

Strategic Housing Improvement Plan

Table 1: Fully Completed Tasks

Line Number	Audit Commission Recommendation	Action	By When
1	1) Develop CBC-specific policies & plans to implement sub-regional strategies and meet local need	a) Carry out Homelessness Review & Strategy	Completed by officers in August 2008 and approved by Council in September 2008.
2		b) Review allocations scheme & housing register	Reported to Strategic Housing Panel in April 2009. To be recommended to Executive in July 2009.
3	2) Improve relationships with partner organisations to help achieve strategic housing objectives, including new provision.	a) establish Copeland Homes/Home Group liaison to: negotiate formal nomination arrangements: explore affordable housing opportunities: develop choice based lettings	Formal nominations agreement signed by June 2009. CBC and Home Housing Group (inc Copeland Homes) are members of the Cumbria Choice Based Lettings project team with a projected “go live” date of October 2010. Liaison with Home Group and other RSLs in the Borough is well established and schemes have been completed, are under construction or planned.
4		b) Participate fully in West Cumbria and Cumbria wide housing forums.	Ongoing throughout 2008/09
5		c) Develop private landlords forum	Landlords forum held 6 March 2009. To be held 6 monthly.
6		d) Improve liaison with Supporting People Team and Primary Care Trust	Throughout 2008/09 CBC has been fully represented on all Supporting People bodies. The PCT is a member of the commissioning body – CBC is represented by the Housing Manager and the Portfolio Holder
7	3) Implement systems & structures to ensure the Council is carrying statutory duties in the private sector under the Housing Act, 2004.	a) Establish new staffing structure: train staff in HHSRS. Take consistent enforcement action.	New staff in post by end October 2008. Training completed over following 6 months.

8		b) Develop effective HMO licensing scheme	Licensing scheme established and 2 HMOs licensed.
9	4) Update financial assistance policies to strategically target private sector renewal on housing and wider regeneration objectives	Assess and update as part of private sector strategy review. Targets revealed by private sector stock condition survey of 2007.	New financial assistance policy agreed by Council in December 2008 and implemented from April 2009. Takes account of private sector stock condition survey of 2007.
10	5) Take a client role in the delivery of housing advice provision in the Borough	a) Review provision as part of homelessness strategy review.	Completed July/August 2008
11		b) Negotiate service level agreements with funded bodies	Completed by April 2009
12		c) Review ability of other CBC services to contribute to improved advice co-ordination	Review completed with Benefits in winter 2009 and agreement signed off in June 2009.
13		d) Improve advice leaflets, website and other information sources. Provide better information and advice on rehousing prospects	Suite of housing advice leaflets published January 2009. New housing element on website completed before April 2009.
14	6) Develop systems & structures to move towards a proactive homelessness prevention approach: reduce the use of temporary accommodation to achieve the gov't target of 50% by 2010 from the baseline number at 31/12/2004.	a) Review approach in light of Homelessness Review & Homelessness Strategy Action Plan of 2008/2013	Copeland was the first LA in Cumbria to achieve the 50% reduction in the use of temporary accommodation (by end 2008). A homelessness prevention toolkit was introduced in 2008 and DCLG funding has contributed towards prevention initiatives. Discretionary Housing Payments have also been used to prevent or mitigate homelessness. In the 6 months ending April 2009 housing advice interventions have prevented 87 cases of homelessness and helped 85 others to find alternative housing.
15	7) Review Housing Team's structure & resources & develop a permanent establishment capable of meeting the Council's statutory requirements,	a) New staffing structure approved in spring 2008 for both Homelessness/Housing	However, recruitment and arrival in post of all new staff not achieved until end October 2008.

