

STRENGTHENING THE HOUSING SERVICE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Deputy Leader Councillor George Clements
Deputy Leader Councillor Cath Giel
Deputy Leader Councillor Allan Holliday
Cllr Norman Williams

LEAD OFFICER: Fergus McMorrow, Director of Development

REPORT AUTHOR: Fergus McMorrow, Director of Development

Summary and Recommendation:

The report proposes a Stage 1 Action Plan to respond to issues raised in the Audit Commission review of the Councils Strategic Housing Function. This comprises initial actions to strengthen the service.

It is recommended that:

Personnel Panel agree to the changes in the structure of the Housing Services Team as set out in the Report.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In December last year the Personnel Panel agreed a restructure of my Directorate. This included the separation and establishment of a Housing Team reporting to a new Head of Service. These proposals were intended to strengthen the management of this area of work by providing more Head of Service time for Housing and a dedicated management focus.
- 1.2 The report recognised that future strengthening would be required in the Housing Function but delayed specific proposals until the review had been completed.
- 1.3 In recognising the need for further strengthening the Council has recently agreed to enhance the services' budget by £250K per annum. External advisors have indicated that this may not be sufficient in the medium term to resolve our capacity issues as we are very much under strength. The situation will, therefore, have to be reviewed as progress is made.

- 1.4 The problems stems from the transfer of the Council's housing stock which took with it a lot of the housing service capacity. This was not replaced to sufficient levels in the restructure that took place in 2004/05. Difficulties in recruitment and illness exacerbated the situation.

2. KEY POINTS ARISING FROM THE INSPECTION

- 2.1 The Council has not given the retained housing services sufficient priority since the stock transfer in 2004, performance has not improved over that period and there has been no evidence of delivery against strategies.
- 2.2 The Council is not making the best use of the Borough's Private Sector Housing Stock by acting on the requirements of the Housing Act 2004.
- 2.3 The Council is not reducing homelessness by tackling the problem early.
- 2.4 Staffing structures, relationships and systems do not support a functioning housing service and resources have not been assigned to improve areas of weakness.
- 2.5 A full action plan will be developed to deal with the shortcomings in the inspection and key actions implement in the next six months prior to a reinspection. In the meantime a series of initial step are being taken or proposed to move the service forward. These follow.

3. PROPOSALS

- 3.1 An interim Housing Services Manager, Peter Deacon has been appointed, to play a leading role in developing and moving an improvement plan forward.
- 3.2 A permanent Housing Services Manager will be recruited to lead the Team. A proposed Job Description is attached as Appendix 1(awaited).
- 3.3 Despite the application of market supplements there has been no interest in the Housing Renewal Managers position. The Housing Strategy Manager has expressed an interest and willingness to transfer to this area of work while continuing to support the homelessness section. One in which the postholder has previous experience. This will provide the opportunity to advertise the Housing Strategy Manager which may prove easier to fill.
- 3.4 Short Term Service Level Agreements will be pursued to secure 1 day per week from specialist skills available in Building Control and Environmental Health in the short term.

- 3.5 The preparation of a new Housing Renewal strategy has been outsourced to an independent organisation with the target of completing the work by May.
- 3.6 An additional Homelessness Officer will be recruited at Scale 4 in order to fulfil statutory housing duties as required by homeless legislation, in particular, reducing the use of temporary accommodation, resettlement of priority need families and to ensure that the out of hours service is adequate. A proposed Job Profile is attached as Appendix 2
- 3.7 An additional generic Housing Technical Support Officer will be appointed to act on the requirements of the Housing Act 2004, in particular to inspect unfit housing and take enforcement action when necessary.
- 3.8 An additional Administration Support Officer is proposed to support the enlarged housing team. The team need to spend time fulfilling statutory duties not completing administrative work. This will be at Scale 2/3. A proposed Job Profile is attached as Appendix 3
- 3.9 The post of Grants Officers will be created at scale 4 to replace one of the admin support posts which is currently graded at scale 2. The current jobholder is already involved in this work and will be assimilated into the post.
- 3.10 One vacant existing planning policy post will be enhanced by xx increments in the Strategic Planning Team in order to help the recruitment of a LDF Policy Planner with a specialist housing role in order to provide information on housing markets which will improve our housing strategy and planning policy evidence base. A proposed Job Profile is attached at Appendix 4
- 3.11 Appendix 5 attached shows the current housing team and that now proposed. Appendix 6 shows how the changes relate to the wider structure in the Development Strategy Department.
- 3.12 Further issues related to the improvement of the service will be examined and proposals brought forward as necessary.

4. FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOURCES OF FINANCE)

- 4.1 The cost of the proposed changes amounts to £137,000 per annum. This is within the agreed budget of £250,000 leaving approximately £113,000 to support individual pieces of work or any further changes that may be required.

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE PLAN

- 5.1 Housing services are a key contributor to a range of corporate plan objectives
- We will ensure that substantially all the stock of social rented sector properties will be in a decent condition by 2010.
 - We will ensure that 70% of private sector dwellings occupied by vulnerable people will be classed as decent by 2010.
 - We will have a balance of housing stock by type and tenure.
 - There will be a reduction in homelessness.
 - We will increase the supporting people funded services in Copeland. and includes a number of important statutory services.

6. CONSULTATIONS

- 6.1 These proposals have been the subject of consultation with the staff and Unions and responses will be reported to the Personnel Panel.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 Housing Services Manager Job Profile

Appendix 2 Homelessness Officer Job Profile

Appendix 3 Admin Support Officer Job Profile

Appendix 4 LDF Policy Planner Job Profile

Appendix 5 Current Housing Team establishment

Appendix 6 Proposed changes in context of wider establishment

List of Background Documents: None

List of Consultees: Chief Executive, Head of Finance and Business Development, Head of Legal Services, Interim Head of Regeneration, Interim Housing Services Manager

CHECKLIST FOR DEALING WITH KEY ISSUES

Please confirm against the issue if the key issues below have been addressed. This can be by either a short narrative or quoting the paragraph number in the report in which it has been covered.

Impact on Crime and Disorder	It is proposed that the CDRP Officer reports to the new Housing Services Manager so this work is directly affected
Impact on Sustainability	Will have an impact through the development of balanced housing markets

Impact on Rural Proofing	None directly
Health and Safety Implications	Will impact on health and safety through the responsibilities of staff and management.
Impact on Equality and Diversity Issues	Impacts through the Councils role in ensuring housing opportunities for all
Children and Young Persons Implications	Impacts in relation to young peoples housing opportunities especially young homeless
Human Rights Act Implications	Possible implications through rights to housing
Monitoring Officer comments	
S. 151 Officer comments	

Is this a Key Decision? No