

**Committee:** Health and Housing  
**Date:** 9 January 2003  
**Agenda Item No:** 5  
**Title:** Housing Strategy Statement 2003  
**Author:** Rod Chamberlain (01799) 510508

### **Summary**

- 1 This report requests the Committee to decide how it wishes the 2003 Housing Strategy Statement and 30 year Housing Business Plan process to be progressed.

### **Background**

- 2 It is a requirement of the Council to prepare an annual Housing Strategy Statement and 30 year Housing Business Plan.
- 3 In about April of each year, the Department of The Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) issues guidance to councils on the production of these documents as part of the annual Housing Investment Programme (HIP) process. The production of these documents takes a considerable period of time and also involves extensive consultation.
- 4 During the current financial year, the Committee established a Housing Strategy Task Group consisting of 3 Members and a Tenant Panel representative. After consideration of the issues and text, this Group recommended a draft to this Committee who in turn passed it to the full Council for ratification.

### **The Way Forward**

- 5 The Committee is requested to indicate if it would like this process to be repeated in 2003. Names could be proposed now but of course, the membership of the Task Group may need to be amended after the District Council Elections in May 2003.
- 6 Currently it is uncertain as to when meetings of the Task Group will take place as a great deal of information has to be assessed. It is expected that the draft Housing Strategy Statement and 30 year Housing Business Plan will be in draft form by July 2003. However information from the surveys on Housing Need and the Decent Homes – Condition of Stock may be the basis of a

presentation to the Task Group at an early stage, unless the Committee felt a special Member Workshop on these issues is more appropriate.

- 7 It is very important to note that the Task Group can not make specific decisions and can only report back on its findings and recommendations to this Committee. If the Committee wishes to give any guidance to the Task Group it is within its remit to do so at this point.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee indicates how it wishes the 2003 Housing Strategy Statement/Housing Business Plan to be progressed.

Background Papers: None

**Committee:** Health and Housing  
**Date:** 9 January 2003  
**Agenda Item No:** 6  
**Title:** Best Value Review of Housing Services – Draft Action Plan  
**Author:** Mr Rod Chamberlain (01799) 510508

**Member Reference Group: Councillors Mrs M Caton (Chairman), Mrs J Cheetham, Mr M Hibbs and Mr W Gladman (tenant representative)**

### **Summary**

- 1 This report outlines the Housing Best Value Action Plan which the Scrutiny 1 committee recommends.

### **The Scope of the Review**

- 2 The review has required intensive examination of the Housing Need (how the Council uses its resources to deal with those people requiring some form of social/affordable housing), Homelessness (how the Council deals with the needs of homeless people presenting as needing help), Tenant Participation (how the Council engages its tenants regarding the services they receive) and Private Housing Sector (how the Council uses available resources to assist private sector residents) services.
- 3 The review has concentrated on the '4C's' which are: Challenge, Consult, Compare and Compete. This has been achieved by wide spread consultation on these services. This has included challenge events involving Members, staff and others, benchmarking with other Councils and Registered Social Landlords to compare services and inviting comments from tenants of the Council and other relevant agencies regarding the services provided. In addition officers involved in the review have discussed the issues with

colleagues in other Councils. The services have been scrutinised in such a way to ensure that value for money remains a key factor in service delivery.

- 4 It should be noted that major factors which have been taken into account during the review have been the Homelessness Act 2002, which also requires fundamental changes to the Council's allocation policy, and forthcoming statutory changes to the Housing Grants arrangements.
- 5 There have been regular reports on the progress of this review to the Scrutiny One Committee during 2002 and Tenant Panel representatives have been fully involved. The proposed Action Plan has been the subject of discussion by Scrutiny 1 and has that Committee's support.

### **The Current Service**

- 6 The main areas that have been discussed and noted during the review are:-

#### **Housing Need**

- Council enables by way of grant, in partnership with Registered Social Landlords, new social housing for rent on new sites being developed. Some rural housing schemes include shared equity housing.
- There is no shared ownership/equity Register.
- Housing Need is defined as 20 points and above
- Housing Need survey was last conducted in 1997 and the final report on the survey undertaken in late 2002 will shortly be available.
- There is currently no capacity for the specific rehousing of key workers or a definition for this group.
- Current Housing Register requires a residential or work qualification in order for an application to receive active consideration. There is a non-active list.
- Current allocation scheme allows applicants to select 3 parishes of choice.
- If an offer of accommodation is refused, application is put 'on hold' for 1 year.
- The needs of General Needs applicants has been given priority with regard to new social housing opportunities.

