

25 August 2006

Ref: 9/06 Scrutiny
Contact: Ian Gourlay
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Email: ian.gourlay@north-herts.gov.uk

To: The Members of the Scrutiny Committee: Councillor Martin Stears (Chairman); Councillor M. Paterson (Vice-Chairman); Councillors David Billing; John Bishop; S. Bloxham; P.C.W. Burt; Paul Clark; Melissa Davey; Jane Gray; David Kearns; H.M. Marshall; M.R.M. Muir; Elliot Needham; and R.L. Shakespeare-Smith.
[Substitutes: Councillors Sal Jarvis and Lorna Kercher]

You are invited to attend a

MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

to be held in

**COMMITTEE ROOM 1, COUNCIL OFFICES,
GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY**

on

TUESDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 2006

at

7.30pm

**[NOTE: A PRE-MEETING FOR MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE
WILL TAKE PLACE AT 7.00pm IN COMMITTEE ROOM 3]**

Yours sincerely,



David Miley
Democratic Services Manager

AGENDA
PART I

ITEM	PAGE
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	-
2. MINUTES To take as read and approve as a true record the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 18 July 2006.	-
3. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS Members should notify the Chairman of other business which they wish to be discussed by the Committee at the end of the business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chairman will decide whether the item(s) raised will be considered.	-
4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING PARTY WHIP DIRECTIONS) To receive from Members of the Committee any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda or any advice from a Member of this Committee concerning a party whip direction. Members should either declare a prejudicial or personal interest and are required to notify the Chairman of the nature of any interest declared. Members declaring a prejudicial interest should leave the room and not seek to influence the decision during that particular item of business.	-
5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION To receive petitions, comments and questions from members of the public. At the time of printing the agenda, no requests to speak had been received. Public participation requests received within the agreed time will be notified to Members as soon as practicable.	-
6. URGENT/GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS The Chairman to report on any urgent or general exception items which required his agreement.	-
7. CALLED-IN ITEMS To consider any matters referred to the Committee for a decision in relation to a call-in of a decision. At the time of printing the agenda, no items of business had been called-in.	-
8. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS	-
9. PRESENTATION BY THREE VALLEYS WATER PLC <i>To receive a presentation by Mr Mike Pocock – Head of Strategic Planning, Three Valleys Water PLC</i>	1

10.	QUESTIONS <i>To receive and respond to any questions either set out in the agenda or tabled at the meeting. The following question has been received:-</i> <i>(a) Area Action Plans – from Councillor David Billing</i>	7
11.	NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL – THE DRAFT FORWARD PLAN: 1 SEPTEMBER 2006 – 31 DECEMBER 2006 <i>To note items on the Council's Forward Plan and to give consideration to any items set out in the Plan prior to a decision being made.</i>	11
12.	SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2006/2007 REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER <i>To consider the issues that the Scrutiny Committee plans to review at future meetings and the activities of its sub-groups.</i>	19
13.	THE ELECTION CYCLE IN NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE <i>To comment on the Cabinet's recommendations to Council in respect of the Election Cycle in North Hertfordshire.</i>	23
14.	ADOPTION OF CROSS BOUNDARY CHOICE BASED LETTINGS (CBL) SCHEME REPORT OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING & ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH <i>To comment on the report scheduled to be submitted to Cabinet on 12 September 2006, in respect of the possible adoption of a cross boundary Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme.</i>	29
15.	MEMBER DEVELOPMENT - UPDATE REPORT OF THE LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT MANAGER <i>To receive a presentation providing an update on Member Development.</i>	45
16.	PRESENTATION BY PLANNING & TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO HOLDER <i>To receive a presentation by Councillor R.A.C. Thake, Portfolio Holder for Planning & Transport.</i>	47
17.	ITEMS REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FINANCE SUB-GROUP: (A) 20 JULY 2006 (B) 4 SEPTEMBER 2006	49 To be tabled

Future meetings of the Scrutiny Committee:

10 October 2006
7 November 2006
11 December 2006 (Monday)
9 January 2007
20 February 2007
20 March 2007

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<p style="text-align: center;">SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 5 September 2006</p>
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<p>*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT</p>	<p>AGENDA ITEM No.</p>
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9

TITLE OF REPORT: PRESENTATION BY THREE VALLEYS WATER PLC

The Committee will receive a presentation from Mr Mike Pocock, Head of Strategic Planning, Three Valleys Water PLC.

Mr Pocock has provided some documentation in advance of his presentation, and this is attached at Appendix A, for Members' information.

APPENDIX A

**Hertfordshire County Council : Environment Scrutiny Committee
Public Hearing : The draft East of England Plan – We want your views.
Statement from Three Valleys Water : 12 January 2005**

Three Valleys Water highlighted the availability of water resources in South East England as a key issue in its business plan submitted to OFWAT as part of the water industry price review in 2004 and the Water Resources Plan submitted to the Environment Agency.

The company plans 10-25 years ahead in order to meet the challenges of increased water consumption verses a decrease in the amount of water available. As part of this we closely monitor the development of regional plans and in particular the impact of the Sustainable Communities issues announced by the Office of Deputy Prime Minister. We successfully urged OFWAT and the Agency to allow the industry to take action now, in order to have long-term plans in place to meet these challenges.

Three Valleys Water have actively informed those making the plans for the South East of the water resources situation and have also called for consideration regarding appropriate funding mechanisms that should be put in place now, to allow the necessary infrastructure to be built in an efficient manner.

As a water company we have a statutory duty to supply domestic housing on request and have made allowances in our plans for growth commensurate with the levels outlined in the East of England Plan. This plan adopts a 'twin track' approach of better use of our existing resources coupled with reducing demand by reducing leakage and increasing metering to domestic properties. These measures will enable us to maintain security of supply to our customers for some years to come but also suggest in the longer term that it will be necessary to build a new regional water resource scheme in the South East. We will be working with other water companies and the Environment Agency to explore options for this resource which might be a new reservoir to store surplus winter rainfall or groundwater or water reuse options including possible relocation and use of wastewater discharges that are currently taken out of catchments.

With South-East England receiving on average 50% less rainfall than the rest of the UK and each of our customers using an average 178 litres of water per person per day (almost 20% higher than the national average). The issue of water consumption needs to be addressed by a wider audience, from planners and developers, to individual customers. Our appeals to customers to be water wise is not just for the here and now, it is for the long-term future to support sustainable development and an adequate water supply for the next generation.

Mike Pocock
Head of Strategic Planning

Water Use Facts:

- Only 1% of the earth's water can be used for drinking.
- South East England has less water available per head than Morocco, Egypt or Kenya.
Source: Environment Agency
- Using a sprinkler or hose uses around 1,000 litres in just one hour
- Approximately 20% of clean water used in the home is flushed down the toilet - use a cistern device (Hippo - available free of charge) or consider installing a dual flush toilet or variable flush mechanism.
- Bathing & showering accounts for about 25% of our water use. A five-minute shower uses around 30 litres, but a five-minute power shower typically uses 65 litres. A bath uses 85 litres.

Enquiry to Three Valleys Water from local councillor

Dear Sir/Madam,

As a district councillor for I am intrigued as to how your company intends to supply extra water for the new homes to be built in your area under the instigation of the office of the deputy prime minister when current users face a hosepipe ban etc.

Please could you enlighten me on this subject as I feel it will possibly have a significant effect upon our development planning in the future and the current drafting of related core strategies.

Yours Sincerely,

Dear Councillor

This is a question I am regularly asked and I am happy to explain.

