

AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS
Identified in Community Housing Inspection Report May 2008

R1 Strengthen the focus on customers and access			
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion
Update and expand the range of housing information booklets	December 2008	Review all existing published information on strategic housing services and update	Dec 2008
		Ensure all leaflets have strapline	Dec 2008
		Review process for updating leaflets	Dec 2008
Involve customers in determining measurable service standards across all strategic housing functions, and monitor performance against these	December 2008	Consult with all strategic housing service customer groups on new and revised service standards – a random number per year will be selected	Ongoing
		The Customer satisfaction form will be reviewed to make further improvements including asking service users if they are satisfied with our service standards	Completed Apr 2008
		Visit service users at home to consult on the services they have received to gather feedback and improve services	Dec 2008
		Establish monitoring processes for all service Standard targets	Dec 2008
		Publish results in a leaflet/ on the website	Ongoing

Further develop methods to gather and use ongoing customer feedback, comments and informal complaints to help shape and improve services	December 2008	Hold annual services users review of service event to influence future service development	Ongoing
		Customer satisfaction questionnaires will continue to be sent out to service users.	Ongoing
		The form will be made available on the website to provide better access for people wishing to complete the form.	Dec 2008
		Forms will be made more freely available at reception points	Ongoing
Fully incorporate strategic housing functions within the customer relationship management system	December 2008	Develop list of frequently asked questions	Completed Jun 2008
		Work with Service Managers to devise scripts where appropriate	Dec 2008
R2 Strengthen the Council's approach to diversity			
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion
Provide clear leadership at Member and senior management level to demonstrate a commitment to diversity and to ensure that work to take forward diversity is fully supported and progress monitored	July 2008	Achieve level 2 of the equality standard	Aug 2008
Develop comprehensive customer profile information to monitor equality of service delivery and take action to remove any barriers to accessing services	July 2008	Research and agree diversity categories to be utilised for data collection and analysis	Jul 2008
		Carry out profiling of our customers using First Housing / CORE / feedback questionnaires	Ongoing

Comprehensively monitor services by diverse needs and use the information to improve services and show that they are being delivered fairly to all groups	July 2008	Implement formal monitoring of equality and diversity issues	Jul 2008
R3 Strengthen the Council's strategic approach to housing			
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion
Improve the co-ordination of strategic housing functions	July 2008	Heads of section will continue to meet fortnightly to co-ordinate the strategic housing functions and identify gaps relevant to their service area	Ongoing
		Set up and develop a new housing options / homelessness prevention team	September 2008
Develop robust monitoring arrangements to assess that the strategic approaches adopted are meeting the intended outcomes	July 2008	Monitor the effects of the new allocation policy and Choice Based Lettings Scheme on the numbers of lettings to homeless cases and the time clients spend in temporary accommodation	Ongoing
Regularly update housing data to get a better understanding of the housing market and local affordable housing needs, including the condition of private sector housing	July 2008	Expand needs data to incorporate a more comprehensive understanding of housing needs, including support and special housing needs	Ongoing
		Develop processes to keep the private sector house condition survey data updated	Dec 2008

R4 Improve the use of the existing housing stock			
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion
Assess the effectiveness and impact of the approach to homelessness prevention	December 2008	Increase monitoring of trends in homelessness and adjust resources accordingly	Ongoing
Improve the publicity of the 'Home Options' choice-based lettings scheme	December 2008	Ensure posters are prominently displayed in Council Offices and CBL outlets	Completed Apr 2008
		Information on the scheme to be included in all newsletters	Ongoing
		Conduct annual survey of non-bidding customers to establish reason for non-engagement	Ongoing
Develop a strategic approach to proactively improve and enforce housing conditions in the private sector	December 2008	Develop a clear understanding of the extent of compliance with the Decent Home Standards (DHS) in the district with an action plan of how the target will be achieved	Dec 2008
		Identify spending required on decent homes in the private sector and maximize funding opportunities through the Regional Housing Capital Grant	Dec 2008
		Assess how other Authorities monitor decent homes	Dec 2008
		Develop pro active procedures in respect of empty and sub standard homes	Dec 2008
Regularly liaise with landlords and owners to improve standards in the private rented sector and bring properties back into use in order to reduce the number of empty properties	December 2008	Improve partnership working with private landlords and lettings agents and develop the landlord forum into a regular event	Ongoing
		Work with the PLACE project team to bring empty homes back into use in Uttlesford	Completed Apr 2008