#### **Homelessness**

- There is no dedicated officer dealing with the increasing workload of homeless people and their subsequent problems. This is not the case in many other authorities.
- The Council accesses Bed and Breakfast accommodation to rehouse homeless families in emergencies. Only a few establishments are available to the Council.
- No private sector housing has been able to be accessed to assist with the rehousing of the homeless.
- The current charging policy for those placed into Bed and Breakfast has not been reviewed for a number of years.

- There are a number of cases of families evicting their children, who have their own family, which all are staying in the same accommodation.

### **Tenant Participation**

- There are two Tenant Panels, with vacancies on both, and the issues discussed at meetings are very similar.
- Tenant Panel representatives have usually been involved with the preparation of newsletter publications supplied to tenants.
- Tenant Panel representatives hold office for one year elected at AGMs. There has never been a contested election. Attendance at AGMs is very poor.
- Meetings of tenants are held when specific issues arise. These meetings are usually well attended.
- Tenant representatives may only claim travelling expenses when attending official meetings.
- Meetings of Tenant Panels are held in evenings.
- Tenant Compact introduced March 2000 and has proved to be useful for Tenant Panels.

### **Private Sector Housing**

- Last Private Sector House Condition Survey carried out in 1993 at cost of £20,000. GO EAST has commented that this survey is out of date and needs to be repeated.
- Council does not have a specific Empty Homes Strategy/Policy.
- Currently grants made to owners/tenants on low income to repair or adapt homes.
- Renovation grants for improving unfit homes can be granted subject to means testing.
- Discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant is available to top up mandatory disabled facilities grant. This grant is subject to means testing.

### **Fundamental and Specific Questions**

- 7 The Terms of Reference for this review posed a number of fundamental and specific questions. All these questions have now been addressed by the Member Reference Group. The questions are now reproduced with the final responses.

Question: What is the Council wanting to achieve in the future in relation to these services?

*Response: Improved and more efficient services that meet the needs of residents. The services are needed and it has been concluded some can be provided in a way that delivers a better service.*

Question: Does the Council have a statutory duty to provide all these services?

*Response: Yes with regard to assessing need, dealing with homelessness, allocations, provision of mandatory grants and consultation with tenants.*

*There is no statutory requirement to provide Tenant Participation or any discretionary grants.*

Question: If not should the Council cease to provide the service and if so what is the likely impact?

*Response: It has been concluded that all the services under review should be continued with changes as proposed in the Action Plan. Removal of any discretionary service would be unpopular and could cause some hardship.*

Question: If the services are to be continued, are there better alternative ways to deliver the services either in-house or by another agency?

*Response: It is thought these services should continue to be provided 'in house' as they are complex and significant as part of the overall service provided. There is however scope for better partnership working regarding some of these services.*

Question: Is the Council identifying the real extent of housing need within the district and, if so, is it providing those applicants in the most need with suitable social housing?

*Response: The issue of housing need has been addressed during the review with regard to those people who apply for housing. Shared ownership/equity is now regarded as a real option and needs to be promoted. The results of a district wide Housing Needs survey will be fed into the 2003 Housing Strategy Statement.*

Question: Do we make the best use of the private/voluntary sector in dealing with homelessness?

*Response: Partnership working currently takes place with agencies such as Women's Refuges, Social Services and Housing Associations. These partnerships will be strengthened with the requirement to produce a Homeless Strategy. There is little interest to assist with rehousing the homeless from the private sector but further attempts are proposed to engage this sector.*

Question: Can homelessness be avoided in more cases and does the Council deal with applications appropriately?

*Response: There is a real need to consider whether the Council has adequate staffing resources available to deal with this client group following the Homelessness Act 2002. The action plan proposes that a full assessment is carried out and a report made to committee in mid-2003 on the resources needed. The draft action plan proposes further action to try and reduce the need of Bed and Breakfast and to try and widen the number of establishments used, to provide a better service.*

Question: In view of the new legislation does the Council need to reconsider its criteria for applicants being accepted onto the Housing Register and are applicants given enough choice when being considered for rehousing, whilst accepting there is only a limited supply of available accommodation?

