

APPENDIX L

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITY O & S COMMITTEE
9 NOVEMBER 2009

Title:

PROGRESS REPORT: LANDLORD SERVICES AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION

[Portfolio Holder:Cllr Keith Webster]
[Wards Affected:All]

Summary and purpose:

To provide members with a nine-month update of the work completed by the housing staff following the Audit Commission inspection report on 15 January 2009. To identify any issues that may affect the ability to meet all the recommendations.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

The Audit Commission made five overarching recommendations that relate to three of the Council's Corporate Priorities.

Priority Two: Improve the quality of live for all, particularly the more vulnerable in our society. The recommendation to strengthen the focus on customer care includes developing an approach to financial inclusion and developing new methods of tenant engagement.

Priority Four: Work for more subsidised affordable housing to be built, and to manage Council housing well. All the recommendations will improve the way we manage our housing. The recommendations to strengthen the focus on equality and diversity, improve performance in service areas and strengthen performance management will advance our management.

Priority Five: ensure all our activities are customer-focused and provide good value for money. The Audit Commission made two recommendations that directly fit within this priority: to strengthen the focus on customer care; and to strengthen the approach to value for money within the housing service.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

Recommendation Two to strengthen the focus on equality and diversity includes comprehensive actions regarding Equality Impact Assessments, contractor equality and diversity compliance and tenant profiling to ensure access to all.

Resource/Value for Money implications:

Recommendation Three specifically addresses value for money with points on benchmarking, quality and cost, value for money targets and efficiency opportunities.

The Council have previously agreed a £120,000 budget for 2009/10 to assist in the implementation of the recommendations.

Legal Implications:

The requirement to review the Council's Tenancy Agreement will have legal implications.

Background

The Audit Commission inspected Waverley Borough Council's Landlord Services in Autumn 2008. The report was published on 15 January 2009 with five recommendations headers and 28 detailed recommendations for the service. Each recommendation has an implementation date, the earliest July 2009 and latest March 2010. The recommendations have formed the basis for the Service Plan for the Landlord service for 2009/2010.

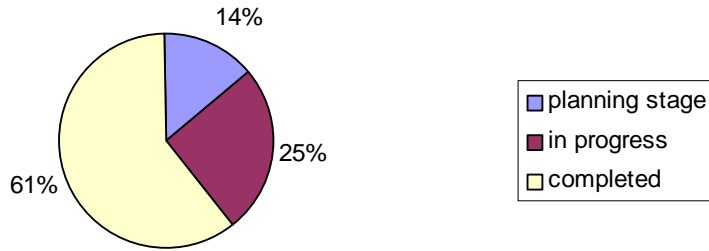
Introduction

Officers have a Housing Improvement Board chaired by John Swanton (Head of Housing) to implement the Audit Commission recommendations. The Board meet monthly to monitor progress and discuss any issues regarding implementation. The Board also "signs off" each completed recommendation.

Initially officers identified the relatively "quick to fix" recommendations to address promptly. Some of the recommendations were in hand before the recommendations were made. However a number of the recommendations are challenging and will take time to implement. Officers have started action planning for the larger recommendations. Please refer to Annexe 1 for the full recommendations.

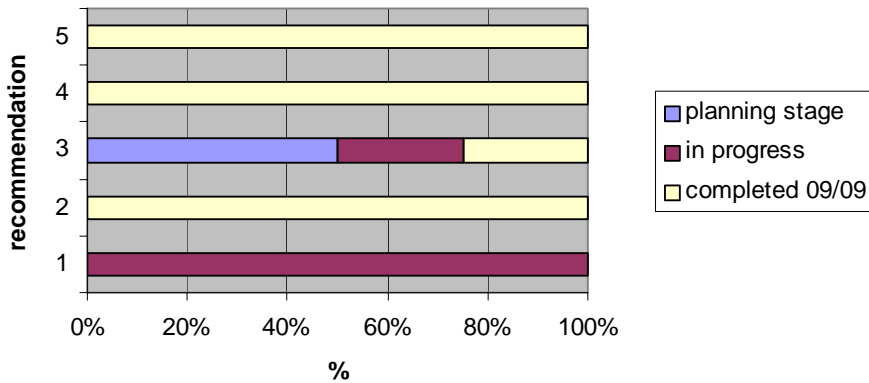
Members received progress reports in June and September to monitor the implementation of the Audit Commission recommendations. The June report illustrated that officers had signed off seven recommendations and the September report illustrated that officers had met the Audit Commission deadline of July and had completed 14 recommendations. The following charts give a pictorial indication of the progress made on the recommendations as at 1 September 2009. 61% (17) of the recommendations have been completed and a further 25% are actively progressing.

**Landlord Service Audit Commission
Recommendations Progress Report 1 Sept 2009**



The below chart indicates progress made on each recommendation.

**Landlord Service Audit Commission Progress by
Recommendation 1 Sept 2009**



NB: The recommendations are not equal in terms of time and resources required.

Recently Completed Recommendations:

Strengthening the focus on equality and diversity.

1. Tenant Profiling and Shaping Services

Officers have developed a greater understanding of the profile of tenants by using data held in the Housing Management System, new letting reports and the STATUS reports. This information is being used to help delivery appropriate services. The Rents team completed some tenant profiling on tenants in April 09 to identify potential poor payers and to develop preventative measures. The profiling illustrated a positive correlation between age and rents arrears.

