



**SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 July 2005**

Report of the Director of Housing Services

**A VISION, STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR THE COUNCIL'S HOUSING SERVICES**

**purpose of the report**

To seek Committee's comments on and approval of a revised vision, strategic objectives and priorities for the Council's Housing Services.

**background**

- 1 The Housing Inspection Report 2003 and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Report 2004 criticised the vision and objectives of the housing service. They were seen as out of date, not related to the corporate or LSP vision or a coherent expression of issues facing Wear Valley.
- 2 The Housing Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) published in December 2004 and recent inspection reports have emphasised the importance of having 'ambition' for the service. This applies to those operational activities which will be delivered by the Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) and the Council's functions. The ALMO must be able to show that it is contributing to a broader vision. Housing Inspectors have commended Council's that use external facilitation.
- 3 The current housing vision and priorities were developed in 2001/02 as part of the Housing Strategy. They pre-dated the corporate/LSP vision objectives and priorities.
- 4 In discussions about the impact of the ALMO with other Departments, the Management Support Unit (MSU) and stakeholders, the lack of an updated vision and priorities for housing services was seen as a key risk for the indicative inspection in September 2005 and a future CPA.
- 5 The MSU, together with the Housing Services Department commissioned KSA consultants to facilitate a strategy development day. The scope of the day was to cover the activities of the Housing Services Department, which included the responsibility for the strategic housing role jointly discharged with Regeneration.

### **the strategy development day**

- 6 The strategy development day was held on Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2005. Senior councillors, community representatives and Council staff from a range of services attended. At the very start of the day, it was made clear that
  - The work was about the Council's housing service, not the ALMO. The shadow ALMO board would determine its vision and priorities. It would be likely that these would reflect the wider Council and LSP vision.
  - The outcomes of the day must complement and be directly linked to the Council's vision and its 6 objectives.
- 7 The report attached at Annex 1 gives details of the strategy development day. In particular, I would draw your attention to
  - The challenge on page 9 making it clear that the work was about Housing Services broadly, not just the ALMO
  - The vision set out on page 13
  - The strategic objectives on page 14
  - The priorities and actions on page 15
  - The key themes on page 18
- 8 Participants expressed the view that it was a highly productive and well planned day. It provided
  - A realistic vision aligned to the Council's corporate statements;
  - Objectives and priorities which will be the building blocks of a Service Plan; and operational plan subject to minor changes;
  - Evidence to satisfy various inspection regimes;
  - A document to help us develop the ALMO in a wider strategic context;
  - A document to help us develop the significant continuing Council involvement in housing.

### **consultation and the emerging agenda**

- 9 The KSA report has been the basis of consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including
  - The Customer Panel
  - Councillors
  - Staff
  - The LSP Housing Thematic Group

- 10 The responses to the consultation have been positive. Specific comments have covered:-
- The need to time limit the vision, objectives and priorities and suggest a review date;
  - The requirement to place housing within the wider context of sustainable communities;
  - The convention that the approval of the vision, objectives and priorities will be taken into account in the budget process as a set of issues competing for resources. They will be given appropriate consideration as part of the resource allocation exercise;
  - The achievability of the vision, objectives and priorities and their integration into the corporate performance management framework.
- 11 The emerging policy agenda including the formation of the ALMO has been taken into consideration. The Government's 'Sustainable Communities Plan 2005', the housing specific document 'Homes for All' and 'The Northern Way' have influenced the development of the vision, strategic objectives and priorities.
- 12 Since May 2005 further work has been done on the ALMO, its corporate governance, its functions and its possible fit with the Council. This again has influenced the vision, strategic objectives and priorities.
- 13 The responses to the consultation have been taken into account in developing the proposal set out below.

## **proposal**

- 14 It is proposed that the vision is changed to:-
- "leading the way to the very best housing of choice for everyone that contributes to sustainable communities which learn and grow".