*Response: The Homelessness Act 2002 is a major factor with regard to the review. The draft action plan proposes significant new criteria for acceptance on the Register and giving applicants much more choice. A new allocations policy identifies factors of real housing need.*

Question: Can tenants be better informed and more involved in decisions affecting their homes, tenancies and their local environment?

*Response: It is difficult to involve tenants in formal Tenant Panel meetings although attendance at specific issues meetings is good. The draft action plan proposes changes to the structure of Tenant Participation and new ways of involving tenants.*

Question: Is the Tenant Compact still relevant, in particular, can formal arrangements for tenants' involvement in decisions be improved.

*Response: It is thought the Tenant Compact is still very relevant, however, there is a need to review it in conjunction with Tenant Representatives. The Action Plan addresses the issue of streamlining the Tenant Panel structure in accordance with the Compact.*

Question: Is the condition of the Private Housing stock at an acceptable level?

*Response: Local knowledge suggests that housing conditions are fairly good. However, the Action Plan proposes that there is a need to consider a number of new proposals to deal with aspects of private sector tenures.*

### **The Draft Action Plan**

- 8 After detailed discussion of many issues relating to the Housing Services under review, the following list of proposed actions is submitted for the approval of the Committee. Appended to this report is a proposed new allocation policy which should be read in conjunction with the Action Plan. The details of this allocation policy have been successfully tested by Housing Officers. The allocation policy also conforms to the requirements of the Homelessness Act 2002.
- 9 The emphasis of the action plan is on improving the quality of services provided. There is no likely savings in real terms.

No	Objective	Proposed Action	Target date	Financial implications
1	To provide residents with shared equity forms of tenure	<b>Housing Need</b> Include shared ownership/equity as part of new housing developments subject to a need being identified on each site opportunity	Immediate	No Revenue Implications here. Redirection of capital funding through LASHG.
2	Create a Register for those applicants who do not want social housing for rent	Create a shared/ownership Housing Register, independent of normal Housing Register and actively promote this type of accommodation for local people when opportunities occur.	By April 2003	See para 9.
3	To identify those key workers in the district unable to provide their own housing	Work with other agencies (county council, health authority etc) to attempt to define Key Workers. To be included in future Housing Strategies.	By July 2003	Within existing budgets. <i>(With an opportunity to attract funding from the Housing Corporation's Capital Challenge Pot).</i>
4	To identify applicants in need of housing in the district	All applicants receiving Need Points to be regarded as requiring social housing. (see attached Draft Allocations policy).	Policy by January 2003 – operational by April 2003	See para 9
5	To redefine who may be placed on Council's Register.	Introduce new Housing Register criteria. (See attached draft allocations policy).	Policy by January 2003	See para 9
6	To assess the Community's housing needs on a regular basis	Continue to conduct a full "Housing Needs Survey" every 5 years.	On-going	Budget in place for Survey in 2002/03 with an annual amount of £11,000 to be earmarked to fund future surveys ( <i>minute RE4</i> )
7	To provide more choice for applicants in Housing Need	Introduce wider choice for applicants on Housing Register (see attached draft Allocations policy)	Policy by January 2003 – operational by April 2003	See para 9

8	To operate a revised allocations policy	Abolish any penalties when applicants on Housing Register refuse an offer of accommodation. (See attached draft allocation policy).	Immediate	May increase on some void levels.
9	To provide more choice for elderly and disabled applicants	Consider the needs of elderly and disabled residents on all new housing development sites.	Immediate	No Revenue implications here. Redirection of capital funding through LASHG.
10	Respond to the new statutory requirements as imposed in the Homelessness Act 2002	<b>Homelessness</b> To assess the new workload entailed	By July 2003	It is too early to identify the financial implications (current recharge made from the HRA to the General Fund in respect of this aspect of the service equates to the costs and overheads of 0.24 of a FTE post (£14,040 in the 2002/03 budget)
11	Prepare a homeless strategy	Complete the work in conjunction with partners	By July 2003	Estimated cost to the General Fund of £8,500. These costs to form part of the bid to ODPM for additional implementation funding (see para 9 below).
12	To introduce a fairer charging policy regarding applicants placed into bed and breakfast	Contribution to be £4 per adult per night and £2 per child. Exempt if on any state benefit other than child benefit or a child tax credit allowance.	Immediate	Costs likely to be neutral as the small increase in contribution would be offset by an increase in exempt applicants