In short, our water resource plans which have a horizon of 25 years are based on a wide range of factors but in particular three that are relevant here:-

1. **Supply.** A fundamental assumption that hosepipe bans will be used to manage demand at a frequency of not more than one in ten years. This is in part to protect the environment in cases of severe stress such as we see this year but also to contain system capacity to a 'reasonable' level and avoid significantly higher prices to customers that would otherwise be necessary if we were required to meet all demand under all hydrological conditions. This is a common assumption for all water resources planning in the UK but clearly the impact depends on the location of droughts for example in 1995 there was a severe drought only in the north of England, and in 1996 the south-east. In the case of Three Valleys customers we have not had restrictions on supply since 1992 until this year. Consultation with customers in the past has shown that customers see this frequency of restrictions as reasonable. We will be inviting stakeholder consultations with our next planning cycle in 2007 and this will give customers an opportunity to update their views. This factor means there is a mechanism to contain demand in a severe drought irrespective of other factors.

2. Existing demand. We have the highest level of consumption in the country at 182 l/p/d due to high ownership of water using appliances reflecting the relative affluence of much of our customer base. As a result we have been an advocate of demand management measures and in particular metering, and at the last price review our regulators approved our strategy to install meters when homes change occupiers. Evidence shows that customers paying for water by volume are more aware of their consumption generally and use between 10 and 15% less water. We are expecting to have 44% of our households metered by 2010 and 85% by 2025. This factor means our plans anticipate a reduction in existing demand.

3. We have a statutory duty to supply domestic housing if asked. This is unequivocal under current legislation and means we include estimates for housing growth in our last plan in 2004 and this allowed for growth that is commensurate with latest forecasts although we have seen some local movement between authorities eg East Herts. Nevertheless we are keen to encourage water efficiency in new developments and work with developers to achieve this. I detect an increase in willingness to seek leading edge and innovative solutions here and this is welcomed. In addition we endorse the need for regulatory changes to drive water efficiency and we welcome the new Sustainable Building Code. Our strategy for metering on change of occupier means we can accommodate new growth for about 20 years whilst maintaining security of supplies to existing customers.

I hope this clarifies the counterbalancing factors in our planning. In the longer term, post 2025, we will need to develop additional resources in the south east or implement further demand management measures such as more water efficiency or perhaps the use of innovative tariffs. An alternative might be to encourage more water reuse as we are some way behind other countries and regions who are considered 'water scarce' as the south-east of England. We have a number of studies underway to investigate these options with a view to implementation as necessary in years to come as the situation evolves.

So the overall situation is that water resources planning, if managed properly and in a timely manner, can maintain secure supplies whilst protecting the environment and accommodating growth. Please let me know if you need further information. I enclose for your information a copy of my letter to the East of England Plan

Regards,
Mike Pocock
Head of Strategic Planning
Three Valleys Water PLC and Veolia Water Partnership, part of Veolia Water UK Group
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email mike.pocock@3valleys.co.uk

Water saving tip: Summer's here so please be wise with your water use. Why not wash salad and fruit in a washing up bowl, rather than under a running tap, and use the water in your garden

TITLE OF REPORT: QUESTION

The following question has been submitted by Councillor David Billing:-

"What opportunities are provided for North Herts in the Area Action Plan approach, within the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004?

What Area Action Plans are intended for North Herts and how far have they got? What access to different types of funding, for example Growth Area Funding, are now available to North Herts, and what is the Council and/or LSP doing to explore and tap all possibilities for development/regeneration funding?"

Response from the Head of Planning & Building Control:-

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 allows for area action plans for key areas of change or conservation to be produced as part of the Local Development Framework.

Area action plans should be used to provide the planning framework for areas where significant change or conservation is needed. A key feature of area action plans will be the focus on implementation. They should:

- i. deliver planned growth areas;
- ii. stimulate regeneration;
- iii. protect areas particularly sensitive to change;
- iv. resolve conflicting objectives in areas subject to development pressures; or
- v. focus the delivery of area based regeneration initiatives.

Authorities may set criteria in their core strategy for identifying locations and priorities for the preparation of area action plans.

In areas of change, area action plans should identify the distribution of uses and their inter-relationships, including specific site allocations, and set the timetable for the implementation of the proposals. Further guidance, such as the layout of uses within these allocations and design requirements etc, may be provided in the relevant area action plan or in one or more supplementary planning documents in the form of a master plan. In areas of conservation, area action plans should set out the policies and proposals for action to preserve or enhance the area, including defining areas where specific conservation measures are proposed and areas which will be subject to specific controls over development.

There are two Area Action Plans that are currently scheduled within the available resources. These are included within the Council's adopted Local Development Scheme and relate to the growth areas around Stevenage and the possible growth area east of Luton.

In relation to the Stevenage growth, there will be a joint area action plan prepared. This is due to the strategic growth required around Stevenage as a result of the regional spatial strategy through to 2021 set out in the East of England Plan. Work is currently progressing on the various options for joint working that exist for both Officers and Members.

Key issues to be covered by the joint AAP include: –

Definition of the extent of the area covered by the AAP.

The overall scale of growth beyond the existing built-up area of Stevenage.

The distribution of that growth to specific sites.

Affordable housing policies.

Design / landscape / sustainability policies and standards to be applied to new development.

Environmental protection policies for the AAP area.

Planning obligations to be sought from the development industry.

Review of Green Belt boundaries.

With regard to the Area Action Plan for land east of Luton, progress is entirely dependent upon emerging local development documents for the Luton conurbation, being prepared by Luton and South Beds Councils. We will only proceed with a Luton Area Action Plan if a South Bedfordshire / Luton Core Strategy document determines that new development is required in North Hertfordshire to the east of Luton. Technical work, such as the review of urban capacity in the Luton conurbation and an assessment of all the potential directions of growth, is an essential prerequisite of the Core Strategy. Such work should at least indicate whether or not there needs to be new development in North Hertfordshire within the Plan period. NHDC will only prepare a Luton AAP if the case in favour of such development is established, if necessary following an Examination into the Core Strategy and the publication of the Inspector's binding conclusions.

There have been two rounds of Growth Area Funding. When the first round of funding took place North Herts was not included in a Growth Area. When the second round of funding was promoted, the Draft East of England Plan had identified North Herts as being in a growth area. A bid was made to obtain finance to carry out improvements to the Grove Road, Wilbury Way and Cadwell Lane Traffic light junction, in order to bring through the possibility of redeveloping the Former Gas Works site. The North Herts GAF II bid for funding was one of only two successful schemes in Hertfordshire in the second round of bidding. There has been no announcement or indication made by government that there will be any further Growth Area funds available in the future.

In respect of growth at Luton, given that the Council's stance is opposition to expansion of the conurbation into North Hertfordshire, no applications for relevant funding have been submitted by NHDC.

In terms of securing regeneration or growth area funding, the economic development team within Policy, Partnerships and Performance are actively engaged in the Investing in Communities initiative, which identifies areas for regeneration and improvement. So far, the schemes have included small areas of consideration, such as at Royston; the Ecotech report cited in car parking reports for the Town Centre there was actually commissioned by IIC in order to evidence need for the future commercial and business needs of both Royston and Buntingford. To date, this has produced £38,000 towards regeneration of the market, but larger schemes such as potential for business incubation units are also under consideration for funding by the IIC partnership in the next tranche of submissions early in 2007.

In the interim, our LSP partners at Stevenage Business Initiative, JobCentre Plus and North Herts College have commenced a small scheme (totalling £9,000 plus resourcing in kind in terms of premises) to support business and skills needs for Royston, in readiness for larger development funding being secured.

