

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF FRONT LINE HOUSING SERVICES AND SUSTAINABLE ESTATES – PROGRESS REPORT

Report of the Director of Derby Homes

SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1 This report gives an update on the recent Best Value Review (BVR) of Front Line Housing Services and Sustainable Estates, completed in January 2002, and the results of the inspection carried out by the Audit Commission.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That Cabinet approves the amendments to the Improvement Action Plan recommended by the Audit Commission, and notes the progress made to date in implementing the Plan.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

3. The Audit Commission have recommended improvements that will enhance the customer services provided to Council tenants.

MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 4.1 The Best Value Review report was completed in January 2002, and Housing Inspectors from the Audit Commission completed a two week visit in March 2002. Following the interim challenge meeting on 9 May 2002 the Council has now received the Audit Commission's final report on the Best Value Review of Front Line Housing Services and Sustainable Estates.
- 4.2 The Council was assessed as providing an '**excellent**', three star service that has excellent prospects for improvement.
- 4.3 The Commission went on to say that they considered "the Front Line Housing Services and the work carried out to achieve Sustainable Estates to be excellent. The Council has clear and relevant aims for the services that mirror their strategic objectives".
- 4.4 The Commission highlighted a number of excellent aspects of the service, these include:
 - the involvement of tenants and leaseholders in the planning, delivery and monitoring of services and recognised the steps taken to ensure that representation on tenants and leaseholder groups reflects the local communities
 - there are effective, practical examples of partnership working to deliver services designed to improve the life chances and quality of life of tenants

- services are delivered by committed, highly motivated and well trained staff working to deliver services to agreed standards
- anti-social behaviour and racial harassment are effectively tackled through tenancy management, effective partnership working and monitored procedures where intervention is required
- resources have been concentrated on reducing rent arrears and progress is being made
- responsive repairs services are well managed with a range of customer satisfaction performance monitoring arrangements in place
- the planned and programmed repairs and maintenance service meets the needs and aspirations of tenants and leaseholders whilst ensuring the improvement and sustainability of the housing stock
- a strong corporate commitment to domestic energy efficiency and affordable warmth is delivered through investment in homes, advice and promotional activities
- sheltered housing schemes provide secure, supported housing for older people and supported housing projects provide good accommodation for vulnerable people
- arrangements are in place to deliver the Supporting People programme due to be introduced in April 2003
- estates are well managed with closely monitored arrangements in place to maintain and improve the appearance and security in partnership with other agencies
- efficiency savings of 3% have been identified through the implementation of the best value review improvement plans.

4.5 Within the recommendations the Audit Commission highlighted the following areas of weakness and offered practical pointers for improvement. The responsibility for implementing these improvements falls to Derby Homes

- Address the issues of access for people with disabilities at local housing offices as highlighted within the report. Carry out training with staff on this aspect of customer care
- Carry out an evaluation of existing interpreting services offered at local housing offices. Develop additional services that reflect the needs of the local community. Carry out training with staff on this aspect of customer care
- Develop the repairs appointment services to meet the needs of all tenants and leaseholders. Carry out training with staff to ensure all staff understand and are able to administer the system. Communicate details of the appointment system to tenants and leaseholders
- Ensure that any future investment to improve accommodation in sheltered housing is carried out to a specification that will meet the long term needs of older people
- Review the use of mediation services and evaluate the contribution that existing services can make in the resolution of problems for, and caused by, tenants and leaseholders. Determine the level of mediation services required and identify the appropriate level of mediation and sources of funding.

- Review the revised draft housing management manual and make sure that it provides comprehensive coverage of all the service areas and provides a robust procedural manual for staff

4.6

Derby Homes must now put into place policies to address the above issues. A further inspection will be carried out by the Audit Commission in September 2002. The aim of this inspection will be to ensure the Improvement Action Plan is being implemented, that the arrangements for the Arms Length Organisation are sound, and that the strategic housing function is robust and effective. If as a result of this follow up inspection we receive a further 3 star assessment, then £81 million of additional borrowing approval will be received. Spend will then start in January 2003.

4.7

Lead Officers have been nominated to oversee actions in all of the identified areas and progress will be reported to the Senior Management Team.

4.8

A copy of the Improvement Action Plan is attached at Appendix 1. Progress to date is noted against each action. A monitoring group consisting of senior managers, process improvement team leaders and tenants has been established and will oversee progress against the improvement plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5. The additional costs of implementing the Best Value Improvement Action Plan will be £75,000 in 2002/3. Such costs and future costs will be contained within the Derby Homes fee income settlement that will be agreed each year. The proposals to improve disabled access in local offices is estimated to cost £100,000, which will be contained within existing revenue and capital budgets.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6. None directly arising.

PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7. Most of the improvements proposed will be delivered by existing staffing resources. All proposals affecting staff will be the subject of consultation with staff and trade unions.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

8. None arising directly.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9. Several improvements proposed will improve services provided to black and minority ethnic communities and improve access to services to all customers.