

Committee: PERFORMANCE SELECT

Agenda Item

Date: September 23, 2008

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Title: AUDIT COMMISSION COMMUNITY
HOUSING INSPECTION

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Item for
information

Summary

- 1 The Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate undertook an inspection of the Council's Community Housing Service in January 2008. This report provides the Committee with details of the outcome of the inspection. The action plan has been approved by the Community Committee. It responds to recommendations made by the Audit Commission within their report.

Recommendations

- 2 None

Background Papers

- 3 Audit Commission Final Report - the full report can be found on the audit commission website www.auditcommission.gov.uk
 - The Council's Self Assessment Form.

Impact

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Communication/Consultation	None
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Finance	At this time there are no cost implications for the Council in progressing action plan, however there may be resource implications involved in implementing individual actions
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	None
Sustainability	None

Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

- 5 The Audit Commission undertook an inspection of the Council's Community Housing Service in January 2008. The Council is responsible through its Community Housing Service for: developing housing strategy; helping to provide affordable housing; the letting of Council housing; the housing advice and homelessness service; and improving housing conditions in the private sector. The service is provided directly by the Council and in partnership with other agencies.

The areas covered were as follows:

- Housing strategy and enabling affordable housing
- Homelessness and housing needs
- Allocations and lettings
- Private sector housing activity

- 6 In addition to these, they inspected three areas that are included in all inspections:

- Access and customer care
- Diversity
- Value for money

- 7 The Inspection not only focused on the strategic housing service but involved a strong focus on the integration with cross-departmental services, including: Planning; Environmental Health; Finance; HR; Policy & Performance.

- 8 Services being examined were assessed against a set series of questions. These questions (known as Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE)) are designed to enable the inspectors to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of services. A significant amount of work was involved in preparing for the Housing Inspection, including the completion and submission of a Self-assessment document that addresses the KLOEs as well as a significant amount of supporting evidence such as strategies, policies, procedures, etc.

- 9 This self assessment (and the accompanying documents submitted by the Council) formed the basis of the inspector's initial views. The inspectors arrived on site for a week in January 2008 and undertook an inspection process that was based on testing their initial views against evidence on site. This incorporated conducting meetings/interviews with key Councillors, key members of staff, partners and stakeholders and customers of the services involved.

- 10 The final Audit Commission report assessed the Community Housing Services provided by the Council as a 'fair' service with no prospects for improvement.
- 11 It should be noted that the inspection took place during the week that the then Chief Executive announced his resignation, when there was a lot of uncertainty about the Council's financial situation and when staff were receiving "at risk" letters. In the circumstances it was unlikely that the audit commission would give better prospects for improvement.
- 12 The report recognised a number of strengths within the service, particularly that it is delivering creditable numbers of new affordable homes, taking a preventative approach to homelessness and offering more choice to applicants for social housing through a choice-based lettings scheme. Also identified were a number of areas that require improvement including the approach to value for money, diversity and private sector housing. Some of the recommendations made in the report are wider than the Community Housing Service alone and refer to services across the Council.
- 13 More detailed information regarding the strengths and weaknesses identified within the Service can be found in the Summary feedback of the Inspector's report.
- 14 The advice and recommendations made by the Inspectors has been useful in verifying our own assessment and the actions that require development to ensure that we provide the best service possible for our customers. The recommendations are a priority for us and as well as shaping the action plan they will form part of our new Homelessness Strategy and Housing Strategy.
- 15 The Head of Housing Services will update the committee on progress against the Action Plan at the meeting.

Risk Analysis

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Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Recommendations made by the AC are not implemented	1	3- Failure by the Council to address the weaknesses set out in the audit commission report would be highlighted as failure within the Community Housing Service in future external audits	ensure recommendations made in the audit commission report are implemented where feasible