13	To reduce homeless cases, following family disputes.	Enter into Homeless at Home agreements in very controlled circumstances.	Immediate	See point 15 below
14	To provide more good quality establishments when bed and breakfast is necessary.	Where bed and breakfast is unavoidable ensure a wider range of available bed and breakfast establishments is available.	By April 2003	See point 15 below
15	To endeavour to engage private housing sector regarding the rehousing of the homeless	Contact private sector regarding availability of accommodation for this group by the holding of a landlord's forum.	By April 2003	Potential to reduce costs of homeless accommodation (average net cost to the Council per household day in B&B accommodation in 2001/02 was £23.65)
		<b>Tenant Participation</b>		
16	To provide a better strategic structure.	Create one strategic Tenant Panel.	By April 2003	Potential savings (HRA) of up to £1,000
17	To develop the democratic arrangements for TP	Term of office of new Panel to be 2 years commencing Oct 2003. Election by postal nomination and subsequent ballot of all the Council's Tenants if required.	By October 2003	Estimated cost (HRA) of £700 additional printing/postage.
18	To encourage more tenants to become involved in Tenant Panels.	Introduce a policy of paying a contribution towards child care and carer costs for tenants attending Panel meetings.	April 2003	Estimated cost (HRA) of up to £300. (estimated as 30 hours per annum @ a maximum hourly rate of £10 per hour)
19	To encourage more TP attendance at meetings.	Hold some Tenant Panel meetings during the day, and to encourage meetings in various parts of the District.	Immediate	Potential small savings (HRA) by reducing staff overtime costs.
20	To encourage Tenant Panels to engage Councillors in TP where appropriate.	To invite Councillors to attend meetings by invitation in order to assist TP development.	May 2003	Within existing budgets

21	To revise and update structure	Update Tenant Compact with Tenant Panel reps	June 2003	Within existing (HRA) budgets.
22	To ascertain tenant's views on services provided	Hold Tenant Forum meetings in main locations in district and invite tenants to attend to make views known and ask questions on service delivery.	First round of meetings by June 2003	Within existing (HRA) budgets.
23	To provide more information for tenants	Prepare a Tenant Handbook involving Tenant Panel representatives	By 31/3/03	Within existing (HRA) budgets.
24	To ensure that current information held by Council on condition of private sector housing is adequate	<b>Private Housing</b> Assess the adequacy of our information on private sector housing conditions in the light of the new national and regional data	April 2003	Within existing budgets.
25	To decide if new survey on private housing condition needs to be commissioned	Form an opinion when assessment above completed, as to whether a new survey represents value for money	June 2003	(It is estimated that commissioning a new survey would cost £30,000)
26	To achieve more private sector occupation	Assess the impact of revoking the Council Tax discount given to long term empty homes	April 2003	Full consideration will need to be given to any financial implications for the Council
27	To use local knowledge to see if more empty private sector accommodation can be utilised	Consult with town and parish councils on their knowledge of problematic empty homes in their areas	May 2003	Within existing budgets.
28	To encourage owners of empty property to bring them back into use	Use the Council Tax database to contact the owners of long term empty homes and start a dialogue on the types of support and advice that the Council can offer to facilitate the return of the property to occupation	September 2003	Estimated cost of £500 per run to generate and despatch letters to owners of empty property from CT database.

29	To consider implications of a new renewal grant policy in accordance with statutory guidance.	Report to Health and Housing Committee on proposals for an Uttlesford Housing Renewal Grant, repayable on sale of the property.	July 2003	Repayments of proposed UHRG would represent Capital Receipts.
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10 It should be noted that changes to the I.T. allocations and points scheme and associated training will be required. The Council will be able to fully utilise the specific implementation grant of £20,000 it has received from the ODPM.