- 15 It is proposed that the strategic objectives remain the same being

### **Service objectives:**

#### *Service*

- Achieving an optimum balance and choice of housing

#### *Environment*

- Delivering ever improving community safety and reducing fear of crime
- Delivering ever improving greener, cleaner and a healthier environment

### *People and Community*

- Developing people and communities who can work together, and are able to say what is needed to make it happen

### **Organisational objectives**

#### *Strategy and Plans*

- Shaping up the strategy and plans which people feel part of, value and believe will work

#### *Organisation*

- Shape up the organisation to have a business like approach to stock management which is inclusive, impacts economically and is valued

#### *Culture*

- Develop a culture of excellence, customer service and continuous improvement

- 16 It is proposed that the priorities have minor changes made to reflect the opinions expressed in the consultation

#### *Cup Finals*

- Scope the housing strategy
- Ongoing Housing Market assessment
- Establishment of the ALMO
- Successful transition to the ALMO

#### *Future Building*

- Position Housing within sustainable communities
- Achieve and maintain Decent Homes Standard
- Develop strategic capacity and functionality
- Achieve 2-3\*
- Balance the market
- Conduct Housing Needs Survey and assess its messages/impact
- Develop the 'soft' qualitative measures
- Engage with hard to reach groups
- Develop Partnerships and build Community Capacity (learning community)
- Local development framework

#### *Quick Wins*

- Successful use of the indicative inspection findings

- Introduction of the ALMO
- Engage customers in the ALMO and the review of service
- Develop service standards
- Agree Vision, Objectives and Agenda
- Agree review of the role and Governance of the ALMO and its relationship to the Council

### **review process**

- 17 The vision and strategic objectives are intended to have a 'lifetime' of 3 years until September 2008. This is subject to the following factors:-
- Comments on the vision made as part of a housing inspection;
  - The establishment of a successful ALMO;
  - Changes to the LSP and Council vision and objectives.
- 18 The priorities will be reviewed each year as part of the revision of the Council Plan.
- 19 The vision, strategic objectives and priorities will become part of 'the golden thread' running through the service plan, operational plans, individual personal development plans and targets.

### **legal implications**

- 20 There are no legal implications from this report.

### **equalities implications**

- 21 The report supports the requirement to deliver the housing service to ensure equality of treatment. The document details work with hard to reach groups.

### **community safety implications**

- 22 The report places housing within the context of safer communities.

### **financial implications**

- 23 There are no immediate financial implications to this report. However, in the budget and service planning cycles expenditure, income and capital activities will need to be aligned to the vision, objectives and priorities.

## **human resources implications**

- 24 The report identifies priorities related to training, employment and recruitment for the service.

## **RECOMMENDED**

- 1 Committee comments on and approves the revised vision, objectives and priorities for the housing service set out in this report.

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<b>Officer responsible for the report</b>	<b>Author of the report</b>
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**SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 July 2005**

Report of the Director of Housing Services

**GYPSY AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES IN WEAR VALLEY**

**purpose of the report**

To report on the Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) "Gypsies and Travellers: A strategy for the CRE 2004-2007", the County Council's draft "Gypsy and Traveller Strategy" and propose ways for the Council to engage with the Gypsy and Traveller communities.

**background**

- 1 Gypsies and Traveller issues have been given a higher national profile in recent years. Contacts within the Audit Commission have stressed the importance of this group within the national approach to community cohesion. Our engagement with Gypsies and Travellers is likely to form part of any future service or CPA inspection.
- 2 We already engage with Gypsies and Travellers at an operational level. For example:-
  - There are two sites in Wear Valley (St Philip's Park and Green Lane) for Gypsies and Travellers;
  - We have legal duties to safeguard the health of residents of authorised sites;
  - We have enforcement powers linked to illegal encampments;
  - We have a duty to assess the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers;
  - We have a duty to promote race equality;
  - We have a considerable 'settled' Gypsy and Traveller community who use our services.
- 3 Most of the operational responsibility rests with the Housing Services and Community Services Departments. The County Council has a full time Travellers Liaison Officer. It also operates a well regarded education service for travelling children. Although the County Council has enforcement powers for its own land and is a consultee/partner in other enforcement, the primary responsibility for enforcement lies with District Councils.

- 4 In Wear Valley, local information would suggest that we have a significant Gypsy and Traveller community. These may be settled or housed or regular visitors. We have periodic illegal encampments. The community seems to be concentrated around West Auckland/Coundon/Witton Park. It is likely that Gypsies and Travellers are our biggest racial group.
- 5 Until recently, we have not considered the community as a separate racial group or discussed structured engagement. This is changing and there is a growing consensus that we should be doing more to act upon recent Government research.

