
REPORT TO:	Housing & Community Services Committee	AGENDA ITEM:
DATE OF MEETING:	12th October 2006	CATEGORY:
REPORT FROM:	Chair of Community Scrutiny Committee	DELEGATED
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	Councillor Ron Lane (Chair of Community Scrutiny Committee)	DOC:
SUBJECT:	Audit Commission Inspection of the Council's Housing Repairs & Maintenance Service	REF:
WARD (S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:

6(b)

1.0 Recommendations

1.1 It is recommended that

- a. The tenants obligations with respect to 'dealing with asbestos' should be included in the lettings agreement (see Audit Commission Ref: R3)
- b. A separate report advising on the implications of the slippages in the Sheltered Housing 'Vision & Standards' Plan be prepared for the Housing & Community Services Committee (Ref R4)
- c. Consider the need for and frequency of post inspections (Ref. R5)
- d. A discount system to be investigated for retrospective annual review of repetitive work in the proposed contract arrangements (Ref R6)
- e. There appears to be scope for improvements in the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) Arrangements with our Partners need to be reviewed as a matter of urgency. (Ref. R7)
- f. The extension of reporting times to include Saturday mornings to be reviewed (Ref. R9).
- g. That a 'capacity building' exercise is undertaken to develop the housing maintenance and repairs service / DFGs with a view to improving performance, quality and VFM (Ref. R12)
- h. In the absence of a planned Audit Commission re-inspection of the housing repairs and maintenance service, the commissioning of an independent assessment of the service is made within eighteen months time to allow for the completion of the implementation plan and to collect six months performance data

2.0 Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide feedback and make recommendations to the Housing & Community Services Committee on the progress made by Housing Services in completing the recommendations made by the Audit Commission, following their inspection of the Council's housing repairs and maintenance service in June 2005.

3.0 Setting the Scene

Inspection

- 3.1 The inspection was undertaken in June 2005. The areas of inspection covered:
- Access, customer care and user focus
 - Diversity
 - Capital improvement, planned and cyclical maintenance, and, major repairs to the Council's 3,235 homes
 - Responsive and void repairs
 - Gas servicing
 - Aids and adaptations for people with disabilities
 - Resident involvement and value for money
- 3.2 A Report on the Inspection was published in October 2005.

Findings

- 3.3 The Audit Commission's overall judgement was that the Council provided a 'fair', one star service with 'promising' prospects for improvement.
- 3.4 The Inspectors identified a number of positive aspects about the service, but they also found a number of service areas that need improving.
- 3.5 Although the Inspectors assessed the Council's prospects for improvement as 'promising', they also identified a number of 'barriers' to our prospects for improvement, which included:
- Some actions identified in previous inspections have not been implemented and progress has been slow on some issues
 - Best Value principles have not been effectively and comprehensively applied to the service
 - IT systems are not yet sufficiently developed

Audit Commission Recommendations

- 3.6 The Inspectors went on to make a number of recommendations designed to help the service continue to improve.
- 3.7 These recommendations including the outcomes of the inspection were

reported to the Housing & Community Services Committee on the 17th November 2005. (Minute Ref: HCS / 62)

4.0 Consideration by the Community Scrutiny Committee

4.1 The progress made on completing the Audit Commission's recommendations have been discussed on five occasions as outlined below.

Date / Minute Ref	Detail
31 July 06 CYS/8	Background information on the Audit Commission's inspection. Progress, as reported in the Best Value Performance Plan, (published in June 2006) provided
14 Aug 06	Informal meeting. Additional questions to clarify the progress forwarded to the Head of Housing Services for comment.
11 Sep 06 CYS / 16	A report updating the progress made (as at the 1 st September 2006) was provided A number of supplementary questions relating to the issues identified in the Audit Commission's Inspection report were raised in order to seek further clarification on progress made (See H&CS Committee report – Appendix 1, dated 17 th November 2005) An informal meeting to be arranged.
14 Sep 06	Informal meeting between the Chair of this Committee, the Chair of Housing & Community Services, Head of Housing Services and the Housing Performance Manager. Clarification to the supplementary questions were provided
25 Sep 06	Special Committee meeting to finalise report and make recommendations to H&CS Committee

