



Executive Committee

All wards

20 May 2009

Housing Mutual Exchange Task and Finish Group - Report

(Report of the Housing Mutual Exchange Task and Finish Group)

1. Summary of Proposals

The Housing Mutual exchange Task and Finish Group have reviewed the Council's Housing Mutual Exchange and Home Swap procedures. The Group have concluded that current procedures at the Council are satisfactory and require no further scrutiny at present. However, Members are recommending that existing inspection practices are more explicitly stated in the Council's Housing Mutual Exchange Policy and Procedure documentation to ensure that the process is transparent.

2. Recommendation

The Committee is asked to RESOLVE that:

subject to suitable rewording by Officers the following details should be incorporated into the Council's Housing Mutual Exchange Policy and Procedure:

“The Repair and Maintenance Officers should be employed to make the initial checks on each property to establish that no unauthorised alterations have been made to the properties and whether any rechargeable works need to be undertaken.

Any defects should be photographed and the details placed on file together with written reports concerning both properties.

Electrical tests for both properties should be arranged by Repairs and Maintenance.

The Tenancy Officer who is responsible for the mutual exchange together with the tenants involved should be advised in writing of any works required to be undertaken by them or the Council.

Normal Housing Mutual Exchange and Home Swap procedures should commence after the actions listed above have been completed satisfactorily. (i.e. the Tenancy Officer responsible for the exchange should visit both properties with both tenants).”

3. **Financial, Legal, Policy Risk and Sustainability Implications**

Financial

- 3.1 There are no financial implications.

Legal

- 3.2 There are no legal implications.

Policy

- 3.3 The Housing Mutual Exchange Task and Finish Group is recommending that the Housing Mutual Exchange Policy and Procedure documentation be amended to state current practice more explicitly. This would not require a change to the Council's current working policy.

Risk

- 3.4 There are no risk implications.

Sustainability / Environmental

- 3.5 There are no sustainability, environmental or climate change implications.

Report

4. **Background and Key Issues**

- 4.1 The Housing Mutual Exchange Task and Finish review took place in April 2009. Members were tasked with scrutinising the Council's Housing Mutual Exchange and Home Swap processes and with making recommendations that would lead to procedural improvements if required.
- 4.2 A particular case in the Crabbs Cross ward encouraged the Chair of the Group, Councillor Smith, to instigate the Task and Finish review. This case had been the subject of a Local Government Ombudsman's review in 2007, which had concluded by making a number of recommendations for the consideration of the Council.
- 4.3 The Group convened two meetings. During the course of these meetings: relevant Officers were interviewed by Members; the Group received a presentation on the subject of the Choice Based Lettings system and the role of mutual exchanges within that system; and

Members scrutinised the contents of the Council's Housing Mutual Exchange Policy and Procedure.

- 4.4 The Group concluded that the Council had responded to all of the recommendations contained within the Local Government Ombudsman's report. They were also satisfied that the Council's Housing Mutual exchange and Home Swap processes worked effectively. Consequently, they concurred that the Council's Housing Mutual Exchange process required no further scrutiny.
- 4.5 However, the Group agreed that current practice at the Council for inspecting properties that were the subjects of exchanges was not clearly stated in the Council's Housing Mutual Exchange Policy and Procedure documentation. Therefore the Group recommended that current practice should be more explicitly stated in this documentation to ensure that the process was transparent for both Officers and residents.
- 4.6 The Group have identified the particular processes which they believe need to be more clearly detailed in the Council's Housing Mutual exchange Policy and Procedure. However, they agreed that relevant Officers should rephrase the points that have been raised in the recommendation because those Officers should be able to incorporate the most appropriate terminology into the document.

5. **Other Implications**

- 5.1 Asset Management - There are no Asset Management implications.
- 5.2 Community Safety - There are no Community Safety implications.
- 5.3 Human Resources - There are no Human Resources implications.
- 5.4 Social Exclusion - There are no social exclusion implications.

6. **Lessons Learnt**

No lessons have been learnt during this review.

7. **Background Papers**

- 7.1 Draft Internal Audit Report: Housing Mutual Exchange, (8 December 2008).

7.2 Local Government Ombudsman's Report, Summary, (2007).

7.3 Mutual Exchange Procedures (Redditch Borough Council).

8. **Consultation**

Relevant Officers, including the Head of Housing and Community Services and the Housing Options Manager, have been consulted by the Housing Mutual Exchange Task and Finish Group.

9. **Author of Report**

The author of this report is Jess Bayley (Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer), who can be contacted on extension 3268 (e-mail: jess.bayley@redditchbc.gov.uk) for more information.

10. **Key**

- 10.1 Housing Mutual Exchange - Housing Mutual Exchange is a term which applies to exchanges involving properties situated within the Borough.
- 10.2 Home Swap - Home Swap is a term which applies to the exchange of a property situated within the borough with a property located in another local authority area.