The economic development team (and indeed the community development team) have access to the Grantfinder database, which lists over 60,000 potential funding streams, including government grants and EU funding initiatives; it is our intention to continue to conduct searches via that means, and of course submit appropriate bids, in order to secure the maximum funds for development and regeneration projects.

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

11

**TITLE OF REPORT: NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL – THE FORWARD
PLAN: 1 SEPTEMBER 2006 – 31 DECEMBER 2006**

See Attached.

Forward Plan of Key Decisions - 1 September 2006

The Forward Plan contains brief details of key decisions that the Council is likely to take over the next four-month period. You will also find details of contacts who can provide further information and hear your views.

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
First Quarter Revenue Budget 2006/07 Spend Profile 06/06	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	12 Sep 2006	Officers	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
First Quarter Capital Budget 2006/07 Spend Profile 06/06	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	12 Sep 2006	Officers	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
Adoption of cross boundary Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme 08/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	12 Sep 2006	Officers, other LA's, local housing associations	Meetings	-Committee report -Bid document -Equalities impact assessment -'What is CBL?' sheet	TBA	Cllr Sarah Wren Martin.lawrence@north-herts.gov.uk 01462-474250
Disposal of land off Yeomanry Drive, Clothall Common, Baldock 09/06		Cabinet	12 Sep 2006	Baldock and District Area Committee	Meeting 14 th August 2006	Estates files	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone barrie.jones@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
Formulation of recommendations regarding the Electoral Cycle 07/06	Scrutiny Committee	Council	21 Sep 2006	Councillors Cabinet	Briefings Council meeting	Report to Cabinet	N/A	Cllr Andrew Young david.miley@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474208
Adoption of Planning Obligations SPD 06/06		Council (via Cabinet)	21 Sep 2006	Local Groups, Cllrs, Relevant Statutory Organisations and other Herts Partners	Written Comments, Area Committees	Methodology for Stds and Sustainability Appraisal	TBA	Cllr Richard Thake Louise.symes@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474359
Adoption of Building Control Policy 09/06		Cabinet	17 Oct 2006	Portfolio Holder	Meeting	Report to Cabinet	N/A	Cllr Richard Thake Ian.fullstone@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 476370
Agree Draft Letchworth Town Centre Strategy for Public Consultation 06/06		Cabinet	17 Oct 2006	Letchworth Area Committee Key Organisations & Stakeholders Key Landowners	Meetings and workshop	Report Summary of Stakeholder Workshops	TBA	Cllr Richard Thake Louise.symes@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474359
The Community Meals Service in North Hertfordshire 09/06		Cabinet	17 Oct 2006	CMT	meetings written	A Meals on Wheels Social Enterprise for Hertfordshire	TBA	Cllr Sarah Wren Lynn.saville@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474530
Savings and Growth options showing 5 year financial forecast 07/06	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	17 Oct 2006	Officers Councillors CMT Portfolio holder	meetings		N/A	Cllr Terry Hone Norma.atlay@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474297
Approval of Ivel Court redevelopment scheme 07/06		Cabinet	17 Oct 2006	Portfolio Holder Officers LAPC Community	Meetings Workshops	Previous Cabinet reports	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Barrie.jones@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
Area Governance and Costs of Democracy 08/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	17 Oct 2006	Portfolio Holders	Meetings Briefings	Previous Cabinet reports	Savings of £50k	Cllr Tricia Gibbs Patrick.candler@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474823
Civic Accommodation Strategy 09/06		Cabinet	17 Oct 2006	Portfolio Holder Officers	Meetings	Previous Cabinet reports	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Barrie.jones@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243
Waste Management Contract – Renegotiations & Policies 09/06		Cabinet	17 Oct 2006	Veolia Waste Management Contractor Portfolio Holder	Meetings	Contracts & Policies	TBA	Cllr Lynda Needham Tony.clampton@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474304
Disposal of land adjacent to 27 Dark Lane, Sandon 09/06		Cabinet	17 Oct 2006	Baldock & District Committee	Meeting 25 September 2006	Estates files	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Barrie.jones@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243
Approval of revised Corporate Plan 2005-15 06/06	PARC	Council (via Cabinet)	2 Nov 2006	Councillors CMT Officers Portfolio Holder	meetings and workshops	Corporate Plan 2005-2015	TBA	Cllr F J Smith liz.green@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474230
Revised Community Strategy for North Herts 11/05	PARC	Council (via Cabinet)	2 Nov 2006	LSP partners/stakeholders residents visioning groups COMPACT	meetings press release website public event	community strategy draft	TBA	Cllr Tricia Gibbs liz.green@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474230
Local Development Framework – Preferred Options for Core Strategy / Development Control Policies 08/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	14 Nov 2006	Local Groups, Cllrs, Relevant Statutory Organisations and other Herts Partners Member Working Party	Written Comments Meeting	In accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement	N/A	Cllr Richard Thake Andy.beavan@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317

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Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
Half year spend profile & balances position 08/06	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	14 Nov 2006	CMT	meetings	Budget Papers	N/A	Cllr Terry Hone Norma.atlay@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474
Half year Capital Budget 2006/07 Spend Profile 06/06	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	14 Nov 2006	Officers	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
Aggregated projects for approval 08/06	PARC	Cabinet	14 Nov 2006	Challenge Board CMT	meetings		N/A	Cllr F J Smith Cllr Terry Hone barriejones@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243 liz.green@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474230
New/Revised Housing Strategy 08/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	14 Nov 2006					Cllr Sarah Wren Alan.davey@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 476362
Implementation of the Gambling Act 07/06		Council (via Cabinet)	14 Dec 2006	Portfolio Holder Officers Licensing & Appeals Committee Community	Meetings Workshops	Report	TBA	Cllr Sarah Wren Andy.godman@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474293
Draft Budget and Council Tax base 09/06	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Council (via Cabinet)	14 Dec 2006	CMT	meetings written		N/A	Cllr Terry Hone Norma.atlay@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474297
London Luton Airport Phase1 Planning Application 04/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	19 Dec 2006		Written Comments	Phase 1 Planning Application	TBA	Cllr Richard Thake Mark.wilson@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474359

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

PENDING ITEMS

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
Agree Letchworth Town Centre Strategy 10/06		Council (via Cabinet)	18 Jan 2007	Letchworth Area Committee Key Organisations & Stakeholders Key Landowners	Meetings and workshop	Report Summary of Stakeholder Workshops	TBA	Cllr Richard Thake Louise.symes@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474359
Budget & Council Tax level set 11/06	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Council (via Cabinet)	8 Feb 2007	CMT	meetings written		N/A	Cllr Terry Hone Norma.atlay@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474297
Best Value Performance Plan Summary 2007/08 11/06	PARC	Council (Via Cabinet)	8 Feb 2007		meetings written	BVPP Summary 2007/08	N/A	Cllr Andrew Young sarah.white@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474659
Third Quarter Revenue Budget 2006/07 Spend Profile 11/06	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Officers	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
Third Quarter Capital Budget 2006/07 Spend Profile 11/06	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	27 Feb 2007	Officers	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
Best Value Performance Plan 2007/08 02/07	PARC	Council (Via Cabinet)	May 2007		meetings written	BVPP 2007/08	N/A	Cllr Andrew Young sarah.white@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474659

TITLE OF REPORT: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2006/07

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report gives details about the topics that the Scrutiny Committee plans to scrutinise and gives an update on the work of the Task and Finish Groups.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

3. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

5 Sept 06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presentation from Three Valleys Water ▪ Planning & Transport Portfolio Holder (Confirmed) ▪ Adoption of cross boundary Choice Based Lettings scheme ▪ Formulation of recommendations regarding the Electoral Cycle ▪ Member Development update
10 Oct 06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leader of the Council ▪ Community Engagement Portfolio Holder (Confirmed) ▪ Partnership working with Parishes & Town Councils Task & Finish Group – Scope ▪ Community Safety Task & Finish Group – Scope (TBC) ▪ Area Governance and Cost of Democracy ▪ Summer Playscheme user Satisfaction Survey Results (to include the performance of the Voluntary Sector providers of children’s services and the success of the provision of activities for 11-14 year olds). <i>As requested at 21.03.06 meeting.</i> ▪ Sports Development Strategy – Report on the performance of the new concessionary rates available for users of the Council’s Easter Sports Programme for Children. <i>As requested at 21.03.06 meeting.</i> ▪ Residential Parking – Report on displacement effects, pay and display, consultations, non-residential CPZ users (outstanding issues from the Task & Finish Group)
7 Nov 06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local Development Framework – Preferred options for Core Strategy / Development Control Policies ▪ Waste & Environment Portfolio Holder (Confirmed) ▪ New/Revised Housing Strategy (<i>requested at the meeting on 19 June</i>)

11 Dec 06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Housing & Environmental Health Portfolio Holder (Confirmed) ▪ Cabinet response to Markets Task & Finish Group recommendations ▪ Cabinet response to Parking Task & Finish Group recommendations
9 Jan 07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Green Spaces Strategy ▪ London Luton Airport Phase 1 – Planning Application ▪ Leisure & E-Government Portfolio Holder (Confirmed)
20 Feb 07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chairman’s Review
20 March 07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Annual Report

3.1 At the meeting on 18th July, Members of the Scrutiny Committee agreed some suggestions for the Leader of the Council to include in his response to the Leader of Hertfordshire County Council on the review of scrutiny in Hertfordshire. A copy of this letter is attached to this report for your information.

4. SUB-GROUPS

4.1 Affordable Housing Task & Finish Group

This Group met on 31st July and 17th August 2006. On 31st July, the Group discussed the North Herts affordable housing programme, affordable housing toolkit, housing strategy, housing need survey, rent, shared ownership, home track system and the allocation system.

On 17th August, the Group received a Capital Programme presentation and discussed other sources of funding. The Group also questioned the Chief Executives of North Herts Homes and Howard Cottage Housing Associations.

The next meeting will be held in October and will hear evidence from witnesses who are looking for an affordable home and a witness who has recently purchased a shared ownership property. The Group will also receive a presentation on Key Worker Schemes.

4.2 Partnership Working with Parishes Task & Finish Group

Nominations have been received for the membership of this new Task and Finish Group as follows:

Conservative: Cllrs John Bishop, Howard Marshall, Alan Bardett and Tom Brindley
Labour: Cllrs David Kearns and Judi Billing,
Lib Dem: Cllr Steve Jarvis
Portfolio holder: Cllr Tricia Gibbs

At the Scrutiny Committee meeting of 18th July, Members agreed that this Group will be chaired by the Liberal Democrat Group’s nominee.

The first meeting will be held on Thursday 14th September.

4.3 **Community Safety Task & Finish Group**

The following nominations have been received for the membership of this new Task and Finish Group as follows:

Conservative: Cllrs Simon Bloxham, Jane Gray, Allison Ashley and Julian Cunningham

Labour: Cllr David Billing, Lorna Kercher

Lib Dem: Cllr Liz Beardwell

Portfolio holder: Cllr Tricia Gibbs

The Committee is asked to agree that this Task & Finish Group is chaired by a Conservative Member.

4.4 **Finance Sub-Group**

This on-going Sub-Group met on 20th July 2006. Three recommendations were made to the Head of Finance and one recommendation was made to Cabinet. Further details of this meeting are reported to this meeting as a separate report.

The next meeting will take place on Monday 4th September. Any recommendations from this meeting will be referred to the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 5th September. If agreed, the Scrutiny Committee will then refer these to Cabinet on 12th September. This will be the process from now on, as agreed by the Chairman.

5. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 Members are asked to note the Scrutiny work programme for 2006/07.

5.2 The Committee is asked to agree that the Community Safety Task & Finish Group be chaired by a Conservative Member.

6. **REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1 To enable the Scrutiny Committee to plan and carry out its workload efficiently and effectively.

7. **CONTACT OFFICER**

7.1 Grace Crawford
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Councillor David Beatty
Leader of the Council
Hertfordshire County Council
County Hall
Pegs Lane
Hertford SG13 8DE

Contact Officer: Grace Crawford
Scrutiny Officer
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Date: 2nd August 2006

Dear Councillor Beatty,

Health Scrutiny in Hertfordshire

Thank you for your letter dated 29th June 2006 and for giving me the opportunity to respond on the proposals.

The letter and the review were discussed at our Council's Scrutiny Committee meeting on 18th July.

The Committee was very concerned about the proposed representation of only four district/borough councillors to be added to the County Health Scrutiny Committee. It felt that every district/borough should be represented on this Committee to give a balanced and fair representation. In addition, it was concerned that this lack of local representation could result in smaller local issues being "overshadowed" by larger regional issues.

Furthermore, two Scrutiny Committees for two PCTs will work far more productively and effectively than one Scrutiny Committee for two PCTs.

I have enclosed a copy of a letter that was sent to Miss Tapster and you from the Chairman of the North Herts & Stevenage Joint PCT Scrutiny Committee. I would like to take this opportunity to re-iterate the main points in this letter and add that I support the purposes of keeping the scrutiny of public health issues local.

Whatever the outcome is, in order for the health scrutiny function to fulfil its purpose, it will require adequate resourcing and relevant expertise.

Yours sincerely,

F. John Smith
Leader – North Herts District Council

TITLE OF REPORT: THE ELECTION CYCLE IN NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE

The attached report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting held on 25 July 2006.

Cabinet's decision was as follows:-

47. THE ELECTION CYCLE IN NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE

The Chairman of Cabinet invited Mr Giles Woodruff to speak at this item.

Mr Woodruff thanked Cabinet for the opportunity to speak and said that he was not in favour of changing the present system of elections in thirds to every four years for the following reasons:

- He did not agree with Electoral Commission's comments published in January 2004 that whole Council elections provided more clarity for voters
- Bigger ballot papers with more than one candidate to vote for could lead to confusion
- A party could get elected on a single issue
- Electing in thirds helped to maintain a strong council
- The cost of holding elections in thirds was a small price to pay for democracy.

The Chairman thanked Mr Woodruff for his presentation.

The Portfolio Holder for Policy presented a report of the Chief Executive that sought the views of Cabinet on moving to a four yearly election cycle to replace the existing system of elections in thirds and made the following comments:

- No right or wrong method of holding elections
- Research had shown that bigger ballot papers did not result in a higher percentage of mistakes
- 70% of shires and some neighbouring authorities hold four yearly elections
- Election fatigue was a real issue for voters
- Councillors were in permanent election mode.

The Chairman of Cabinet commented that with the likelihood of all out elections next year, it seemed a sensible time to make a decision about either maintaining the status quo or changing the system. It was agreed that it was not appropriate for Cabinet to make this decision but to have an intelligent debate about the matter in full Council.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services confirmed that the requisite resolution would have to be passed by two-thirds of those members present voting in favour of it at a special Council meeting convened solely for that purpose.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Council considers amending the current electoral cycle so that whole Council elections are held every four years;
- (2) That a special Council meeting be held for the purpose of considering this matter during September 2006.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That Council consider amending the current electoral cycle so that whole Council elections are held every four years at a special meeting of Council to be arranged during September 2006.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: The recommendations in paragraph 7 of the report are made to allow Cabinet to consider whether or not it wishes to change to a 4 yearly electoral cycle.