#### **cre strategy**

- 6 The CRE Strategy examines public attitudes to Gypsies and Travellers, the quality of sites, access to accommodation, education and public services, employment, health and criminal justice issues. It reminds public bodies that Gypsies and Travellers are a recognised racial group, who experience discrimination and suffer social exclusion.
- 7 The Strategy aims to ensure full racial equality for Gypsies and Travellers over the next 3 years. The measures proposed range from changing monitoring arrangements to making social housing funding conditional on having adequate provision for and engagement with Gypsies and Travellers. In particular 'zones of acceptance' for illegal encampments are debated.

#### **durham county council draft strategy**

- 8 The County Council issued a draft Strategy in early 2005. The Community Services Department have returned their comments and the Durham Housing and Neighbourhoods Group have been asked for their views. Other councils, such as Sedgefield Borough, have also responded.
- 9 The draft Strategy's main points are
  - There has not been a consistent approach across the County;
  - 'Demand' outstrips resources;
  - Statistical information is incomplete;
  - The County Council should promote a joined up approach and lead the development of this with other partners.



## **proposal**

- 10 This issue is not just confined to Wear Valley. Other local authorities are also considering:-
- The need to respond to the national agenda;
  - The quality of site provision;
  - Engagement with the gypsy and traveller community;
  - Dealing with illegal encampment;
  - Gathering evidence and information;
  - Including the community's needs in plans and strategies;
  - Changing monitoring and reporting arrangements.
- 11 It would seem that the settled community has links across South Durham. For example, the community in Coundon with Spennymoor and those in West Auckland with Evenwood. There does not seem to be a north/south Durham connection.
- 12 Sedgefield Borough Council have started to review their activities in terms of both operations, policy and strategy. It is proposed that we should discuss a joint approach with Sedgefield Borough Council and Teesdale District Council and explore opportunities for joint working.

## **financial implications**

- 13 There are no direct financial implications from this report. However, the new national emphasis may lead to budget bids. Joint working may present the opportunity to make efficiencies. Failure to respond adequately to the national agenda may lead to reductions in allocations.

## **community safety implications**

- 14 There are no direct community safety implications to this report. However, Committee will note the joint work carried out with the Police on illegal encampment issues.

## **equalities implications**

- 15 There are significant equalities issues to this report. As Gypsies and Travellers are a recognised group who experience discrimination, the Council has legal duties towards them. The CRE, Audit Commission and ODPM have placed an increased emphasis on equality and diversity throughout the public sector. Failure to respond adequately on this issue may trigger sanctions.

## **legal implications**

- 16 The Council has considerable legal duties in this area covering equalities, community safety, housing.

## **RECOMMENDED**

- 1 Committee notes the summary of the CRE Strategy and draft County Council strategy as detailed in the report.
- 2 Committee instructs the Director of Housing Services to discuss a joint approach with Sedgefield Borough Council and Teesdale District Council to engage with the Gypsy and Traveller Community.

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**SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 July 2005**

**Report of the Director of Housing Services**  
**CHOICE BASED LETTINGS REGIONAL FUND**

**purpose of the report**

To seek approval to bid on a cross authority basis for funds to set up a choice based lettings (CBL) scheme.

**background**

- 1 The Government aims to have a nationwide system of choice in housing allocations by 2010. The Government's preferred system to offer choice is the CBL scheme.
- 2 CBL schemes allow people to apply for empty houses which are advertised locally. CBL moves away from the traditional approach to allocating homes. The traditional approach is for the landlord to select from a waiting list where 'points' are given. In short the landlord 'rations' access to housing. Some allocations policies have restrictions on the type and location of properties available and the number of offers.
- 3 CBL schemes should cover local authority, housing association, private rented and low cost home ownership properties.
- 4 CBL schemes still give points to applicants. They then use those points to bid for the advertised vacancies. In effect the points are a currency that can be used to buy accommodation.
- 5 CBL schemes are meant to increase the amount of customer choice available to applicants. It develops a marketplace and allows customers to make a trade off' between location, type of property and price.
- 6 There are boundaries to CBL schemes. They must follow the Government's Code of Guidance on Allocations and Homelessness. This means some applicants will be given priority and the points awarded must reflect the Code.

- 7 In Wear Valley we have a very open allocations policy. Any customer can apply for any dwelling in an unlimited number of areas. We do not limit offers. We have opened up the allocation of one bedroom bungalows.

