

**EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF THE STRATEGIC MONITORING COMMITTEE –
19 NOVEMBER 2007**

**47. THE COUNCIL'S POLICY FOR MANAGEMENT OF THE SMALLHOLDINGS
ESTATE**

(Councillor PJ Edwards declared a personal interest in this item.)

The Committee considered a report on the Council's policy for the management of the smallholdings estate.

The Head of Asset Management and Property Services presented the report.

In the course of discussion the following principal points were made:

- It was requested that a map be made available to Members of the Committee showing the Council's holdings. In reply it was noted that a series of maps would be needed but work currently underway on the Council's holdings as a whole should enable this information to be produced in due course.
- The policy of disposing of land when prices were rising was questioned. It was replied that the policy as set out in the Asset Management Plan was to generate £10 million in capital receipts over a ten year period. This should be achieved. The policy was to rationalise the smallholdings estate by disposing of unsuitable or high maintenance property.
- It was noted that some of the documentation quoted as background papers and described as policy did not indicate when it had been produced but appeared to be out of date. It was stated that the Property Strategy as reported to Cabinet on 19 May 2005 was the Council's policy and the documents being referred to were supporting working documents.
- It was proposed that a full review of the management of the smallholdings estate be carried out and properly documented in one report, with particular reference to value for money for the whole of Herefordshire.
- It was suggested that provided that the Committee was assured that the criteria for rationalisation of the estate were in place the Committee should focus on other issues.
- It was suggested that in some instances the rental for holdings compared favourably with that for a property on the Belmont housing estate. It was asked whether sub-letting was also taking place.

In reply the Estates Manager said that the previous Cabinet Member had instructed that there should be no sub-letting and under the Agricultural Holdings Act (AHA) this was not permitted. However, there were ways in which this could be subverted. He had discussed this with fellow land agents but there appeared to be no counter. In contrast, under the new Farm Business Tenancies (FBT) control could be exercised and permission required to sub-let. The Council could exercise its discretion under an FBT to permit sub-letting but if it did do so it could charge extra rent. Forty of the Sixty-one holdings were currently held under the AHA.

In response to detailed questions the following points were made:

- That increased prices for grain would be reflected in rent reviews.
- That one notice to quit had been issued and although the arrears had now been paid that tenant would leave the smallholding in February 2009.
- Expenditure on a road at a smallholding at Burghill was clarified.
- The reasons why a particular holding at Burghill had not been let were clarified explaining the various tenancy agreement options and their implications.

RESOLVED: That a full review of the management of the smallholdings estate be carried out and properly documented in one report, with particular reference to value for money for the whole of Herefordshire, and detailing the criteria for disposal and including maps showing the location of holdings.