The Scrutiny Committee has asked to comment on the report before it is considered by Council. Members' views are invited.

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No.
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TITLE OF REPORT: THE ELECTION CYCLE IN NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE
 PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR A.D. YOUNG

1. SUMMARY

The report seeks the views of Cabinet on moving to a four yearly election cycle replacing the existing system of elections in thirds.

2. FORWARD PLAN

This report contains a recommendation on a key decision which was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan published on 1 July 2006.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 As a consequence of the recent boundary review it is likely that the Council will be required to hold elections for all Members in May 2007. Given this the Portfolio Holder for Policy (which includes electoral matters) feels that the time is right for the Council to consider the timing of the elections cycle here in North Hertfordshire.

3.2 Since the creation of the Council in 1974, and in keeping with the arrangements for most non-metropolitan District Councils, one third of the Council is elected each year for 3 years out of 4 and there are no District Council elections in the fourth year of the cycle. There are usually County Council elections in the fourth year.

3.3 There are a variety of election cycles in England as follows:-

- Metropolitan boroughs elect in thirds
- London boroughs elect every four years
- County Councils elect every four years
- Shire districts can elect in thirds as we do now or in halves (this is very rare) or hold whole Council elections every four years

3.4 In 2003 the Electoral Commission conducted a consultation exercise on election cycles in England. This stemmed from views set out in the White Paper “Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services” published in 2001.

3.5 The views expressed in the White Paper included the following :

“The current cycle of local government elections is confusing ... It is too easy for electors to lose track of when elections are to be held or how many votes they have on any particular election day. And this arrangement can lessen the immediate impact of voters behaviour on Council control.”

3.6 As part of their consultation the Electoral Commission put forward a number of arguments for either partial elections or whole council elections.

3.7 The arguments for partial elections were set out as follows:

- More frequent opportunities for electors to exercise their right to vote;
- may facilitate more immediate political accountability;
- may tend to produce less drastic changes in political direction, and provide greater political continuity;
- can ensure that the political composition of authorities more accurately reflects the current political complexion of local areas;
- may reduce the likelihood that the timing of important or controversial decisions are distorted by the timing of elections.

3.8 The arguments for whole Council elections were set out as follows:

- Greater possibility of wholesale change in control may encourage participation;
- too frequent elections might dilute public interest;
- opportunity for all electors in an area to influence the composition of the authority at the same time;
- may tend to encourage greater long-term planning by authorities and discourage continuous election campaigning.

3.9 Following the consultation exercise the Commission recommended that each local authority in England should hold whole Council elections with all Councillors elected simultaneously, once every four years. (Report on the Cycle of Local Government Elections in England – published January 2004) The Commission felt that on balance whole Council elections are more likely to provide clarity for electors and a degree of stability for local authorities. The Commission also emphasised that the wide variation in the range of opportunities for people to participate in local elections depending on where they live was unfair.

3.10 The arguments set out above give a flavour of the matters to be considered in debating different electoral cycles. In North Hertfordshire we do have a choice as a shire district and local factors such as efficiency and the impact on other services, such as schools, of frequent elections should be considered.

3.11 It should be borne in mind that even if a decision is taken to move to whole Council elections for the District every four years, there will still be other major elections on a regular basis. In a typical cycle, there will only be one year in four without any major election – other than the possibility of a parliamentary election being called.

3.12 The process for seeking a change in our electoral cycle is relatively straightforward and requires a resolution of the Council passed by two thirds of the members voting thereon to petition the Secretary of State for a change. The legal position is set out in detail in the legal implications section below.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Local Government Act 1972 provides the electoral cycles which will apply to any particular local authority. s7(4) provides that a non-metropolitan district Council may request the Secretary of State to provide for a system of whole Council elections, once the requisite resolution has been passed.
- 4.2 The requisite resolution must be passed by two-thirds of the members voting in favour of it at a special Council convened only for that purpose.
- 4.3 Should the Council pass the requisite resolution and request that the Secretary of State make the Order, the order would need to come in to effect in May 2007. Presuming that the draft Order to be proposed to the Electoral Commission by the Boundary Committee on 27 June is approved by them, any subsequent Order made by the Secretary of State for the Department of Communities and Local Government will revoke the Order of the Electoral Commission, so far as it relates to the electoral cycle.

5. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 As we anticipated the possibility of an all out election in May 2007 due to the boundary committee's periodic electoral review of the district wards, the estimates for 2006/7 and 2007/8 contained additional funds for this. The total budget for running an all out election in May 2007 stands at £108,000.
- 5.2 The election of one third of the Council in May 2006 cost just over £60,000, although accounts are still subject to being fully finalised. 2006 was not our most expensive third as it did not include many of our large rural areas. It is estimated that the average price of an election for a third of the Council at 2007 prices would be around £65,000.
- 5.3 Using the figures above, the potential saving over a 4 year period of running one set of all out elections, compared to 3 elections of thirds is £87,000 (3 x £65,000 - £108,000). This is equivalent to approximately £22,000 per year over four years.
- 5.4 It is difficult to state these figures with accuracy at this time. The cost of an all out election is not clear as we have not held one for some time. In addition, there will potentially be other costs such as a higher number of by-elections. By-elections also have variable costs but £1,000 - £1,500 is a broad estimate.
- 5.5 Given this additional uncertainty, an estimated saving of £17,000 to £22,000 per year seems reasonable. This all relates to purchases of goods and services and not to any staffing costs. Costs for electoral staff are accounted for elsewhere in our budget.

6. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None contained within this report.

7. RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is recommended that Cabinet consider amending the current electoral cycle so that whole Council elections are held every 4 years.
- 7.2 If Cabinet agree that change is desirable it is further recommended that Cabinet seek an appropriate resolution from Council to petition the Secretary of State.

8. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in paragraph 7 are made to allow Cabinet to consider whether or not it wishes to change to a 4 yearly electoral cycle.

9. CONTACT OFFICERS

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10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Cycle of Local Government Elections in England – January 2004 – paper held on file by the Chief Executive.

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

14

**TITLE OF REPORT: ADOPTION OF CROSS BOUNDARY CHOICE BASED LETTINGS
(CBL) SCHEME**

The attached report is to be considered by Cabinet at its meeting to be held on 12 September 2006.

The Scrutiny Committee has asked to comment on the report before it is considered by Cabinet. Members' views are invited.

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No.
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TITLE OF REPORT: ADOPTION OF CROSS BOUNDARY CHOICE BASED LETTINGS (CBL) SCHEME

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING & ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR SARAH WREN

1. Summary

- 1.1 As part of its drive to increase choice in the delivery of public services the Government requires all local authorities to operate a 'Choice Based Lettings scheme' (CBL) for allocating all social housing units by 2010.
- 1.2 This report describes what is meant by CBL and seeks support for a bid to the DCLG for funding to implement a joint CBL scheme for most local authorities in Hertfordshire.

2. Forward Plan

- 2.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision and has been included in the Forward Plan.