	developing and implementing housing strategies to meet local need and deliver services to an acceptable standard.	Options and Private Sector Renewal.	
16	Develop a consistent corporate approach to the management of complaints, including reporting to Councillors about learning from them.	a) CBC approach to complaints has been reviewed and changes introduced with effect from April 2009.	Strategic Housing Panel began to receive reports of complaints January 2009 (when their outcome is known).
17	Develop & display a comprehensive range of housing leaflets	Suite of customer leaflets advice & information leaflets to be published.	Series of leaflets on homelessness, housing advice and housing options published in January 2009.
18	Develop clear service standards in housing, which are well publicised and against which performance is monitored.	Housing service standards to be developed which will explain the service provided, how to access the service, the standards pertaining and how they will be monitored and complaints dealt with.	Following consultation, including with customers, service standards were determined and agreed by Strategic Housing Panel in March 2009. Subsequently published in leaflet form and now appearing on website.

Table 2: Partially Completed Tasks

Line number	Audit Commission Recommendation	Action	By When
1	Develop CBC-specific policies & plans to implement sub-regional strategies and meet local need	Produce CBC-specific comprehensive action plan to implement Cumbria Housing Strategy, 2009/2011 in the Borough.	Major component parts now in existence (e.g., financial assistance policy, allocations scheme, housing options & homelessness initiatives. To be completed and reported to the August meeting of Strategic Housing Panel.
2	Ensure corporate systems for dealing with key issues, such as budget setting and financial management, service planning and appraisals are adhered to in each service area and that robust monitoring and management takes place at the corporate centre to prevent non-compliance.	Housing Services to adhere to the annual budget building process and monthly budget monitoring & management.	This is largely completed but Financial Services have launched an initiative on capital programme management, introduced in July 2009. Given the corporate need to improve this area it would be wise to describe it as work in progress.
3		Develop older persons strategy	Substantial progress made but further consultation necessary

			with partner agencies in the public & voluntary sector. To be completed & reported to Strategic Housing Panel by end October 2009.
4		Develop new private sector strategy in compliance with Housing Act, 2004	To be completed by end August 2009.
5	Improve relationships between departments to exploit opportunities for joined up working and make best use of expertise outside the housing team to deliver housing objectives	Establish corporate working group to support implementation of this plan. Include housing priorities in service plans of relevant internal services.	Strategic Housing Panel of Councillors established in Spring 2008 but this is supported almost only by housing staff. Corporate officers' participation to be implemented from August 2009. Housing priorities included in Development Strategy service plan.
6		b) Develop service level agreements (SLAs) with relevant internal services	SLA signed off with Benefits in June 2009 but in practice was developed 6 months earlier. SLAs to be completed with Environmental Health and legal Services by end September 2009.
7	Report regularly to the Executive and corporate team on performance against the service/improvement plan and against a full set of performance and cost indicators in housing until the service has been reinspected	Progress to be reported to Executive and Corporate Team on a monthly basis, including spend against budgets and key performance indicators.	While monthly reports have been made to Strategic Housing Panel for the last twelve months, reports to Executive and Corporate Team have been sporadic, and excluded cost indicators. This to be corrected in July 2009.
	Ensure the new corporate access strategy is robust enough to manage access to housing services and to develop a strategic corporate approach to customer care by addressing key issues	See below	See below
8	Develop a fully interactive corporate website	Housing pages on corporate website to be reviewed and updated with all new policies, strategies and information.	Housing pages almost up to date and will be completed by end July 2009. Corporate interactive website yet to be introduced.