The Repairs team identified properties for “property MOTs” where three or more out of hours emergency appointments had been made or where no repairs had been requested for over 12 months. Officers are due to start the inspection

programme of these properties in Autumn 2009. In January 2009 all tenants were sent a Repairs and Maintenance priorities survey with the tenants newsletter. From this 336 people said that they were interested in undertaking repairs themselves. Although this was a minority overall it was a majority for younger tenants. As younger tenants are an age group, which traditionally, have lower levels of satisfaction we felt that this was a good opportunity to provide a service which they were particularly interested in. The event was a success with participants learning tiling, electrical and plumbing skills. 50% of participants were under 55 years of age.

Working with the Safer Waverley Partnership officers have developed Neighbourhood Agreements on a number of estates. To start this process a resident survey was undertaken to identify the profile of residents, concerns, priorities and thoughts on their area. This helped form common themes and aims for the agreement. Residents are active members of their community with a say in community spending.

2. Equality Impact Assessments

Officers developed a work plan to create a rolling programme of Equality impact assessments. So far eleven Equality impact assessments have been completed on key policy, strategy and procedure documents.

3. Contractor Compliance

In December 2008 Officers surveyed our main contractors to ensure compliance with their Equality and Diversity policies and codes of conduct. Recommendations were made to contractors following the survey and Repairs and Maintenance staff are reviewing these at their monthly monitoring meetings.

Progress on Recommendations

Strengthen focus on customer care:

Officers are reviewing the service standards to ensure they are measurable and are relevant to tenants. The Rents and Responsive Repairs standards were agreed with the Tenants Panel in August. Officers will review the remainder with the Tenants Panel in October.

Officers have appointed TPAS to review the current Tenant Engagement arrangements to seek advice on how to widen involvement. The review started in July and the recommendations are expected in January 2010. Officers have launched a Tenants Blog, held DIY training (which was targeted to younger tenants), arranged a Participatory Budgeting workshop and launched The Chantry's Community Neighbourhood Agreement.

Officers are working Corporately to develop a Financial Inclusion Approach, which will be an essential component of the Council's Social Inclusion Strategy.

Strengthen the approach to value for money:

As part of the appraisal process in July 2009 each member of staff will receive a value for money target.

Mangers received Value for Money training from HQN consultants in June 2009 to assist them in developing a Value for Money Strategy and Value for Money reviews of service areas. Officers will work with the Landlord Services SIG to develop this approach over the coming months.

Officers have been successfully in gaining a grant to fund 50% of the solar thermal water heating system at Bluden Court.

Annexe 2 details the individual recommendations with progress notes and evidence for each.

Conclusion

Officers have made a good progress with implementing the Audit Commission recommendations. All 12 recommendations with a July deadline have been met, all three recommendations with a September deadline have been met and a further two have been completed. The nine-month review illustrates that progress has been made in all areas. Officers have a clear action plan and are on target to meet the third implementation date of October 2009.

Recommendation

1. The contents of this report are noted;
2. Officers are tasked to continue implementing the Audit Commission recommendations; and
3. Officers are tasked to provide a twelve month review in January 2010.

Background Papers (SDC)

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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Audit Commission Recommendations

Recommendation	
R1	<p>Strengthen the focus on customer care by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and publishing a suite of measurable and challenging service standards in consultation with tenants; • developing new methods of involvement to engage a wider range of residents in the management of their homes and ensuring that resident involvement structures are representative of the population; • ensuring that complaints are systematically analysed to develop learning and that a compensation policy is introduced; • engaging tenants in mystery shopping exercises and quality checking of empty properties; and • developing an approach to financial inclusion.
R2	<p>Strengthen the focus on equality and diversity by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing a greater understanding of the profile of tenants and using this understanding to shape service delivery; • completing equality impact assessments on key areas of policy and service delivery and developing robust action plans to address any negative impact of policies and inform strategies on equality; and • monitoring contractors compliance with their equality and diversity policies and codes of conduct.
R3	<p>Strengthen the approach to value for money within the housing service by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing a robust understanding of how costs compare with peers; • reviewing service contracts to ensure that they provide the optimum cost and quality; • introducing value for money targets as part of performance management arrangements; • ensuring stock investment decisions maximise the long term sustainability of the stock through preventative and cyclical maintenance programmes, within available resources; • exploring opportunities for efficiencies through use of supply chain and shared procurement; • introducing incentives for tenants to pay rent by the most cost efficient means; • separating service charges from rents and giving a clear breakdown of service charges on rent statements and rent increase letters; and • investigating the availability of additional income to support stock investment such as through energy grants.

R4	<p>Improve performance in service areas by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that repairs appointments are made at the first point of contact; • ensuring that detailed information on asbestos is provided to tenants where it is known to be present; • ensuring that cleaning and grounds maintenance specifications meet the needs of individual estates and are robustly managed, within the resources available; • reviewing the current tenancy agreement to ensure it meets the latest legislative requirements and considering the use of introductory tenancies; • developing a comprehensive action plan for achieving the Respect Standard; • clarifying the role of estate monitors in all aspects of the housing management service; • linking estate management budgets to the estate walkabout programme ensuring that tenants are fully involved in expenditure decisions; and • reviewing the aids and adaptations policies and procedures to ensure that there is a clear priority criteria for critical cases and that any waiting times are minimised.
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R5	<p>Strengthen performance management by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • publishing up to date performance reports and targets on the website and in tenants newsletters; • ensuring that performance reports on aids and adaptations takes account of the whole process from initial request to completion; • implementing computer software which enables effective management of anti-social behaviour cases; and • reviewing service action plans to ensure that tasks are measurable and that outcomes and cost implications of all tasks is fully explained and understood.
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