



Community & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

Briefing Paper

Report of: Kate Bailey, Strategic Housing Services Manager
Date: Thursday, 6th January 2011
Open

Housing Inspection Improvement Plan

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report considers the recent Audit Commission Strategic Housing Services Assessment and the accompanying improvement plan.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Audit Commission is an independent watchdog that works across local government including housing to promote economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services. In October 2010 they assessed the Strategic Housing Services team following completion of a self-assessment and suggested improvement plan submitted in September.
- 2.2 The Council opted not to have a full inspection due to the uncertain future of the Audit Commission and the cost so the assessment undertaken has not be scored and will not be published on the Audit Commission website. The Audit Commission acted in the role of critical friend to the Council.
- 2.3 The Audit Commission identified Wyre Forest for a strategic housing services inspection following completion of the Comprehensive Area Assessment that flagged up particular issues with housing in Wyre Forest and Malvern (who were also assessed in September 2010).

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 The assessment considered the following key areas; Housing strategy development, enabling new housing, making the best use of existing housing, making the best use of existing private sector housing, housing options and homelessness, value for money and other performance management and capacity issues. The report provides a general assessment of the service including key strengths and areas for development of the service, the coverage of the self-assessment ,

the effectiveness of improvement plans in addressing key issues and makes further recommendations where required.

- 3.2 The assessment identifies progress made in housing strategy through the development and consultation on the Worcestershire Housing Strategy, the core strategy and the recent Private Sector Housing Action Plan. It also recognises the importance of the County Homelessness Strategy and Housing Market Assessment updates but recognises the need to do more research into particular client groups e.g. the Housing Needs of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) households.
- 3.3 The strong approach to delivering new housing, work within the Private Sector including around affordable warmth and enforcement and choice based lettings were all recognised.
- 3.4 Areas for development included work around empty homes, disabled facilities grants and better monitoring of RSL performance. The improvement plan also identified further work being required around homelessness and housing options and the value for money achieved through the homeless contract with Community Housing Group.
- 3.5 Capacity for improvement was seen as strong with the team being effectively led and with the skills and ability to further develop the service and the active engagement from the Cabinet Member for Housing and Environmental Services was recognised.

4. Options

- 4.1 That the Community and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that the Strategic Housing Services assessment is signed off and the improvement plan agreed.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Report taken to scrutiny for consideration. Prior to the report being finalised it was shared with Community Housing Group for consideration.

6. Related Decisions

- 6.1 Not applicable

7. Relevant Council Policies/Strategies

- 7.1 Strategic Housing Services service plan.

8. Implications

- 8.1 Resources: Details of any resource implications of the decision

8.2 Equalities: Not applicable

8.3 Partnership working:
This self assessment also included an evaluation of work undertaken by Community Housing Group and they were also interviewed as part of the process.

8.4 Human Rights: Not applicable

8.5 E-Government: Not applicable

8.6 Transformation: Not applicable

9. Equality Impact Needs Assessment

9.1 The self assessment covers areas of the service that have been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment in 2009.

10. Wards affected

10.1 All wards

11. Appendices

11.1 Strategic Housing Services report from Audit Commission.

11.2 Wyre Forest DC proposed Improvement Plan.

12. Background Papers

12.1 Strategic housing services service plan.

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