11 If the Committee approves the Action Plan, implementation will take place as quickly as possible and target dates have been supplied in the report.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee approves the draft Action Plan.

Background Papers: BVPP 2002/03  
Best Value Review documentation for the review  
(R Chamberlain file)  
Reports to Scrutiny 1 Committee 2002/03

## **UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL**

### **Draft Allocations Scheme (commencing January 2003) which relates to dwellings being allocated on a secure tenancy basis**

#### **The Allocation Scheme**

This allocation scheme has been adopted by Uttlesford District Council. The Council's Health and Housing Committee is responsible for policy issues relating to the scheme. The operation of the scheme will be the responsibility of the Director of Community Services and other appropriate officers within Housing Services.

#### **The Scheme – Equal Opportunities**

- The Council's allocation scheme will be operated strictly in accordance with Council policy and in accordance with the Commission of Racial Equality Code of Practice and irrespective of an applicant's ethnic origin, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, age or disability.
- Applications will be held on a database and information will be subject to Data Protection legislation.

#### **Assessing Housing Need**

- The Council will operate a Housing Register. All applicants wishing to be considered for secure accommodation vacancies (either UDC and/or nominations to a RSL or Shared Equity Nomination) must complete a form and return it for assessment to the Director of Community Services, Housing Services, Uttlesford District Council, London Road, Saffron Walden.
- Should anyone have any difficulty in completing an application form, housing staff will assist.
- The register will include Council/RSL tenants who wish to move to alternative accommodation.
- The priority awarded to an application will be decided by a Housing Needs Points Scheme, following a home visit.
- Applicants will be required to provide details of their financial circumstances.
- No application will be considered for rehousing until completion of the Housing Investigation. Accordingly if an applicant has been asked to supply information and has failed to do so no action will be taken on the application until compliance.
- Should it be concluded that an applicant under normal state retirement age is financially able to secure alternative accommodation at market rent no points will be awarded.
- Owner occupiers over state retirement age would normally only be considered for sheltered housing.

#### **Who will be included on the Register**

- Anyone where a member of the family is aged over 18 years of age.
- Any applicant where the Council has accepted a duty to rehouse in accordance with the Homelessness Act 2002 (this could include 16/17 years olds who are homeless).

Who will not be included on the Register.

- Persons subject to immigration control who are not eligible for an allocation of housing would include:
  - Registered with the Home Office as an Asylum Seeker,
  - Visitor to UK who had limited leave to remain in the UK.
  - Persons allowed entry to UK, but have no recourse to public funds.

#### Who will not be considered for an allocation

- Anyone, or a member of the family, who is regarded as guilty of unacceptable behaviour which would make the person or family unsuitable to be a tenant (this would be decided where there are good grounds for a Court to issue a Possession Order for eviction – not a suspended order).

#### The Points Scheme

Applications will be assessed in accordance with the following criteria.

#### Homeless

- |   |   |    |
|---|---|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accepted by the Council as a vulnerable household, in priority need and vulnerable (shortly to be homeless or actually homeless – including applicants placed into Bed and Breakfast by the Council).</li> </ul> | } | 15 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra points if applicant or tenant is or likely to be a victim of violence/racial harassment (granted only if being dealt with as a homeless applicant)</li> </ul>  | } | 2  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As above but in temporary accommodation or subject to a Homeless at Home Agreement which was found or provided by the Council.</li> </ul>  |   | 10 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledged by the Council as homeless or shortly to be homeless, but not in priority need or not vulnerable or not intentionally homeless.</li> </ul>  |   | 8  |

- Current Notice of Seeking Possession/Notice to Quit/Court summonses 5
- Intentionally Homeless 5

(Note: the Council will endeavour to assist such applicants if it has the available resources)