### **regional fund**

- 8 The Government wants to encourage local authorities to adopt CBL schemes. It has provided £4 million over 3 years to support the development of sub regional CBL schemes. The Government has invited bids by 7 October 2005. The explanatory letter and bidding guidance is attached at Annex 2.
- 9 Successful bids will
- Take a partnership approach
  - Involve housing associations
  - Involve at least 3 local authorities although larger schemes will be prioritised

### **proposal**

- 10 It is proposed that the Council works together with other local authorities to determine the most suitable way to introduce a CBL scheme. This may be with 3 or more other local authorities. The most appropriate mechanism to work with others on this issue would appear to be the Durham Housing and Neighbourhood Group. This Group has representation from all housing authorities in Durham, housing associations and other agencies.

### **financial implications**

- 11 The Council will bid for an allocation from the fund.

### **legal implications**

- 12 The Council will be required to revise its allocations policy in line with the relevant housing legislation. It may need to enter into legal agreements in the future.

### **equalities and diversity implications**

- 13 The CBL scheme which is developed will need to comply with the legal requirements to be fair in allocating properties and giving priority. It will also need to be accessible to all groups in society and encourage the development of mixed, cohesive communities.

### **community safety implication**

- 14 The CBL scheme will be critical in balancing communities, determining eligibility for accommodation and making provision for vulnerable customers or victims of crime.

## RECOMMENDED

- 1 Committee approves the proposal that discussions are held through the Durham Housing and Neighbourhood Group about a bid to the CBL regional fund.
- 2 Committee asks the Director of Housing Services to make further reports on the outcome of these discussions.

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**SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 July 2005**

Report of the Director of Housing Services

**REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE CONTRACT TENDERING RISK ASSESSMENT**

**purpose of the report**

To seek approval of an approach to the medium term future of the repairs and maintenance contract informed by a risk management assessment.

**background**

- 1 In January 2004 the Council concluded the process of tendering the repairs and maintenance contract. The contract was awarded to the Council's Property Services team. The Housing Inspectors accepted that the tendering process had been genuine and open. However they reminded us of the need to give evidence of value for money. They have followed up this reminder with revised guidance on value for money.
- 2 Value for money and better procurement will be key themes in the forthcoming housing inspection. Any procurement exercise takes place within the organisational context and with reference to the risks presented by the environment.
- 3 This report assesses the risks involved in tendering the contract at this time. It follows the Council's Risk Management Strategy agreed at Central Resources Committee on 19 December 2001.
- 4 The Strategy requires risks to be
  - Identified
  - Analysed
  - Controlled and
  - Reported/monitored
- 5 The Strategy also identifies types of risk. They may be
  - **Political:** those associated with a failure to deliver either local or central government policy, or to meet local commitments.

- **Economic:** those affecting the ability of the Council to meet its financial commitments. These include internal budgetary pressures, the failure to purchase adequate insurance to cover external macro-level economic changes, or the consequences of proposed investment decisions.
- **Social:** those relating to the effects of changes in demographic or socio-economic trends on the Council's ability to deliver its objectives.
- **Technological:** those associated with the capacity of the Council to deal with the pace/scale of technological change, or its ability to use technology to address changing demands. They may also include the consequences of internal technological failures on the Council's ability to deliver its objectives.
- **Legislative:** those associated with current or potential changes in national or European law (for example, TUPE regulations).
- **Environmental:** those relating to the environmental consequences of progressing the Council's strategic objectives (for example, in terms of energy efficiency, pollution, recycling, landfill requirements, emissions, etc).
- **Competitive:** those affecting the competitiveness of the service (in terms of cost or quality) and/or its ability to deliver best value or,
- **Customer/Citizen:** those associated with the failure to meet the current and changing needs and expectations of customers and citizens.

#### **the service**

- 6 The service is delivered to some 5,000 council tenants on a responsive basis. It includes an emergency call out service and repairs to civic buildings.
- 7 The service was rated as 1 star (fair) by the Housing Inspectors in 2003. The key statistics for the service are given below:-
  - Some 25,000 repairs each year are completed;
  - 86% of customers said they were satisfied;
  - the value of the contract is circa £2 million;
  - the service works to legislation or regulations covering the duties of the landlord, gas safety, electrical safety, employees' health and safety and building control;
  - the service is performing at satisfactory levels often in the top quartile level;
  - value for money savings of £80,000 have been identified in 2005;
  - there are 70 full time equivalent employees engaged in the service.