9	Develop a clear corporate approach to translation which meets local needs.	Ensure that Language Line translation service is available at reception and to customer-serving staff in all departments.	This is subject of a report to Strategic Housing panel on 15 July 2009
10	Develop transactional customer satisfaction surveys following key housing processes and report to Councillors on lessons learned.	Customer satisfaction surveys to be developed for private sector housing renewal and homelessness/housing options functions.	Private sector housing surveys introduced & be reported to August 2009 meeting of Strategic Housing Panel. Homelessness/Housing Options surveys to be introduced August 2009.
11	Further develop/implement existing equality and diversity policies	a) Develop and maintain a thorough corporate understanding of the profile and needs of local people through liaison with representative community organisations and robust research.	The current work done on the draft older persons strategy and anti-fuel poverty strategy is not enough to meet the requirements of this recommendation. The gap to be addressed by end September 2009.
12	Carry out and act on the findings of equality impact assessments in housing	a) Develop equality impact assessments and act on findings. b) Review existing research data to profile differing housing needs across Borough. Examine needs of specific groups such as gypsies & travellers, where Cumbria wide research is available.	Initial equality impact assessments done for private sector renewal & homelessness/housing options services. Actions a) & b) to be completed with consequential action plan by end September 2009.
13	Improve value for money and performance management	a) Implement effective procurement of all commissioned services and products including establishing a robust client role in ongoing contract management	Effective procurement of the Kells (Basket Road) Environmental Improvement Scheme introduced by February 2009. Works are currently underway with a strong client role provided by Strategic Housing Services Manager and Community Renewal Officer.
14		Review existing partnership arrangements to improve value for money.	Partnership arrangements with RSLs and others have been reviewed to ensure they deliver service outcomes but value for money has not been specifically addressed.

15		Develop effective procurement practices for private sector renewal & improvement works, including partnerships.	CBC to join purchasing consortium in order to obtain discounts for DFG works & services. To join by end September 2009.
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Table 3: uncompleted tasks

Line Number	Audit Commission Recommendation	Action	Comments
1	Develop a clear corporate approach to translation which meets local needs.	Use of telephone interpretation offered in all leaflets and decision letters	To be introduced by mid-October 2009
2	Develop a consistent corporate approach to the management of complaints	Housing staff to be trained on using complaints as a learning opportunity	A training proposal has been requested.
3	Further develop and implement existing equality & diversity policies	Understand the housing needs of migrant workers	Research has been done in the County, which we will obtain.
4	Carry out and act on the findings of equality impact assessments	a) Liaise & consult with representative community groups	To be undertaken by end September 2009
5		b) Reflect diversity issues in procurement tenders & contracts	To be undertaken after community liaison
6	Improve value for money and performance management	Tracking, benchmarking & reporting to staff & Councillors on corporate & service costs	A proposal has been obtained from consultants to undertake this work. It will be compared to the other option of doing it entirely in-house, including the timeline for completion.
7	Improve relations with partner organisations to help achieve strategic housing objectives	Develop private landlord accreditation scheme	Landlords attending the forum in March 2009 showed no willingness to join such a scheme: to be raised again at next forum in October 2009.



Copeland Borough Council 30th January 2009

Audit Commission review of progress against 2008 Strategic Approach to Housing inspection recommendations

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Action plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All recommendations (and bullets to meet recommendations) from the inspection report are included and are itemised on the action plan • CBC has itemised additional actions it considers need to be carried out to deliver a recommendation. For example for 'develop borough-specific plans to implement sub-regional strategies and meet local need' 5 action points relating to different strategies requiring development have been set • A strategic housing panel (comprising of elected members) oversees the housing improvement programme (inspection action plan) monthly and makes recommendations to the Executive regarding service delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title unclear - does not specify is responding to inspection recommendations • Targets to complete recommendations have not been converted into specific dates, remaining for example at '6 months' as per the report. This may prevent the deadline being understood • Targets of 3 to 6 months were set to deliver recommendations, and therefore should have been completed since it is a year since the last inspection. In most cases these are not met. It would appear that the targets set are longer than that specified so many actions are on schedule for the action plan but not the inspection report. (However considering the staff changes this is realistic) • Targets are also unclear because 'complete by' does not mean implementation, e.g. if consultation and/or Council approval is required. Suggest have several targets for the various stages when this applies, and these should be reflected in any project plans e.g. gant charts • CBC assesses progress with actions identified to deliver recommendations, but it does not assess whether the recommendation overall has been delivered or outcomes. It is difficult to assess whether recommendations or individual actions contributing to their delivery have been signed off. There is no coding to reflect this. • New objectives to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of work completed (including outcomes) e.g. R1. 2a task group and 2d Supporting People and PCT, 3a strategic housing panel are not set. The Audit Commission has attempted to assess whether actions have been delivered based on the information provided in the status column. • When updating an action and referring to another action as the

answer, this is not always referenced e.g. says 'as above'. See R1. 3a private sector strategy