		Develop/implement an empty homes strategy	Completed Apr 2008
Improve referral and take up arrangements for Disabled Facilities Grants	December 2008	increase the promotion of the availability of grants	Dec 2008
		Identify ways of further reducing this the waiting times	Dec 2008
		Work with the County Council, who assist us with Occupation Therapy assessments and adaptation works, to further streamline the grant delivery process	Ongoing
		Ensure that bids for funding reflect the need in the district	Ongoing
R5 Improve the approach to value for money			
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion
Ensure information about the cost, quality and performance of all services, and how they compare to others, is regularly reviewed and used to identify value for money and inform service improvements	December 2008	Compare service costs with other service providers and where appropriate market test service to provide quality services at a competitive cost	Ongoing
		Investigate what information can be obtained from CIPFA and financial returns	Dec 2008
At corporate level, develop a strategic framework for value for money to ensure it is embedded as a way of working throughout the organization	December 2008	Develop a corporate approach to value for money linked to the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy and performance management	Dec 2008
		Value for money training, support and improved processes to be provided to managers	Dec 2008
		Work with Members/SMB/HODs to incorporate a value for money strategy into services	Dec 2008

Demonstrate the value for money provided by projects and partnerships	December 2008	Look at comparable authorities who have market tested service areas	Dec 2008
R6 Strengthen improvement planning and performance management			
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion
Provide clear leadership in driving forward improvements and performance management to ensure it is embedded as a way of working in the organization	December 2008	Embed the performance management framework Provide training for all Managers to enable them to carry out individual performance reviews	Dec 2008 Dec 2008
Make full use of the performance management framework and IT system to ensure that performance for all strategic housing functions are reported on, scrutinized and timely action is taken to address weaker performing areas	December 2008	Set up quarterly performance management meetings and provide formal minutes for each meeting	Completed/Ongoing
Increase the use of local performance indicators an setting challenging targets across all strategic housing functions	December 2008	Engage with key partners to determine local performance indicators Service Managers to receive training in Covalent to enable them to set up local indicators for the team	Completed Apr 2008 Completed Apr 2008
Increase customer involvement in influencing and monitoring service delivery	December 2008	Further develop feedback questionnaires	Jul 2008
Ensure service plans are in place to bridge the gap between divisional plans and appraisals	December 2008	Where appropriate Service Heads to ensure service plans are in place to bridge the gap between divisional plans and appraisals - plans should reflect the Council's current position and be 'fit for purpose'	Dec 2008
Ensure all action plans are SMART	December 2008	Ensure all action plans are SMART	Dec 2008

R7 Strengthen financial management			
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion
Fill vacancies and increase the capacity of the finance team to support the strategic housing functions	July 2008	Ensure that the management capacity of the Finance Team is enhanced, to support the achievement of better financial management	Nov 2008
Deliver the revised medium-term financial strategy to address the current financial situation, and link budget setting to improve planning processes	July 2008	Deliver the revised medium-term financial strategy	Completed Mar 2008
		Arrange budget training for HoDs and Service Managers	Jul 2008
		Introduce budget profiling	Apr 2008
		Introduce regular reporting on overall budgetary control, including forecasting position to Members	Jun 2008
Fully exploit the financial IT system	July 2008	Review FIS system - including adoption of new coding structure, recharging structure and commitment accounting	Dec 2008