3. Background

- 3.1 CBL is the Government's term for allocation policies that incorporate a high degree of customer choice, encourage better use of stock while continuing to meet housing need. The thinking behind CBL is that this will better ensure sustainable tenancies and help to build sustainable communities. It passes the responsibility for decision making to the customer thereby giving them a greater stake in their home and community.
- 3.2 The key message from the latest Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) guidance is that the responsibility for ensuring CBL happens is now a strategic housing responsibility even where the Council no longer manages its own stock.
- 3.3 From the experience of pilot schemes, CBL schemes do cost more to resource because the process can involve a lot of applicant bidding and information seeking and also because of the regular advertising involved. These can, potentially be offset, by simplification of administration and by economies of scale when working with others in partnership. The single largest cost is Information Communication Technology (ICT) where current systems may not be adequate to operate a CBL scheme and, if working with others, each organisation will have its own IT system. These systems will be integrated into the CBL software.

4. **Issues**

4.1 Since 2001 various approaches have been piloted by a number of authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSL's). The results of these pilots have been published and DCLG has issued guidance on how all authorities should implement CBL.

4.2 The feedback from the Government highlighted the following issues:

- Insufficient involvement of RSL's.
- The implementation timetables were too long.
- The amount of money being requested was too much.
- Bids did not demonstrate how the issue of cross boundary mobility would be addressed.

4.3 These issues have been addressed and have become part of the current bid.

5. **Legal Implications**

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from a decision on whether to make an application for a grant.

6. **Financial and Risk Implications**

6.1 The implementation costs are estimated at £250,000. Subject to successful DCLG funding the total net contribution from the project partners will be £153,000, see section J of Appendix 2.

6.2 The North Herts Housing Partnership contribution to the implementation costs would amount to £21,500 in the first year, and NHDC's commitment would be half of this, £10,750. The remainder would be contributed by North Herts Homes (NHH) and Howard Cottage Housing Association (HCHA). Subsequent costs year on year for NHDC are expected to be in the region of £10,000 from 2008/9 onwards.

6.3 The Council's participation to the project is dependent upon a successful growth bid for next year's implementation costs and future year's running costs as set out in paragraph 6.2 above. All growth bids for next year and onwards are currently being processed as part of the Council's Service and Financial Planning process and this project has been submitted at the gross cost of £21,500, highlighting the risk if our RSL partners do not contribute to the District share.

6.4 Growth bids for 2007/09 and onwards will not be approved by Cabinet until February 2007. Commitment to the project bid is required now and DCLG support will be known in November, following this the project will commence before the end of the current financial year, however the initial funding from NHDC would be required from 2007/8.

6.5 The main risk for the project concerns the bid to the DCLG and whether the funding will be agreed. There is also a risk that our common housing register partners, NHH and HCHA do not agree to participate in the project. Another risk would be our inability to meet the governments deadline of 2010.

7. **Human resource and equalities Implications**

7.1 There would inevitably be staffing implications, mainly around the administration of such a scheme and changes in working procedures. These would need assessing when developing a scheme, however further resource requirements are not anticipated at this stage.

7.2 The implementation of this scheme would also involve special measures to ensure that hard to reach groups are not disadvantaged by its introduction.

8. **Consultation with external organisations and ward members**

8.1 Consultation has been ongoing with the 'Herts Housing Choice' project group.

9. **Recommendation**

9.1 Cabinet approves NHDC's participation in a joint bid with 6 other Hertfordshire authorities and RSLs (draft bid attached at Appendix 2).

9.2 That if the bid is successful, the growth bid put forward in the Service and Financial Planning Process is supported. This would involve a maximum contribution of £21,500 as this authority's contribution in 2007/8 to the scheme's implementation and £10,000 towards annual running costs thereafter.

10. **Reasons for Recommendation**

10.1 It is proposed to engage an agency. This will provide the software that will 'sit on top' of existing systems and carry out the bidding and matching processes. The agency will also provide the advertising and feedback processes. By buying into existing expertise both in ICT and marketing the costs and experience of existing providers can benefit the partnership. The two main providers, Locata and Home Connections have developed since their inception and have addressed many of the early problems with CBL.

10.2 The reasons for a joint working partnership with other local authorities and RSLs are:

- Benefits of economies of scale in relation to ICT and advertising;
- Consistent with Government guidance;
- Enabling cross boundary mobility;
- Assists RSLs that operate across a number of local authority areas.

10.3 The seven partner authorities currently use 3 different ICT systems and the RSLs have several other systems in place.

10.4 Commitment to an annual budget is required before next year's annual budget is approved in February 2007.

11. **Alternative options considered**

11.1 NHDC decides to join the Herts Housing Choice partnership at a later stage. This however could reduce the chances of the initial bid being successful, as well as limiting our participation at the influential implementation stage.

11.2 NHDC, NHH and HCHA could implement a more local scheme, however this would be unlikely to secure DCLG funding, and would impact more heavily on financial and staff resourcing.

12. **Appendices**

- 1 – What is Choice Based Lettings?
- 2 – Draft joint bid to be submitted to the DCLG

13. **Contact Officers**

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14. **Background Papers**

14.1 Implementing and Developing Choice Based Lettings – A Guide to Key issues (ODPM March 2005)

14.2 Choice Based Lettings, bidding guidance, DCLG, May 2006.

What is Choice Based Lettings?

APPENDIX 1

The basic principles are as follows::

- The traditional points system for assessing need is changed to a simplified banding system. Bands are ranked reflecting overall housing needs. This is not however a prerequisite for CBL as some schemes have continued to operate with traditional points schemes.
- Vacancies are advertised in the local press, specially produced magazine, a website etc. and are 'sign posted' as being available only for applicants in band 'X' or 'Y' etc.
- Applicants themselves have to apply by expressing an interest in the properties they wish to live in either by phone, bidding cards or in the Internet. Applicants effectively, have to balance and choose whether to apply for low or high demand property in low or high supply areas knowing their own banding and relative priority.
- The advertising also incorporates information about the environment around-distance to shops, schooling situation etc as well as information about the property itself.
- To ensure the scheme operates efficiently a strict 'apply by' date is incorporated in adverts.
- Actual offers are made to the applicant in the band with the highest need and who has waited the longest in that band.

A Choice Based Lettings scheme should also be flexible enough to adapt to changing demands (i.e. during a crisis in temporary accommodation it would be possible to advertise more properties as available to homeless households only) and priorities (i.e. local lettings policies based on sustainability criteria can also be used).

There are some clear advantages to CBL. Firstly, by giving feedback to applicants on how advertised properties were let it makes the allocation process open and transparent. Those waiting for housing can see exactly how many properties become available for letting and have a better understanding of why they must wait. The pilot schemes have also demonstrated a positive impact on void turn around time. The fact that applicants only bid for properties they wish to live in increases the acceptance rate. Multiple viewings can also be used for hard to let properties, where several bidders are invited to view.

APPENDIX 2

FUND FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEMES – SECOND ROUND

DRAFT BID FOR DELIVERING CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

“HERTS HOUSING CHOICE”

A. Payment arrangements.

Grant funding payable to : Three Rivers District Council
Lead Contract Officer : Nyack Semelo-Shaw
(Head of Housing Needs and Strategy)
Three Rivers DC, Northway House, Northway, Rickmansworth, Herts WD3 1RL
Telephone 01923 – 727050.
e-mail: nyack.semelo-shaw@threerivers.gov.uk

B. Scheme partners.

The bid brings together the following local authorities:

- Dacorum Council
- Hertsmere Council
- North Hertfordshire District
- St Albans Council
- Three Rivers DC
- Watford Borough Council
- Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

The Registered Social Landlords:

- Aldwyck Housing Association / Lea Valley Homes
- Hightown Praetorian & Churches HA
- Howard Cottage Housing Association
- L & Q Beacon
- Origin Housing Group
- North Hertfordshire Homes
- Warden Housing Association

In area covered is 1027 square kilometres with a total Council stock of 33,532 and RSL stock of 25,577. All partners are located within the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region (LCB) which comprises of 15 local authorities and over 30 RSLs.