## **risk identification and analysis**

### **Political risks**

- 8 The service is key to delivering the Government's agenda of quality, choice and social inclusion at the local level. The service is probably the most important determinant of customer satisfaction in housing and because of its budget will be critical in any future Housing Inspection.
- 9 The employees in the service have high levels of contact with customers. They are seen as representing the Council. This is a risk when considered as part of the current phase of the stock option appraisal phase.
- 10 As Committee will know the Council chose ALMO as its preferred stock option and that we are entering a phase of consultation with tenants about this. To set up the ALMO a clear indication of customer support is needed. In other stock options exercises across the country, the attitudes of frontline employees have been a critical factor in influencing customers' view. If frontline employees, during their contact with customers, speak against the Council's preferred option it is much more difficult to convince tenants to support the Council's view.
- 11 Committee will know that some of the public service trade unions have expressed a strong preference for the option of stock retention and are campaigning for extra public funding for council housing. They are communicating with their members and sending them information favouring the retention option. In Wear Valley the view of some local trade union representatives is that Council employees have expressed interest in stock retention. They have sought reassurances that employee terms and conditions would not be reduced by an ALMO.
- 12 Tendering the service will cause concern to employees in the service. Our experience from the last tendering process is that employees worried about their job security, they sometimes allowed their worries to influence their judgement and made adverse comments about the Council to customers.
- 13 There are two identified political risks to tendering the service at this point. These are:-
  - Employees, motivated by concerns about their job security, could make adverse comments and reduce levels of customer satisfaction;
  - Employees, motivated by concerns about their job security, could make adverse comments about the proposed ALMO at a very sensitive time when tenants are being consulted. This could seriously prejudice the proposed ALMO.
- 14 The analysis of this risk is high. In other words it has, according to the Risk Management Strategy, a more than 25% chance of occurrence. It would have a financial impact of over £50,000.



### Economic Risk

- 15 Assuming that Committee accepts the political risk is high, there is an economic risk which follows on. A failure to get tenant support for the proposed ALMO will lead to a review of the stock option decision. The Council has invested some £100,000 to date in the stock options process. The proposed ALMO will spend £26 million to meet the decent homes standard. Tendering at this time would effect a major investment decision by the Council.
- 16 Again the analysis of this risk is high.

### *Legislative risk*

- 17 The previous tendering exercise led to a number of first stage TUPE challenges. Should the Council tender at this stage, it is highly likely that a TUPE challenge will be made. This could lead to protracted level discussion and delay.
- 18 The risk of this is high.

### Competitive Risk

- 19 The Council is obliged to achieve best value in its service delivery. Getting value for money and better procurement are key features of the housing inspection regime. Tendering is one method of procuring services.
- 20 Contractors are usually looking for a degree of stability and long term partnership. It would be likely that any contract would be for at least 3 years and more probably 5 years. This presents a difficulty for the Council in setting up the proposed ALMO.
- 21 Like the Council, the proposed ALMO will have to achieve best value. The ALMO board will have to consider all of its contracts for capital works, responsive repairs and support services within 12 months of going live.
- 22 For the Council to tender and enter into a contract for responsive repairs at this time, would fetter the ability of the ALMO to enter into its own contracts. A contract inherited by the ALMO of 3-5 years may not match the needs of the ALMO board.
- 23 In addition, the previous tendering exercise found that responsive repairs were not, alone, a very attractive activity to tenderers. Most expressed a desire to combine responsive repairs with capital works. The proposed ALMO board will have more capital available and may want to combine contracts.
- 24 In short, tendering now would restrict the proposed ALMO's choices and flexibility. This could affect the Council and the ALMO's ability to achieve best value.

25 The risk of this is high.

#### Risk control

26 Having identified the risks, Committee is now asked to consider action to minimise loss. The actions proposed are:-

- To continue to improve the business processes, efficiency and value for money of the responsive repairs service;
- To delay the re-tendering of the service until the ALMO board is established;
- To assist the ALMO board in determining the most appropriate procurement option for the responsive repair service.

16 These actions mean that further consideration of the procurement of the service is likely to be made by the ALMO board in 2007. The responsive repairs service may then be considered within the context of a bigger housing capital programme, the ALMO's objectives and tendering support services.

