

AUDIT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS
Identified in Strategic 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	Progress
Update and expand the range of housing information booklets	December 2008	Review all existing published information on strategic housing services and update	Dec 2008	Completed Nov 2008 - All leaflets have been reviewed and have been re-printed
		Ensure all leaflets have strapline	Dec 2008	Completed Nov 2008 - Worked closely with the equalities team to impact assess all leaflets and add strapline
		Review process for updating leaflets	Dec 2008	Completed May 2008 - Procedure has been reviewed
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	All services standards have been consulted on and published. Will be reviewed annually.
		The Customer satisfaction form will be reviewed to make	Apr 2008	Completed – Apr 2008

		<p>further improvements including asking service users if they are satisfied with our service standards</p> <p>Visit service users at home to consult on the services they have received to gather feedback and improve services</p> <p>Establish monitoring processes for all service Standard targets</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Dec 2008</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Completed Sep 2008 - Procedures in place</p>
<p>Further develop methods to gather and use ongoing customer feedback, comments and informal complaints to help shape and improve services</p>	<p>December 2008</p>	<p>Hold annual services users review/service event to influence future service development</p> <p>Customer satisfaction questionnaires will continue to be sent out to service users</p> <p>The forms will be made available on the website to provide better access for people wishing to complete</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Jan 2009</p>	<p>Ongoing – 2 events held to date: homelessness and private sector owners</p> <p>Ongoing – customer satisfaction forms have been re-designed for all services. Monitored quarterly</p> <p>Tenant satisfaction survey completed – questionnaires sent to 1600 tenants</p> <p>Completed – Jan 2009. New web designer in post – forms now available on website</p>

		the form. Forms will be made more freely available at reception points	Ongoing	Ongoing
Fully incorporate strategic housing functions within the customer relationship management system	December 2008	Develop list of frequently asked questions Work with Service Managers to devise scripts where appropriate	Jun 2008 Dec 2008	Completed Jun 2008 No scripts required. FAQ (see above) to be used
R2 Strengthen the Council's approach to diversity				
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion	Progress
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	This has been recognised by SMB as a priority. Level 2 achieved – externally assessed by IDeA.
Develop comprehensive customer profile information to monitor equality of service	July 2008	Research and agree diversity categories to be utilised for data collection and analysis	Jul 2008	Completed – Oct 2008

delivery and take action to remove any barriers to accessing services		Carry out profiling of our customers using First Housing / CORE / feedback questionnaires	Ongoing	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	Completed – Oct 2008
R3 Strengthen the Council's strategic approach to housing				
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion	Progress
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	Ongoing – meetings held fortnightly
		Set up and develop a new housing options / homelessness prevention team	September 2008	Completed – Sep 2008
Develop robust monitoring arrangements to assess that the strategic approaches	July 2008	Monitor the effects of the new allocation policy and Choice Based Lettings Scheme on	Ongoing	Ongoing – Working group set up with other authorities in the partnership to monitor/expand

adopted are meeting the intended outcomes		the numbers of lettings to homeless cases and the time clients spend in temporary accommodation		CBL. Questionnaire sent to all users and analysed results will inform review of system
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	Strategic Housing Market Assessment is being carried out. This will provide an updated understanding of housing need in Uttlesford Housing data is updated quarterly to reflect the current housing market. This is being completed using Hometrack data. Officers are also working with partners to access data on requirements for supported housing, this includes those with drug and alcohol problems, offenders and those at risk of domestic violence.
		Develop processes to keep the private sector house condition survey data updated	Ongoing	Ongoing

R4 Improve the use of the existing housing stock				
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion	Progress
Assess the effectiveness and impact of the approach to homelessness prevention	December 2008	Increase monitoring of trends in homelessness and adjust resources accordingly	Ongoing	Ongoing - including monitoring trends on mortgage repossession cases/enquiries locally and through EHOLG
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	Completed Apr 2008
		Information on the scheme to be included in all newsletters	Ongoing	Has been and will continue to be publicised in the tenant's newsletter
		Conduct annual survey of non-bidding customers to establish reason for non-engagement	Ongoing	First review carried out in November 2008
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	Dec 2008	In progress - waiting for local area details of EHCS 2006 results due Spring 2009

		<p>how the target will be achieved</p> <p>Identify spending required on decent homes in the private sector and maximize funding opportunities through the Regional Housing Capital Grant</p> <p>Assess how other Authorities monitor decent homes</p> <p>Develop pro active procedures in respect of empty and sub standard homes</p>	<p>Dec 2008</p> <p>Dec 2008</p> <p>Dec 2008</p>	<p>Completed – Sep 2008. Working collectively with regional partners to develop programmes and bid for funding</p> <p>Completed – Sep 2008</p> <p>Completed – Apr 2008</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>December 2008</p>	<p>Improve partnership working with private landlords and lettings agents and develop the landlord forum into a regular event</p> <p>Work with the PLACE project team to bring empty homes back into use in Uttlesford</p> <p>Develop/implement an empty homes strategy</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Apr 2008</p>	<p>In addition to annual event a Landlords' Manual will be produced in association with Essex EHM PSHG for launch at next Landlords' Forum</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Completed - Apr 2008</p>