C. Existing partners within CBL systems.

At the moment Dacorum and Aldwyck HA run their own schemes.

Dacorum - Piloted CBL for 3 years in three neighbourhoods covering 25% of the total Council stock and recently rolled out scheme to cover whole of stock and area.

Aldwyck HA - Has been running a scheme for three years for their tenants and other applicants.

Lea Valley Homes, the key worker Zone Agent for Hertfordshire, and a subsidiary of Aldwyck are also a partner in the scheme.

D. Other RSLs in the area have indicated a willingness to join the scheme when it is operational.

These include Ridgehill Housing Association, Paradigm Housing Association, William Sutton Trust/Affinity Group, and Guinness Housing Trust.

E. Proportion of stock prepared to be included in the scheme.

All partners will include 75 -100% of their stock in the proposed scheme with the exception of specialist supported housing, for example for people with learning difficulties, which will be allocated according to local requirements.

F. The scheme.

The partnership area is significantly affected by its proximity to London. The influence of the capital extends to house prices, affordability and mobility within the sub-region. This has created a commonality of issues across the whole area which a flexible CBL scheme will help alleviate, namely:

- acute need outstripping supply;
- affordability of adequate housing is out of reach of many households;
- the 'London affect' is a key economic driver in the housing market.

It is proposed to develop a new scheme which will allocate 75 -100% of each partner landlord's stock through open advertisement and transparent criteria and provide opportunities for cross-boundary mobility. The scheme is fully supported by the regional and sub-regional housing strategies with the intention of extending choice to those in housing need.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the proposed scheme to help identify weaknesses and areas which could disadvantage particular groups e.g. people with a disability, ethnic minority applicants etc.

1. Key objectives of the scheme.

- to work collaboratively with local authorities and RSLs.
- to maximise rehousing opportunities and choice for the residents in the partnership area including the marketing of shared ownership and intermediate renting opportunities.
- to produce an easily understood and customer-friendly scheme.
- to improve access and make the best use of resources for people with disabilities and all vulnerable groups.
- to improve mobility across the sub-region.
- to enable home-seekers to be pro-actively be involved in the development of the scheme and as end users of the service.

- to increase resource efficiencies at various levels and stages of the process, for example:
 - during procurement develop a scheme with common project management, ICT, advertising and training.
 - operational efficiencies by improving void turnaround, right-first-time allocations and improved performance information.
- to achieve balanced and sustainable communities where people have chosen where they want to live.
- to enable homeless households to have choice whilst achieving our performance targets and performance of statutory duties and to adopt the Homelessness Intervention Team model to deliver a wide range of intervention solutions to prevent homelessness, especially among BME households.
- to provide a platform for properties to be let by private sector landlords.

2. How the scheme will operate and provide greater choice to applicants.

It is intended to outsource the running of the CBL system by competitive tender to a CBL Agency. This means although all seven authorities and the RSLs may have different IT software this will be overcome by purchasing a standalone IT system. The scheme would offer greater choice to applicants in Hertfordshire with all vacancies advertised on a dedicated website provided by an appointed agency. The vacancy magazine would be available across the whole area.

Partners in the scheme have visited numerous CBL providers and are aware of the bidding process and their input to it. CBL agencies are able to provide a range of services but it is the intention of the group to go for a full agency service. This will help facilitate consistency of quality and performance standards across the area however we will retain the ability for services to be tailored to meet the requirements of individual partners.

Our specification to the CBL Agency will insist on a Gateway Approach to providing our customers with a wide range of options and advice. One of the key attributes of a scheme will be the ease and accessibility with which homeless households and vulnerable groups are able to use it.

The proposed scheme will ensure that homeless applicants will have the same opportunities to bid for properties and would have sufficient priority within banding and points schemes to ensure that they are moved from temporary accommodation.

3. Timing of the scheme

We will appoint a project manager to co-ordinate the implementation of the scheme. This will ensure expertise and efficiencies for time and cost.

The partnership intends to phase in the scheme across the area. Two of the seven partners are currently engaged in stock transfer ballots and the potential transfers may affect the implementation timetable. A phased approach will enable the partners to address IT issues as they arise, project manage on a realistic scale and help develop member confidence in the process.

4. Plans to include shared ownership / low cost home ownership options.

The partnership does intend to actively encourage shared ownership and low cost ownership. The support of the County Zone Agent, Lea Valley Homes, will be important to the success of this.

5. Plans to bring in the private rented sector.

Some partners have an established private rented deposit scheme – it is envisaged these will be the first authorities to introduce the private rented sector. Should this prove successful it will be extended across the whole of the partnership.

6. Existing housing options approach in the partnership area.

Particular good practice exists in some of the local authorities within the partnership. This will be shared among all the partners. For example:

- The proposed CBL scheme will bring together information about all housing options in a way that is accessible to applicants seeking alternative housing solutions which can be applied across the partnership.
- Through magazines and websites provide information on other related housing services e.g. Disabled Facility Grants and Care and Repair schemes.
- Increase the marketing of and assist with the allocation of difficult to let properties and encourage applicants with a low priority to apply.

7. Common housing registers

North Herts District Council and a number of the partner RSLs operate a successful common housing register and Gateway allocation scheme. This experience will inform any extension to other parts of the partnership area following the implementation of the CBL scheme.

8. Common allocation scheme

Currently all the partners have their own allocation schemes. When the CBL system is fully implemented however, we will investigate a common application form to be used across Hertfordshire. Priorities within the districts' allocation policies are very similar in line with statutory requirements and identified levels of local housing need and all councils have contributed to the sub-regional housing strategy identification of priorities.

9. Arrangements for mobility between local authority districts within the scheme.

The Herts Housing Choice scheme will increase mobility through a proportion of the lettings being open on a reciprocal basis based on landlord stock size up to an agreed quota limit. We will also operate cross-boundary offers for people leaving residential rehabilitation for drugs and alcohol and for those who apply under the Witness Protection Scheme.

It has been a long standing objective to have a register of adapted properties across the County. This CBL scheme will work towards putting this in place.

As the HARI partnership has operated in SW Herts for several years, the idea of cross-boundary and inter RSL nominations is not new. The CBL scheme will build on the existing protocols and agreements.

10. Monitoring of the scheme.

Post implementation of the CBL scheme we recognise the need to measure the success and impact of the scheme. We realise the scheme will inevitably have teething problems and there will be adjustments necessary. We therefore propose to undertake the following research:

- a postal survey of customers to see if they thought the CBL system was fair and transparent; easy to understand.
- to benchmark with neighbouring and proposed CBL schemes [e.g. Herts & Essex, Harlow Homefinder, West London Consortium and the Bedfordshire Scheme].

We are particularly keen to gauge the impact on:

- refusal rates.
- void turnaround times (BVPs).
- the development of sustainable communities through
 - the impact on BME and other disadvantaged groups and
 - the level of subsequent transfer applications.
- Homeless households' level of satisfaction.

11. The sub-regional and regional context

The bid dovetails with the objectives of the LCB Sub-Regional Housing Strategy 2005-08 which identifies the development of Sub-Regional Choice Schemes as a key instrument in contributing to the LCB vision of sustainable communities and social cohesion by:

- developing the intermediate market, working closely with the Zone Agent
- meeting the needs of vulnerable groups and we particularly recognise the presence of large BME communities in Watford and St Albans.