### **Rent Agriculture Act**

- \* Where the Council has accepted a statutory duty to rehouse 5

### **Unsuitable housing**

- Lacking a living room 2
- Lacking bath or shower facilities 2
- Lacking kitchen 3
- Lacking inside WC 3
- Lacking water supply 4
- Lacking electricity 4
- Lacking adequate heating 3
- Lacking hot water 2
- Lacking appropriate garden facilities for children 1
- Lacking a bedroom or overcrowding (points to be awarded if parent(s) other adult members of the household, opposite sex children (where one is aged over 7 years) or more than 2 same sex children sharing an appropriate sized room) 2 (for each element of bedroom deficiency)
- Sharing living room 1
- Sharing kitchen 1
- Sharing bathroom 1
- Sharing WC 1
- Property in disrepair (where applicant not responsible) 1 or 2
- Property unfit (follow Environmental Health advice) 3 or 5
- Property has poor internal/external arrangements for the applicant (eg access to WC, difficult stairs etc). 1, 2 or 3
- Elderly people under occupying accommodation. 1

### **Medical Grounds**

- Discretionary points to be awarded taking into account an applicants medical or welfare needs (as disclosed by the applicant and where alternative accommodation would benefit). Consideration to be given to letters from GP's and other agencies etc. 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5
- Extra points if medical condition is regarded as urgent. 2

### **Hardship/Welfare**

Discretionary points to be awarded taking into account an applicants social welfare and employment needs (where alternative accommodation would benefit). 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5

### **Violence/harassment**

Any applicant or tenant, currently living in accommodation where there is a risk of them becoming a victim of violence or harassment (including racial) where alternative accommodation is required, but where a homeless application **has not** been made to the Council. 10

### **UDC Tenants and Nominated Tenants to RSL's**

UDC tenants or RSL Tenants (where UDC have nominations rights) requesting more suitable accommodation resulting in better use of the Council's stock (in addition to other points awarded)

Need to move. 8

Request more suitable accommodation 5

Note: No tenant or RSL tenant will, unless there are very exceptional grounds, be awarded any points if the management of their existing home is unsatisfactory due to tenant neglect or if a possession order has been granted, including rent arrears.

### **Local Connection with UDC**

In the event of an Uttlesford resident's application scoring any points on the above further points will be added to the application as follows:

- Permanent resident in UDC 4
- Extra if permanent resident in UDC for more than the last 2 years prior to application 2

Other connections as follows:

- If a non-resident of UDC scores any needs points extra points will be added if they have Full time employment in the Uttlesford District 1
- Strong family connection within the Uttlesford district. 2
- 15 years previous residence in Uttlesford as a juvenile 4
- Returning member of HM Forces 4

\*Note all initial points allocations will be carried out by a Housing Officer and will be agreed with a Senior Housing Officer.

### **Housing Need**

All applications scoring any points will be regarded by the Council as being in housing need. This means that the Council would like to rehouse if it had the resources available. Any applicants awarded 0 points will be regarded as not being in need. Housing Need will be recorded as a global number and highlighting the number resident in Uttlesford.

### **Housing Choice**

- The district will be split up into eight 'Rehousing Areas'.

These areas will be based on the following areas.

- Area 1 Saffron Walden
- Area 2 Saffron Walden (rural)



Area 3	Great Dunmow
Area 4	Great Dunmow (rural)
Area 5	Stansted
Area 6	Stansted (rural)
Area 7	Thaxted
Area 8	Thaxted (rural)

- Applicants may select, in order, any or all of the 'Rehousing Areas'.
- Applicants may request NOT to be considered for certain parishes or streets within each area (it is the responsibility of applicants to ensure their preferences are noted).
- Applicants will be assessed for the type of accommodation for which they qualify.
- Applicants can request consideration for other types of accommodation but priority will be given to those categories of applicant who qualify for the vacancy.
- As a general principle the vacancy in question will be made to the highest pointed applicant who requests and qualifies for that vacancy. Any exception to this would require authorisation by the Director of Community Services or Head of Housing with a full reason being endorsed on the papers.
- Applicants can only be considered for one vacancy at a time. This will be decided by the priority given by the applicant to the 'Rehousing Areas'.
- When an offer of accommodation is made, the applicant must respond within 7 days or the offer will be automatically withdrawn.
- Members of the Council, who so request, will be notified of the proposed allocation of any vacancy (including dwellings used for rehousing the homeless) which occur within their ward.

#### **Right to Review**

- Any applicant has the right to ask for a review regarding a decision made concerning any aspect of this policy. Any request must outline the grounds why a review is thought appropriate.
- Any review and any subsequent review will be dealt with by an officer(s) or appropriate person(s) not involved in the previous decision.