Improve referral and take up arrangements for Disabled Facilities Grants	December 2008	increase the promotion of the availability of grants	Dec 2008	Defer until next financial year - will need to increase bids for funding (to ensure we maximize DCLG funding) before we try to encourage more applications (see below)
		Identify ways of further reducing the waiting times	Dec 2008	In progress
		Work with the County Council, who assist us with Occupation Therapy assessments and adaptation works, to further streamline the grant delivery process	Ongoing	Ongoing – working in partnership with Our Home Improvement Agency to improve delivery of services on the ground
		Ensure that bids for funding reflect the need in the district	Ongoing	Ongoing
R5 Improve the approach to value for money				
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion	Progress
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	December 2008	Compare service costs with other service providers and where appropriate market test service to provide quality services at a competitive cost	Ongoing	Securing value for money (vfm) is a corporate priority within the latest edition of the corporate plan covering the period 2009-12.

service improvements		Investigate what information can be obtained from CIPFA and financial returns	Dec 2008	The Council is developing its approach to benchmarking. Comparisons are made corporately with the Local Government Association's SPARSE group, which represents small, rural councils. Individual services benchmark with other councils and there are plans to develop a more corporate approach to benchmarking (see note dealing with the following action).
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	<p>Develop a corporate approach to value for money linked to the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy and performance management</p> <p>Value for money training, support and improved processes to be provided to managers</p> <p>Work with Members/SMB/HODs to incorporate a value for money strategy into services</p>	<p>Dec 2008</p> <p>Dec 2008</p> <p>Dec 2008</p>	<p>Value for money is a corporate priority and is also included as a priority in the Improvement Plan agreed and monitored by the Voluntary Improvement Board (VIB), set up in May 2008. The VIB oversees the recovery and direction of the Council and provides independent review and challenge. It is chaired by the CAAL from the Audit Commission and includes representatives from other external agencies. Vfm was not seen as the highest priority in the initial stages of recovery, but is now being addressed.</p> <p>The Council is in the process of</p>

				<p>establishing a corporate support unit, whose roles will include ensuring a more corporate approach to vfm, including benchmarking.</p> <p>All divisional action plans for 2009/10 include the requirement to address vfm</p>
Demonstrate the value for money provided by projects and partnerships	December 2008	Look at comparable authorities who have market tested service areas	Dec 2008	On-going
R6 Strengthen improvement planning and performance management				
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion	Progress
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	<p>Embed the performance management framework</p> <p>Provide training for all Managers to enable them to carry out individual performance reviews</p>	<p>Dec 2008</p> <p>Dec 2008</p>	<p>Completed Jan 2009 (On-going) – performance management framework established and promoted throughout the authority – ‘golden thread’ links created through SCS & LDF, corporate plan, divisional plans and U-performance objectives</p> <p>Completed – Dec 2008</p>

<p>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</p>	<p>December 2008</p>	<p>Set up quarterly performance management meetings and provide formal minutes for each meeting</p>	<p>Dec 2008</p>	<p>Completed – all strategic housing functions performance is reported and monitored through the authority’s Performance Select Committee via Covalent (performance management software). Where possible corporate and/or divisional plan actions are linked to national, corporate and service level indicators. New processes being implemented where under-performing PIs are subject to a Business Improvement review following SMB approval</p>
<p>Increase the use of local performance indicators an setting challenging targets across all strategic housing functions</p>	<p>December 2008</p>	<p>Engage with key partners to determine local performance indicators</p> <p>Service Managers to receive training in Covalent to enable them to set up local indicators for the team</p>	<p>Apr 2008</p> <p>Apr 2008</p>	<p>Completed - Apr 2008</p> <p>Completed - Apr 2008</p>
<p>Increase customer involvement in influencing and monitoring service delivery</p>	<p>December 2008</p>	<p>Further develop feedback questionnaires</p>	<p>Jul 2008</p>	<p>Completed – Aug 2008 - further enhanced by possible introduction of corporate</p>

				customer feedback process
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	Completed – Jan 2009. Golden thread links Appraisals, Divisional Plans and Corporate Plan. Divisional plans are now more service driven.
Ensure all action plans are SMART	December 2008	Ensure all action plans are SMART	Dec 2008	Completed – Aug 2008 (ongoing)
R7 Strengthen financial management				
Actions	Deadline set by the AC	Actions we will take	Target date for completion	Progress
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	CFO started in October 2008. Trainee accountant and one other accountancy position to be advertised in February 2009. All other posts fully occupied
Deliver the revised medium-term financial strategy to address the current financial situation, and link budget	July 2008	Deliver the revised Medium Term Financial Strategy	Jul 2008	Medium Term Financial Strategy ("The Road Ahead") was approved by the Council in February 2008 and covers the

<p>setting to improve planning processes</p>		<p>Arrange budget training for HoDs and Service Managers</p> <p>Introduce budget profiling</p> <p>Introduce regular reporting on overall budgetary control, including forecasting position to Members</p>	<p>Jul 2008</p> <p>Apr 2008</p> <p>Jun 2008</p>	<p>period 2008/09 to 2010/11.</p> <p>Revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (“Sustain and Build”) was approved by the Council in February 2009 covering the period 2009/10 to 2013/14.</p> <p>Each Medium Term Financial Strategy explains how financial resources are used to support corporate priorities identified in the Corporate Plan.</p> <p>Completed – Jul 2007. HoDs had finance training July 2008</p> <p>Completed – Apr 2008. Profiling introduced in April 2008</p> <p>Completed – Jun 2008. Member reports commenced in June 2008</p>
<p>Fully exploit the financial IT system</p>	<p>July 2008</p>	<p>Review FIS system - including adoption of new coding structure, recharging structure and commitment accounting</p>	<p>Dec 2008</p>	<p>Commitment accounting in test live trial starts in October - <i>This project has been delayed due to resources having been diverted to the DWP Code of Connection (CoCo) project.</i> Coding changes likely to be deferred until July 2009</p>