#### **reporting and monitoring**

28 The service is subject to regular reporting and monitoring. These arrangements comply with:-

- The corporate and departmental performance;
- Internal and external audit;
- Budgetary control systems, financial regulations and standing orders;
- External inspection;
- Overview and Scrutiny processes;
- The Council's Constitution and associated Committees;
- Challenge by customers and the involvement of the Local Government Ombudsman;
- Examination by the Customer Panel.

29 It is proposed that the risk is reported and monitored through existing arrangements.

#### **financial implications**

30 The Council must continue to prove value for money in the service. This means that savings must be identified and diverted towards higher quality service delivery.

#### **legal implications**

31 There are no immediate legal implications.

## **equalities and diversity implications**

- 32 The service must be delivered in a fair and equitable way with due regard to the needs of minority or vulnerable groups.

## **RECOMMENDED**

- 1 Committee accepts the risks identified and analysed in this report.
- 2 Committee agrees the actions set out in the risk control section of this report.
- 3 Committee agrees that the risk is reported and monitored through the existing arrangements.

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**SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28th July 2005**

Report of the Director of Housing Services  
**ESTATE CARETAKER – WOODHOUSE CLOSE**

**purpose of the report**

To seek Committee approval to employ an Estate Caretaker for the Woodhouse Close estate.

**background**

- 1 Estate Caretakers are widely used by high performing social housing organisations.
- 2 The use of Estate Caretakers is recognised as best practise by the Chartered Institute of Housing, the Audit Commission (KLOE 6) and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.
- 3 Woodhouse Close estate has been categorised as being “unsustainable”. Consultation during the Woodhouse Close Neighbourhood Plan process, with residents and stakeholders, identified that a major concern was the condition of common areas and around empty properties. The Neighbourhood Plan recommends the use of an Estate Caretaker to combat this problem. Housing Committee approved this Plan on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2005.

**proposal**

- 4 That an Estate Caretaker is employed to work primarily on the Woodhouse Close estate and be based at the Neighbourhood Housing Office under the day to day supervision of the Neighbourhood Manager.
- 5 The Caretaker would be responsible for the general upkeep and appearance of the estate, carrying out minor external repairs, clearing litter and some bulk items, assisting prospective and new tenants and liaising with other team members to monitor the external appearance of void properties.
- 6 The duties undertaken by the Estate Caretaker would not duplicate those currently undertaken by the Street Wardens. It is anticipated that the Caretaker would be employed primarily to carry out manual tasks relating to the exterior of

void properties and communal spaces and would not be expected to have a patrolling brief similar to that of the Street Wardens.

- 7 The duties undertaken by the Estate Caretaker would not impact on the type of work currently carried out by the Councils own workforce.

### **resources /financial implications**

- 8 Three options were investigated when considering the cost/benefits of this post. These three options are outlined below;

- Option1: employing an estate caretaker in-house, the costs (per annum) would be

Salary	=	£14106
National Insurance costs etc.(@26%)	=	£3667
Vehicle (hire@ £49 per week)	=	£2548
Diesel (p.a)	=	£2000
Provision of equipment	=	£500
Total		= £22821 p.a.

- Option 2: using an external contractor to provide this service (ORBIS). Two costs were provided. However should members approve this course of action then a tendering process would be required to ensure Best Value for customers.The two indicative costs are:

a) – fully trained operative, with vehicle and equipment supplied by contractor  
= £58800 p.a

b) – fully trained, with vehicle only = £56160 p.a

- Option 3; sharing an estate caretaker with Accent North East. Accent use a Residential Caretaker based on Lusby Crescent.His duties are similar but not identical to those tasks that we would expect a Caretaker to carry out. Appropriate costing details have not been provided by Accent. It should be noted that whilst approval of this option would reduce the cost to the authority it would also have a detrimental impact on the overall effectiveness of the post.

### **human resources implications**

- 9 Consultation with Officers in the Property Services section of the Housing Services Department indicate that the duties carried out by the caretaker would not duplicate those currently carried out by workforce operatives and therefore

would not have implications with workforce Trade Unions. Appropriate training would be provided.

- 10 The Caretaker would increase the number of staff based at the Woodhouse Close Neighbourhood Office.

### **crime and disorder implications**

- 11 The use of the Estate Caretaker forms part of the Woodhouse Close Neighbourhood Plan. One of the central objectives of this plan is to reduce crime and the fear of crime. The Estate Caretaker's role is integral to this.