- Some actions contain several actions, making them difficult to sign off as completed if any are outstanding. See R1. 3B private sector enforcement.
- Not always clear what is taking place to deliver actions e.g. R1. 5c and 5d 'work underway', or if the target is imminent (Jan 09) whether are on schedule to meet.
- It is unclear whether systems to manage complaints have been established (R3. 3a and b)
- Deadlines are not revised if missed to set new expectations on what should be delivered e.g. R4 2.a.
- Managers meet to discuss the action plan, but this is informal and does not always fit in with monthly reporting cycle to strategic housing panel
- Report to portfolio holders is useful for explaining outcomes delivered from action plan, but crucially does not explain if recommendations have been completed

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Staffing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff resources promptly increased following last inspection. • Managers have clear accountability to respond to recommendations and lead on specific strategic housing functions. • Have recruited for posts previously had difficulty filling, including through setting higher salaries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ technical officers - is having an impact by providing more responsive services and dealing with backlog of grant requests ○ housing research and policy - leading on updating housing needs data ○ strengthened homelessness service - capacity to deliver more housing advice, including homelessness prevention initiatives • Resources also allocated for 2009/10 to enable the commissioning of consultants as required to meet deadlines and fill skills gaps • Staff/managers seem clear about what needs to be done and in what order – challenging due to limited amount of time available since recruited and reinspection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible gap for leading on affordable housing

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Cross cutting areas</p>	<p>Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service standards still undeveloped - awayday as a housing team using a consultant, but further work needed to agree, and no plans to consult customers • Arrangements to record, respond to and monitor customer complaints are under review, but changes will not go live until April 2009. The inspector has not seen the new procedure to enable an assessment of whether the recommendation in the previous inspection relating to complaints will be met. (Currently complaints logged by receiving staff and passed to manager – cannot see any central monitoring) <p>Diversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No equality impact assessments being carried out, staff not trained to complete and no programme of retrospective assessments planned • Unclear whether Language Line is in place – arrangements that are known require referrals to another part of the Council and translation through other agencies takes time to arrange, sometimes several days • Still not done anything to understand the needs of migrant workers <p>Value for money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No benchmarking but have recently joined HouseMark for homelessness module

Strengths	Weaknesses
Strategic Approach to Housing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per previous inspection there is the Cumbrian Housing Strategy 2006/2011 which all districts are signed up to and is assessed as 'fit for purpose' in 2006 • Working with neighbouring councils to update the strategic housing market assessment • Countywide housing needs strategy due 2010 • Key: CBC has allocated funding to update housing needs before this in 2009, because it recognises this is a priority • Working with countywide partners for housing needs, and strategic housing market assessments, Supporting People, and housing officers group - shares best practice and agrees common working practices • Understanding the needs of vulnerable people - Commissioning Plan for older people services (July 08), supported housing for young people (joint venture - floating support to look at education and sustaining tenancies). • Housing needs surveys now taking place in rural areas through Cumbrian rural housing trust which CBC is one of the funders and CBC is beginning to work with parishes to discuss results • CBC actively involved in the project to introduce a sub-regional choice based lettings scheme by Spring 2010: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ CLG funding secured ○ recruiting for project manager ○ in the process of agreeing common housing policy with partners ○ involves councils and housing associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key: CBC still does not have a plan setting out how it will implement the Cumbrian Housing Strategy locally (deadline Feb 09 is an extension and plans to consult on the plan may make the deadline unrealistic) • Key: No project plan setting out how and when it will agree the above, and who/what this will involve • There has been no consultation on the Cumbrian Housing Strategy at Copeland • Housing needs surveys for parishes yet to feed into plans since plans still to be agreed (in response to Cumbria Housing Strategy)