5.0 Community Scrutiny Committee's Findings

5.1 The findings are contained in the table below

Ref No.	Audit Commission's Recommendation	Community Scrutiny Committee's	
		Comments/ Observations	Recommendations
Within 3 months			
R1	Report the findings and recommendations of this report to the Council, staff, tenants, leaseholders and stakeholders.	Complete All Members will now receive the Tenants newsletters	
R2	Prepare a SMART action plan to address all weaknesses identified in this report and ensure that progress is regularly monitored and reported.	Complete and ongoing A "HAPPY" document coordinates all action plans within the service area	
R3	Undertake a comprehensive review of the provision of repairs and maintenance leaflets to tenants to ensure that information is provided in a consistent and co-ordinated manner and that all tenants are supplied with information to help in the diagnosis of repairs.	Subject to approval by the H& CS Committee (Nov 06) the Tenant's Handbook will be available in January 2007, Advice on dealing with asbestos to be included in Handbook Handbook / leaflets will conform to current corporate diversity standards All new tenants are now visited within 6 months of taking up occupancy	Tenants obligations regarding asbestos' to be included in the lettings agreement
R4	Review progress against all outstanding diversity actions within the key action plans. Ensure that action is taken on all outstanding items.	All outstanding diversity issues have been accepted as being complete. New statutory guidance from the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) is currently being assessed. Progress will be made via the corporate Equalities and Diversity Action Group Due to some work slippage, the Sheltered Housing's 'Vision & Standards' Plan is being reviewed	A separate report to be prepared for consideration by H&CS Committee

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		Comments / Observations	Recommendations
Within 6 months			
R5	In conjunction with stakeholders undertake a detailed analysis of the responsive service to address the high incidence of variation orders and the reasons for the high levels of jobs being diagnosed and ordered as emergencies.	<p>Work programme produced as a result of the 'Challenge Day'</p> <p>Other consultation meetings planned</p> <p>All preparatory work to completed (April 2007) Intention to move towards the simplified National Federation schedule of rates in order to manage future repairs work</p> <p>Independent VFM assessment for maintenance work approved by the external Auditor. A report due (late October 2006)</p> <p>The ratio of planned to emergency works is 63:37. which is within current good practice guidelines of 60:40</p> <p>It is noted that the current BVPI 211b defines this ratio in financial terms (i.e. capital: revenue equates to 45:55) However, we should be less concerned with this definition than our work definition which represents good practice</p> <p>Stock condition database is kept up to date by changes to administrative procedures</p> <p>Targets for pre and post work inspections are set at 10% and 20% respectively</p>	<p>Consider the frequency of post inspections</p>

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		Comments / Observations	Recommendations
Within 6 months (continued)			
R6	Undertake a review in conjunction with stakeholders of contract administration, management and evaluation procedures to enable the delivery of a more customer -focused service.	<p>Tenants are now fully involved in major improvements to their homes. A range of fittings benchmarked which ensures they have a reasonable choice and requirements of VFM are met</p> <p>Planned maintenance works fully discussed with tenants</p> <p>Independent VFM assessment of the repairs and maintenance report to be considered (October 2006.</p> <p>National Federation rates allow for a 'location' factor batching when organising work in semi rural areas</p> <p>Application of 'void discounts' will be included in contract arrangements for 'location' and 'repetitive' work discounts. Thus addressing Best Value principles</p> <p>Delays in implementation of the assessment have occurred due to changes in the departmental management structure and long term staff absence</p>	<p>A discount system be investigated for retrospective annual review of repetitive work in the proposed contract arrangements</p>

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Within 6 months (continued)			
R7	Review the procedures for aids and adaptations to ensure that initial requests for aids and adaptations are recorded, works are captured on property attributes and the service is monitored to ensure that it is meeting its stated objective of achieving independent living.	<p>Procedures to update the stock condition database are in place and active</p> <p>It was noted that two property databases are held. (Housing for council owned properties and in Environmental Services for privately owned properties)</p> <p>Appears to be some scope with our Partners to improve the delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)</p> <p>Currently, DFGs are being delivered within 35 weeks, of works being authorised by Social Services</p>	Arrangements with our partners to be reviewed
R8	Continue to develop the provision of performance information so that it includes all service areas and corresponding commentary and actions to manage under performance and deliver service improvements.	All service plans are SMART. They are regularly reviewed and reported	