G. Approval for the scheme and consultation.

All authorities have approval of their Cabinet or Executive and we have authority of the HARI Board and its partners to proceed. All RSL partners have endorsed the bid through their boards. There is wide support across the county through existing groups e.g. LCB Sub-Regional Heads of Housing group and at Inter Authority Chief Executive levels (Dacorum, Watford and TRDC).

Consultation with tenants has commenced and initial feedback demonstrates a clear commitment and support to develop a CBL scheme on a cross-boundary basis. This includes:

Dacorum	CBL was piloted for 3 yrs and is now being rolled out across the District so all residents are aware of the benefits of CBL
Hertsmere	Article in a Housing Register newsletter. which goes to applicants on our list. Talking to all the smaller RSLs at the Housing Liaison Meeting. Carried out an online survey.
North Herts	Stakeholder and user consultation through the Housing Forum.
St Albans	Introductory workshops held at St Albans Resident Day Sept 2005. CBL Roadshows October 2005.
TRDC	Talk to partners at a Homelessness Strategy Day. Talks to voluntary organisations, HYHG, D&A, ACS / Supporting People, CAB and residents' forums.
Watford	Strong support and commitment from the Watford Tenant Action Group following a report and presentation on a CBL scheme.
Welwyn Hatfield	Allocation review (including CBL) high priority in Corporate Plan. Project team (officer only) set up and have been meeting since Nov 05. Stakeholder day held on 24th May 2006 - specifically to consult on our allocation review and the introduction of CBL - included tenants, RSLs, voluntary and statutory agencies, other stakeholders. Strategic Housing Forum on 5th July (again RSLs, voluntary/statutory agencies, members, and staff) did presentation and then workshop on CBL and implications. Task and finish group (includes members, tenant reps and officers) set up and first meeting July 06.

The project plan envisages engineering consultation as the scheme develops.

H. Sharing Good Practice

We would be keen to share our experience and examples of good practice in developing and running a cross-boundary model of CBL with the Government officers, DCLG, other local authorities and RSLs.

I. Project plan and timetable

July 06	Bid Preparation
Sept 06	Sign-off
Nov 06	Bid Result
Dec – March 07	Appoint project manager
March – May 07	Consult stakeholders
July 07	Specify & tender for CBL Agency
Aug 07 – May 08	Appoint CBL Agency
August 2008	Implementation
	Customer Satisfaction Survey

J. Costing & Funding Arrangements

The estimated development cost and funding arrangements are £250k in total. These estimates have been based on discussions with CBL Agencies and comparison to other schemes. We are applying to the Government for funds of £97,000; a proportion of the total costs. Local authorities will pay an equal proportion of £21,500 and RSLs will make what contributions they can.

We have deliberately not asked RSLs for high funds as we believe they may decide not to join the scheme and because some RSLs have several CBL schemes in operation across their stockholding. However, we will review this situation once the scheme has been in operation and we may decide to introduce a charging system based on usage.

	£			£
St Albans	21,500		Capital Costs	150,000
North Herts	21,500			
Hertsmere	21,500			
TRDC	21,500			
WBC	21,500			
Dacorum	21,500		Resource Costs	100,000
WHDC	21,500			
RSLs	2,500			
Government Funding	97,000			
	250,000			

Costs are likely to be incurred over 2 years 2007/08 – 2008/09.

Capital costs	
ICT Supplier Implementation & Set up	£120,000
Licence	£30,000
Resource costs	
Project manager	£75,000
Consultancy	£12,500
Training for staff	£12,500
Total	£250,000

Local authority contact details:

Dacorum	<p>Ray Anderson - Dacorum Borough Council Civic Centre Marlowes Hemel Hempstead Herts HP1 1HH 01442 228000 Ray.Anderson@threerivers.gov.uk</p>
Hertsmere	<p>Andrew Weaver Head of Housing and Health Direct Line - 020 8207 7586 andrew.weaver@hertsmere.gov.uk</p> <p>Maggie Benson Acting Housing Register Manager Hertsmere Borough Council Civic Offices Elstree Way Borehamwood Herts WD6 1WA TEL: 020 8207 7420 maggie.benson@hertsmere.gov.uk</p>
North Herts	<p>Martin Lawrence Housing Needs Manager North Hertfordshire District Council Town Lodge Gernon Road Letchworth Garden City Herts SG6 3HN Tel: 01462 474250 martin.lawrence@north-herts.gov.uk</p>
St Albans	<p>Linda Middleton Housing Strategy Civic Centre St Peter's Street, St Albans AL3 4JE email l.middleton@stalbans.gov.uk direct Dial 01727 819401</p>
Three Rivers	<p>Michelle Wright Housing Allocations Manager Three Rivers House Northway Rickmansworth Herts WD3 1RL Michelle.wright@threerivers.gov.uk Tel: 01923 727053</p>

Watford	Laura Marland Housing Options Manager Watford Borough Council Town Hall Watford Herts WD17 3EX Laura.Marland@watford.gov.uk Tel: 01923 278162
Welwyn Hatfield	Sian Chambers 01707 357640 s.chambers@welhat.gov.uk Christian Woodhead 01707 357067 c.woodhead@welhat.gov.uk Darren Welsh 01707 357660 d.welsh@welhat.gov.uk

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

AGENDA ITEM No.

15

TITLE OF REPORT: MEMBER DEVELOPMENT - UPDATE

THE LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT MANAGER WILL GIVE A BRIEF POWERPOINT PRESENTATION ON THIS MATTER.

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

AGENDA ITEM No.

16

PRESENTATION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR PLANNING AND TRANSPORT

PRESENTATION BY COUNCILLOR RICHARD THAKE, THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR
PLANNING AND TRANSPORT

ITEMS REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY FINANCE SUB-GROUP – 20 JULY 2006

The Finance Sub-Group met on Thursday 20th July 2006, to consider the following reports:

- North Herts Leisure Centre Contract Variation
- Delivering Efficiency in Local Services
- 2005/06 Capital Outturn Report
- The Financial Management Strategy 2007-2012

The Finance Portfolio Holder attended.

**Recommendations to the Head of Financial Services:
Delivering Efficiency in Local Services**

1. The Group was very keen to explore the details of this report in further depth than time allowed. Therefore, with reference to paragraph 3.3 – the Group would like to recommend that the Regional Centre of Excellence attend a future meeting of the Finance Sub-Group to discuss their work and give Members the opportunity to scrutinise this area of work further.
2. With reference to the fifth paragraph of the appendix (Annual efficiency statement – backward look), the group would like this paragraph to include an explanation that clarifies that the Challenge Board is an Officer led Group.
3. With reference to the section called ‘Key actions taken during the year’, the Group would like more explanation notes added, particularly where there have been crosschecks.

**Recommendation to Cabinet:
The Financial Management Strategy 2007-2012**

1. The Finance Portfolio Holder informed the Group that this was not the final version of the report, so there would be another opportunity for the Group to scrutinise it again.

The Group would like to recommend that this report be submitted to the Finance Sub-Group in October 2006.

25th July 2005 - Cabinet response to recommendation:

That the comments from the Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group be noted.

ITEMS REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY FINANCE SUB-GROUP – 4 SEPTEMBER 2006

The recommendations from the meeting of the Finance Sub-Group to be held on Monday, 4th September 2006 will be tabled at the meeting.

Under the new procedures outlines in Item 12 – Work Programme 2006/07, the Sub-Group will be requesting the Scrutiny Committee to formally refer its recommendations to Cabinet.