Strengths	Weaknesses
Homelessness and housing advice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention initiatives now in place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ family intervention for young people who are potentially homeless ○ can refer to an organisation that will provide rent deposits ○ now have formal referral arrangements with CAB to advice on a range of issues ○ supported accommodation available for offenders and young people ○ is a panel to award discretionary housing payments ○ homelessness prevention fund of £35K can fund mediation, assist tenants to comply with tenancy conditions (e.g. maintain property) and offer a months rent in advance to support the rent deposit scheme • Other prevention initiatives planned: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ formal arrangements with welfare benefits to fast track HB claims of homeless or potential homeless • Key: Have met target to reduce temp accommodation to 6 units from 12 units (achieving 5) • Furniture is available through charities for homeless people/families moving into accommodation • CBC is putting systems in place to formalise referrals to other agencies and to monitor housing advice it is delivering and the impact of this, this is informed by a clearer definition of what constitutes prevention (also see weakness) • Bed and breakfast has reduced and CBC is now regularly only using one provider within the borough, which CBC has inspected (only used 5 times in the last 3 months) • Now meeting monthly with housing associations and plans to agree early warning systems to make referrals for housing advice (potentially homeless) are out to consultation; are also agreeing performance management indicators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CBC accepts it is still not monitoring the impact of housing advice yet even though identified as a weakness in the last inspection (also see strength) • There is no sanctuary scheme for women subjected to domestic violence wishing to remain at home (in homelessness strategy action plan to consider), there is floating support available, but this seems generic rather than specifically for domestic violence • The main bed and breakfast used is not DDA compliant • New leaflets for homelessness and housing advice service but not consulted on with service users • Action plan for delivery of homelessness strategy is not being monitored beyond immediate manager • No landlord accreditation scheme
<p>Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Things planned but not in place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Service user exit survey Feb 2009 	

- Rolling out service to boroughs (surgeries not just Whitehaven)
- Obtaining credit card so can use a bed and breakfast which is DDA compliant

Strengths	Weaknesses
Private sector housing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing renewal policy has been revised (this has not been given to inspectors, so CBC will need to check now includes HHSRS) • Publicity on housing renewal confirms restriction found in last inspection of three year residency rule has been removed, and first time buyers are also able to access a home renewal grant where property was vacant for 6 months • Are identifying empty properties e.g. through council tax records, newspaper adverts • Have range of procedures now in place as guidance for service delivery and new staff, ensuring consistency • Key: DFG completions (referral to approval) stretch target in Local Area Agreement, to reduce from 44 weeks to 28 - CBC is meeting this with performance improving at 19 weeks (outcome of technical officer posts and streamlining processes such as OT referrals) • DFG - Had a backlog of 70 properties, and are inspecting now, about 20 left. Clear end of Feb. • Are starting to raise awareness of DFG e.g. disability forum • All staff trained on HHSRS • Have a register of unfit properties (identified through reports from: private tenants, homelessness team, CAB and others) • Are visiting unfit properties promptly and taking action (<u>confirm if you have issued any notices to complete works and if so what timescales have been set</u>) • Interest free loans are available - owner occupiers qualifying for part grant and part interest free loan • Have continued to canvass partners to identify HMOs but with little success (seems not to be an issue in the area), the two identified have been licensed • HECA report was completed on time for submission • Satisfaction surveys - DFG and renovation grants now in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key: No publicity on DFGs to raise awareness amongst residents of service • Landlords' forum still not underway (first meeting next month) • Key: Renovation grant publicity limited to website • Still nothing on equity release option • No customer satisfaction results for DFG and renovation grants service yet

Strengths	Weaknesses
Affordable housing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affordable housing under construction - 10 units, plus several schemes being supported for funding (housing association for rent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key: No guidelines on affordable housing such as Local development framework and this is not in any other plans for the department Key: No plans to deliver affordable housing target e.g. section 106 agreements Staff resources for leading in this area are less defined

Housing Inspector – Elaine Sams