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Within 6 months (continued)			
R9	Increase resident involvement and influence in all aspects of this service.	<p>All actions to involve residents are now complete.</p> <p>Reduction in the number of telephone lines is being considered.</p> <p>Careline' number to remain as an exclusive facility for vulnerable and 'at risk people'</p> <p>The existing 2 lines for reporting repairs will continue to operate for the next 12 months, until a diagnostic system to assist 'Customer First' staff deal with reports is introduced and / or the implementation of contract changes to National Federation rate</p>	The extension of reporting times to include Saturday mornings to be reviewed as a matter of urgency
Within 12 months			
R10	Implement appointments across all trades to enable all tenants to be offered them in accordance with prescribed timescales and to improve ease of access for tenants.	The provision of offering repairs outside normal working hours and on Saturdays (subject to individual circumstances) was noted	
R11	Ensure that all elements of the repairs and maintenance service deliver value for money.	See comments in R5 and R6 above	

Ref No.	Audit Commission's Recommendation	Community Scrutiny Committee's	
		Comments / Observations	Recommendations
Within 12 months continued			
R12	In conjunction with contractors and tenants actively develop a strategy that will enable a move from a responsive to a planned maintenance service.	<p>Comments regarding resource issues , detailed in R5 and R6 above are pertinent</p> <p>Strategy produced. Implementation is forecast for completion in April 2007 Elements of the housing repairs and maintenance service, including the delivery of DFGs would benefit from a building capacity exercise.</p> <p>This exercise would ensure that the service continues to improve</p> <p>The structure of existing working arrangements may have to be reviewed</p>	<p>That a 'capacity building' exercise is undertaken to develop the housing maintenance and repairs service / DFGs with a view to improving performance, quality and VFM</p>

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 This report has been prepared to clarify the progress made by the Council's Housing Services in fulfilling the recommendations made by the Audit Commission's inspection of the housing repairs and maintenance service in June 2005.
- 6.2 The findings reveal that the Housing Services division is making significant progress in achieving the recommendations made by the Audit Commission
- 6.3 Both this Committee and Housing Services are concerned that the Audit Commission have no plans in place to re-inspect the Council's housing repairs and maintenance service in the immediate future.
- 6.4 The lack of any formal recognition by an external organisation that improvements to service delivery have been made, may have a demotivational effect on staff, who have made progress on the Audit Commission's recommendations possible
- 6.5 Providing the Housing Service continues to maintain its focus and builds on its current successes, it is possible in this Committee's opinion that some elements of the Housing service could achieve 'Beacon' status.
- 6.6 It is the Committee's opinion that, if a re-inspection of the housing repairs and maintenance service were undertaken in 12 months time,

a significant improvement to the re-rating of the service would be realised

- 6.7 This Committee would like to thank all the Officers and Members who prepared reports and contributed to the discussions, in making this report possible.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 An independent VFM assessment for repairs and maintenance has been agreed by the external auditor as a reasonable course of action. A separate report is due late October 2006. The report will comment on whether it is necessary to place the repairs and maintenance works out to tender. The procurement process is likely to cost in the region of £50,000 to the Council.

- 7.2 In the absence of a planned Audit Commission re-inspection of the housing repairs and maintenance service, the commissioning of an independent assessment in eighteen months time is likely to cost in the region of £7,000 to £8,000

8.0 Background Papers

- 8.1 Housing & Community Services Committee, 'Audit Commission inspection of the Repairs and Maintenance Service,' 17th November 2006
- 8.2 Best Value Performance Plan 2006
- 8.3 Community Scrutiny Committee, '*Housing repairs and maintenance inspection,*' 31st July 2006
- 8.4 Community Scrutiny Committee, '*Housing repairs and maintenance inspection,*' 11th September 2006
- 8.5 Community Scrutiny Committee, '*Housing repairs and maintenance inspection,*' 11th September 2006
- 8.6 Other supporting papers held by the Housing Services and Policy & Economic Regeneration sections