

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING TO THE EXECUTIVE**  
**3<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2009**

**Exception to Standing Orders for a Joint Housing Viability Study**

**1.0 Introduction and Report Summary**

1.1 The Local Development Framework needs to be supported by a sound evidence base. As part of this process, officers have identified the need to commission a study of the viability of affordable housing in the Vale and South Oxfordshire. Officers propose to commission a study of housing viability jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council. An exception to the Council's Standing Orders is needed to enable the study to be procured effectively.

1.2 The contact officer for this report is Peter Williams, Principal Policy Officer (Planning), telephone (01235 520202 ext 502). **Email address** **peter.williams@whitehorsedc.gov.uk.**

**2.0 Recommendation**

- (a) *that an exception to Contract Standing Orders be authorised under Standing Order 2C to commission a housing viability study jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council using the contract standing orders operated by SODC rather than the Vale's Contract Standing Orders, for the reasons outlined in the report.*
- (b) *Members are also recommended to delegate to the Head of Planning authority to enter into a contract for a Housing Viability Study jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council to support the preparation of the Council's Local Development Framework.*

**3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies**

This report relates to the Council's Strategic Objective of meeting people's need for housing and the Corporate Priority of enabling affordable homes to be built in the district. The report does not conflict with any Council Strategies.

**4.0 Justification for an Exception to Standing Orders**

4.1 Information on the viability of affordable housing requirements is required by the government's Planning Policy Statement 3: 'Housing' to justify affordable housing policies in a Local Development Framework. Both this Council and South Oxfordshire District Council therefore need to commission a study to determine the viability of the proposed thresholds, percentages and tenure splits for affordable housing. Based on the costs incurred by other councils the joint contract is expected to cost in the region of £26,000.

4.2 Undertaking a joint study would save each council a substantial sum of money when compared to each doing their own study. For South Oxfordshire a study needs to be completed by the end of June whereas our requirement is for a completed study by the

end of July in order to meet committed deadlines for the Core Strategy submission in January 2010. It is imperative that the procurement process is undertaken as swiftly as possible. Members will recall that the recent joint Housing Needs Assessment was commissioned by this Council, so it is now the turn of South Oxfordshire District Council to take the lead on this study. In addition South Oxfordshire's procurement process for this type of contract is simpler and more efficient than this Council's. The contract will go through the procurement process at SODC and it would be an unnecessary duplication to require the study to be put through another public procurement process.

- 4.3 Standing Order 2C of the Council's Contract Standing Orders allows a specific contract to be approved by or on behalf of the Council without compliance with Standing Orders if there are special circumstances justifying an exception.
- 4.4 In respect of a specific contract, exceptions can be made if:- (a) the relevant Chief Officer has reported to the Council or Executive or the appropriate Committee the special circumstances justifying the exception and (b) at the appropriate meeting it has been resolved to approve the exception. The exception needs to be recorded in the minutes.
- 4.5 The special circumstances outlined above, including the fact that another public procurement process is being used, justify the exception to this Council's standing orders.
- 4.6 Members are therefore recommended to authorise an exception to Contract Standing Orders to allow the use of the procurement process operated by South Oxfordshire District Council rather than the Vale's Contract Standing Orders.
- 4.7 Members are also recommended to delegate to officers authority to enter into a contract for a Housing Viability Study jointly with South Oxfordshire District Council to support the preparation of the Council's Local Development Framework.

ADRIAN DUFFIELD  
Head of Planning