

AGENDA ITEM NO

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

PEROFRMANCE MANAGEMENT BOARD

17th JULY 2007

AUDIT COMMISSION - INSPECTION OF STRATEGIC HOUSING SERVICES – ACTION PLAN

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Cllr Peter Whittaker
Responsible Head of Service	David Hammond

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council's Strategic Housing Services were inspected by the Audit Commission in the week commencing the 27th March 2006. The Housing Inspection assessment by the Audit Commission scored Bromsgrove District Council as providing a poor service that has uncertain prospects of improvement.
- 1.2 A report was made to PMB last August upon the action plan that had been developed and approved by the Executive Cabinet to address the recommendations made by the Audit Commission. This second report re – presents an update on the action plan (as at June 15th 2007) which outlines the progress that has been made with 86% of the actions having been completed.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That Members receive the Housing Inspection Action Plan; updated as at 15th June 2007.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Audit Commission report detailed the reasons that informed the score of 'poor with uncertain prospects for improvement'. The inspection focussed upon the following principal areas:
- Access and customer care
 - Diversity
 - Value for money,
 - Housing strategy and enabling
 - Homelessness and housing needs
 - Private sector housing

These are the services remaining after the Council transferred its housing stock through Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) to the Bromsgrove District Housing Trust in March 2004.

The Audit Commission assessed Bromsgrove District Council as providing a 'poor', zero-star service that has uncertain prospects for improvement.

3.2 **RECOMMENDATIONS SET OUT IN THE REPORT**

The report offered practical pointers for improvement and identified the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation.

There were 6 key recommendations set out in the report which are as follows:

R1 Develop a specific, measurable, achievable, resources and time bound (SMART) action plan to address all weaknesses identified in this report and ensure that progress is regularly monitored and reported corporately.

R2 Strengthen the focus on providing effective access and customer care by:

- Introducing, publishing and monitoring service standards in conjunction with customers;
- Establishing systems to gather regular feedback from customers and use this information to inform service development;
- Ensuring that effective monitoring arrangements are in place covering externalised services.

R3 Strengthen the corporate approach to diversity by:

- Developing training for front line staff in dealing with people for whom English is not a first language;
- Ensuring that all Councillors receive diversity training;
- Complete diversity and equality impact assessments in the establishment of all plans and strategies;
- Ensure that translation strap lines are included in all leaflets to indicate
- their availability in other languages and formats; and
- Display prominent posters indicating the provision of interpreting and translation services at all access points.

R4 Improve the approach towards value for money by:

- Setting out a clear corporate strategy on providing value for money;
- Ensuring that service heads have access to good quality information about the costs of service, across all areas;
- Comparing costs with other service providers and ensuring that this information is routinely reported and shared with external partners.

R5 Strengthen the approach to providing effective performance management by ensuring that:

- Individual personal development plans are completed within a set timescale linked to the development of corporate and service plans;
- A consistent reporting framework of both local and national performance indicators is established;
- Training needs against the service objectives are established on a regular basis and training is delivered.

R6 Improving leadership and support for Strategic Housing and addressing the needs of vulnerable people by:

- Ensuring that members play a more prominent and pro-active role in
- influencing regional housing issues;
- Ensure that members are fully involved in developing a strategy for the future of hostel and temporary accommodation in the district;
- Reconsidering the effect of the planning moratorium of the delivery of
- affordable housing;
- Working in a more focussed way with officers in seeking to redress the imbalance in the housing market.

3.3 DEVELOPMENT OF AN IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

A Strategic Housing Action Plan was developed last summer to address both the six key recommendations set out above and also the observations made in the main body of the report identifying where the service could be further strengthened. The action plan sets out the actions that needed to be addressed both corporately and those that were more specific to the Strategic Housing Section itself. The proposed outcomes and targets set out in the Audit Commission Recommendations have been transferred into the Action Plan for clarity.

A number of the weaknesses identified by the Audit Commission were already identified in the actions set out in the Council's Housing Strategy Document that gained 'Fit For Purpose' earlier in 2006. The Inspection Action Plan was therefore further supplemented with additional actions from the Housing Strategy to ensure that a holistic approach is taken to service improvement.

Actions that have already been achieved are 'shaded in' grey and given a Green Traffic Light.

The Housing Inspection Action Plan gained Executive Cabinet approval on the 2nd August 2006.

3.4 Progress reports have been presented to the Corporate Management Team and to the CLG Local Government Monitoring Board.

- 3.5 The Strategic Housing Team, whilst disappointed at the inspection rating given against progress that had been achieved over the two year period following LSVT, have enthusiastically embraced the action plan as a framework for taking the service forward into improvement.

A Strategy Action Planning day was held on the 21st June 2007 involving the Strategic Housing Team, the Head of Planning and Environment, The Corporate Director (Services) and Councillor Peter Whittaker – Portfolio Holder For Strategic Housing. Progress and items outstanding from the Inspection Action Plan were reviewed and carried over into a new action plan that is being developed to further improve the Strategic Housing Service and housing options available to customers.

4. Financial Implications

There are no additional financial implications, revenue and capital resources are already identified in the pursuit of the Council's Strategic Housing service. There may be financial implications surrounding the remodelling of temporary accommodation and the provision of support to vulnerable and at risk individuals and groups; however this will not be drawn from existing Council resources.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are legal requirements within equalities and diversity and the duties of the Council under the homelessness legislation.

6. Corporate Objectives

- 6.1 The provision of affordable housing; commitment to customer care and the pursuit of equalities and diversity are all within the Council's Corporate Objectives.

7. Risk Management

- 7.1 Failure to pursue the actions within the Plan will adversely affect the outcome of any future inspection. Various aspects of the plan contain their own particular risks which include those from not pursuing equalities and diversity and inability to introduce effective customer care.

8. Policy Considerations

- 8.1 Contains issues surrounding diversity; customer care; affordable housing and work with partner organisations

9. Equalities Implications

9.1 Central to the development of the Council's Diversity and Equalities Policy.

Background Papers

The Audit Commission Inspection Report of Bromsgrove District Council's Strategic Housing Service.

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