

REPORT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

REVIEW OF DECENT HOMES STANDARD

Background

In 2004, the Community Services Scrutiny Panel carried out a Scrutiny on the Decent Homes Standard.

Actions

The Executive Head of Property Services and Operations Manager were in attendance at the Panel's Meeting on 15 March 2006.

Panel Members had a short discussion on the Decent Homes Standard, however due to time constraints, the Chair asked the Head of Property Services to provide further additional information in writing.

Outcomes

The Panel was told that the percentage of houses externally assessed as non decent was higher than the Property Services assessment. However, the Council is still on course to achieve the DHS target set for 2010.

The Head of Property Services' additional written response is attached as Appendix B.

Recommendations

1. That the measures necessary for the Council to achieve its 2010 Decent Homes Standard target be pursued.
2. That progress towards the required DHS target is rigorously monitored, continues to be reported at Performance Clinics, and is reviewed again by the Community Service Scrutiny Panel in March/April 2007.

Community Services Scrutiny Panel
March 2006

Review of Decent Homes Standard

Questions to Head of Property Services

Stock Condition

- Can you give information about the Stock Condition as externally validated?

As of 31st March 2005, there will be 3,670 properties the external consultants assessed as non-decent. This equates to 57.8% of the total housing stock.

- Are measures in place, or under discussion, to ensure that the Decent Homes target for 2010 is met?

If we make 11.5% (734 properties) improvements every year for the next five years then we will achieve the DHS target. The budgets and works programmes put in place for the next 5 years will cover this.

- Is the Council keeping pace with the need to introduce more adaptations for the elderly?

There is a separate budget of approximately £265,000 allocated every year to the Special Needs Officer for carrying out medical adaptations. I believe that we are keeping pace with demand.

- Are RTB sales adversely affecting DHS targets?

It is true that RTBs can adversely skew the figures in relation to DHS if we sell a lot of "decent homes". Conversely, if we sell a lot of properties which are classed as "non-decent", then this can improve our figures. However, the Council is only currently selling about 140 properties a year, so out of a housing stock of 6,350 properties, the affects are negligible.

Work Programmes

- Does the Council have the workforce to effectively operate Tenants' Choice and Planned Maintenance Programmes?

We have enough workforce to effectively operate our service. In addition we utilise agency workers and of course sub-contractors.

- Were the Kelloe and Witton Gilbert Schemes successfully done in-house? Were there any knock-on effects? If so, have they been dealt with?

The two contracts at Kelloe and Witton Gilbert were done successfully in-house. The knock-on effect was that we could not fully carry out that years' programme (with these additional contracts added in late). We therefore had to catch-up the following year (2004/05) and to some extent this year as well (2005/06). We are now back on schedule.

Tenant Consultation

- Do you consider that tenant consultation is effective?

Tenant consultation is effective and also necessary to comply with our own in-house customer care policies.

- Are tenants still being used as advocates for less confident residents?

Following the trial at West Rainton with Tenants Advocates, we felt that we did not achieve what we set out to do, and in fact it caused us more problems than normal. We have therefore abandoned this idea but still aim to achieve high levels of tenant satisfaction.

- Are Customer Satisfaction Forms still being used proactively to improve the services?

Everything we do is followed by a customer satisfaction form and we are still achieving high levels of satisfaction in all main areas of building work :-

- ◆ Responsive repairs
- ◆ Planned maintenance
- ◆ Tenants choice modernisations
- ◆ Gas servicing

Areas of dissatisfaction are recorded and tenants are visited to see if we can attend to their specific complaints. We also use dissatisfaction to measure the performance of sub-contractors and materials used, and appropriate measures are taken.

Funding

- Is the Direct Service Organisation running at a profit or loss?

The DLO is making a profit. This year we will make a profit of approx. £216,000.

- Is there a contingency fund?

This coming year we will be asked to make a profit of £92,600 but in future years the DLO will not be asked to make a "profit". All surpluses will go back into the Housing Revenue Account.

Monitoring

- Is there still an equivalent of Project Control Meetings?

The "Project Control" meetings have now been renamed "Capital Works Steering Group" and chaired by myself. These are held monthly and attended by Senior Officer representation from all departments together with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and the Director of Strategy & Resources.

- Who monitors the Housing Budget Plan?

The Housing Business Plan is monitored within this meeting along with

- ◆ General Fund Capital Works,
- ◆ Flourishing Communities Capital Works
- ◆ IEG/ICT capital schemes
- ◆ Members Discretionary Fund Capital Works.

- Do staff have Personal Development Plans and are they reviewed and updated?

Staff and manuals have personal development reviews annually and these are randomly inspected by the “Investor In People” assessor.