified under Section 2 Local Government Act 2000 ("*the well being power*").
5. Equalities
- 5.1 Officers are of the opinion that there are no specific equality issues relating to this item.
6. Conclusions
- 6.1 The current Chair devotes a large amount of her time in working with Officers to develop and improve resident involvement. The consultation paper from the Tenant Services Authority, makes it very clear that the Authority seeks to place tenants at the centre of social housing actions, thus providing opportunities for residents to become involved in the management of their housing and in making choices over services provided. This will inevitably increase the Chair's workload, and Officers feel that the current workload and future involvement should be formally recognised by the payment of an agreed allowance of £1,168 to Mrs Hill, the current Chairman.
- 6.2 If the Committee approves the principle of paying remuneration, Officers recommend that in future years the level of payment should be reviewed at the January meeting of the Committee to tie in with the consideration of Revenue Estimates. The payment should also be reviewed when Chairmanship changes so as to reflect the duties undertaken.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that –

the Committee approves the payment of £1,168 per annum to the Chair of the RCRA to be met from existing HRA budgets.

(TO RESOLVE)

Background Papers

None.

13. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATION that –

the press and public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following reports under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the reports in question would be likely to involve disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in appropriate paragraphs of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

(TO RESOLVE)

PART II

Matters involving Exempt or Confidential Information in respect of which reports have not been made available for public inspection.

a) Exempt Information Para

14. FUTURE PROVISION OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION 3

b) Confidential Information

(No reports to be considered under this heading)