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<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>Housing and Community Services Committee</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM:</b> 10
<b>DATE OF MEETING:</b>	<b>21<sup>st</sup> April 2005</b>	<b>CATEGORY:</b> Delegated
<b>REPORT FROM:</b>	<b>Director of Community Services</b>	<b>OPEN</b>
<b>MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:</b>	<b>Bob Ledger (ext 5775)</b>	<b>DOC:</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Preparation for the Audit Commission Inspection within the Housing Service</b>	<b>REF:</b>
<b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>TERMS OF REFERENCE: HCS01</b>

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**1. Recommendation and purpose of report**

- 1.1 To advise and seek ongoing approval from Members for the preparation underway for the Audit Commission inspection of the Housing Service in June 2005.
- 1.2 To note and approve that a competitiveness study of the responsive and void repair service be undertaken to include market competition in the next financial year.

**2. Detail**

- 2.1 The delivery of Council Services is subject to external inspection by the Audit Commission. The housing services delivered by Councils and RSLs (Registered Social Landlords – mainly Housing Associations) are subject to specific and additional inspection through the Commission i.e. there is a housing inspectorate within the Commission. The Audit Commission has stated that they have programmed an inspection of our Housing Service and specifically our Repairs and Maintenance function in w/c 6<sup>th</sup> June 2005.
- 2.2 The Audit Commission summarise their findings through awarding stars from 0 (poor) to 3 (very good) and by stating how likely the housing organisation is to improve in the future. Some members will recall that the last Audit Commission inspection for housing focussed on the Sheltered Housing Service. This originally took place in 2001 where no stars were awarded and was reinspected the following year where 1 star was awarded and the authority was assessed as having promising prospects for improvement.
- 2.3 The Audit Commission has a detailed matrix which it uses to assess services but have already additionally stated that they will be emphasising on the forthcoming inspection issues of value for money and governance.
- 2.4 Following approval at the November 2004 Housing and Community Services Committee a Members' steering group was established to oversee the preparation

process and a Corporate officer working group has also been established to ensure that the preparations and the Best Value review process as a whole are undertaken in accordance with established procedure. The Members' steering group comprises Cllrs, Richards, Murphy, Taylor, Bale and F. Hood whilst the officer group comprises the Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Human Resources, Head of Finance and Property Services, Unison Branch Secretary, Head of Housing, Housing Operations Manager, Housing Repair and Improvement Manager and Housing Strategy Officer.

- 2.5 The preparation process commenced with an assessment of our baseline position as assessed against the Audit Commission's 'Key Lines of Enquiry' (KLOEs). These give examples of good practice in the relevant service areas. From the baseline assessment areas of weakness or need for development were identified and these have been developed into action plans one to be delivered in time for the inspection and a further one as a post-inspection action plan. Relevant officers within the Housing Service are now fully engaged on delivering those action plans with progress being monitored by both the Members' steering and officer groups.
- 2.6 There are three reports to this Committee which seek to progress significant parts of the action plan namely: a review of the Service's Asset Management Strategy; as a supplement to the Corporate Procurement Strategy, a Housing Procurement Guide and; a recommendation to invest in the future viability of the DLO operation with the appointment of two trainees.
- 2.7 The DLO operation will be a critical part of the inspection process. It can be evidenced that the DLO operation has not been properly invested in for many years either in terms of resources or management and development. This situation was recognised over a year ago and the situation has improved over recent months by; physically merging the admin' functions of the repair client and contractor roles thereby improving joint working and providing cover for holiday and other absences in a small team; uniting the routine and void property repair function (both contractor and client roles) under one Manager and; investing in new computer software across the whole repair function but to specifically include a dedicated DLO module.
- 2.8 Although these investments are starting to improve the responsive repair side of our work, adherence to target timescales in work completion is still below an acceptable level. Combining this with the fact that the delivery of responsive and void repair work has not been tendered since 1999 will lead the Inspectors to probe into why the Council hasn't examined other delivery mechanisms for this key area i.e. externalising the service.
- 2.9 In recognising this situation part of the pre-inspection action plan is to undertake a 'competitiveness study' of the responsive and void repair operation. This study will need to give a commitment to tender this part of our work in the short to medium term (the autumn of 2006 will be proposed). If we do not give such a commitment against a background of poor performance this will lead to the Council being critically assessed in a key area and it would have a highly significant impact on our overall assessment e.g. it may mean the difference between being assessed as poor rather than fair.
- 2.10 At the time of writing this report officers are working on providing by April 12<sup>th</sup> the advance document request list which entails 95 separate requests for policy, procedural or information documents and the 30 page self-assessment form. It is

anticipated that copies of both the completed document request list and the self-assessment form will be sent to all Members of Council for information and comment.

**3. Financial Implications**

- 3.1 There are significant resource implications involved with inspection principally in officer time.

**4. Corporate Implications**

- 4.1 Involving Members and other services in the inspection and Best Value Review process provides for a more collective and corporate approach to this important piece of work.

**5. Community Implications**

- 5.1 The overall aim is to improve the quality and cost effectiveness of our services provided primarily to the tenants of SDDC