### **timescale**

- 12 If approved it is anticipated that the post would be advertised and an appointment made in August 2005.

### **anticipated outcomes/service improvements**

- 13 The Woodhouse Close Neighbourhood Plan was developed following extensive consultation with customers, ward members and stakeholders. The Estate Caretaker is central to the successful implementation of the Plan.
- 14 Increase in customer and resident satisfaction regarding the general appearance of Woodhouse Close estate leading to an increase in demand for accommodation on the estate and thus impacting on the overall sustainability of the estate.
- 15 Improved void property relet times, providing a better value for money for customers.
- 16 Swifter response times on some small, minor repairs and less bureaucracy, again, providing a better value for money for customers.

### **conclusion**

- 17 The use of an Estate Caretaker would have a positive impact on service provision and customer satisfaction
- 18 That based on the options outlined above the most cost effective option would be to employ a Caretaker 'in house' (Option 1). The costs as outlined in the external contractor option (Option2) are prohibitive and would not represent value for money for customers. The option of employing a Caretaker in partnership with Accent North East (Option 3) would undermine the overall operational impact of the post.

- 19 It is therefore proposed that a post of Estate Caretaker at Scale 2 be created, within the Neighbourhood Operations section and be directly responsible to the Neighbourhood Manager. The cost of the post would be funded by transfer from other budgets.

## **RECOMMENDED**

- 1 Committee approves the recruitment of an 'in house' Estate Caretaker for the Woodhouse Close estate.

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**SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 JULY 2005**

Report of the Director of Housing Services

**CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY AND TARGETS**

**purpose of report**

To inform Housing Services Committee of the need for a Customer Involvement Strategy and Targets for the Housing Services Department.

**background**

- 1 The Housing Services Department is committed to developing an effective tenant and resident involvement service and we acknowledge that our relationship with our customers should be one built on trust within an honest and open environment.
- 2 To enable the Housing Services Department to encourage all customers to get involved in future decisions on how the Council provide services, the Wear Valley Housing Customers Compact 2003 was developed along with corresponding Action Plans. The Compact, devised in partnership with customers, councillors, Customer Panel and Resident Association representatives is a flexible document which adapts to local circumstances.
- 3 In line with good practice, Community Involvement Strategies have become increasingly popular and most often aim to support already established Customer Compacts and Action Plans.

**the need for a community involvement strategy and targets**

- 4 Many local authorities have been praised by the Audit Commission and ODPM for their development of Community Involvement Strategies and accompanying action plans which outline specific targets for Community Involvement. The Wear Valley Housing Customers Compact 2003 has been formally recognised by the ODPM as good practice, although the request for a Community Involvement Strategy as part of the Audit Commission's document list would indicate that a strategy is now desirable.



- 5 Community Involvement Strategies outline the commitment of the Housing Services Department in engaging with all customers together with identifying the Corporate responsibilities for consultation and participation.
- 6 The advantages to developing a Community Involvement Strategy and related targets are as follows:-
  - Community Involvement Strategies outline the organisations commitment to our customers in terms of consultation and participation;
  - Community Involvement Strategies recognise that involving customers is fundamental to delivering effective good quality housing;
  - Community Involvement Strategies recognise that customers should be able to have their say on issues which affect their homes and environment;
  - Community Involvement Strategies concentrate on developing and improving good practice;
  - Community Involvement Strategies are designed to be flexible and to provide appropriate levels of engagement that suit a wide range of customers;
  - Community Involvement Strategies aim to take general principles and turn them into action for involvement.

### **format of community involvement strategies**

As Community Involvement Strategies support an already established Customers Compact they are relatively short in structure but always contain the following items:

- Commitment Statement (from Councillor)
  - Introduction
  - Vision
  - Aims and Objectives
  - The ways in which customers can choose to be involved
  - How will we meet our aims and objectives?
  - Who will be responsible
  - Action Plan and Targets

### **proposal**

To develop a Community Involvement Strategy and targets for the Housing Services Department. Some aspects of a Community Involvement Strategy have already been drafted and are contained in Annex 3. The development of a Community Involvement Strategy is therefore, currently, work in progress.

### **financial implications**

The production of a Community Involvement Strategy is financially achievable due to the resources available within the Community Involvement Budget for the financial year 2005/2006. The costs incurred within this process would be for the design and print of the strategy.

### **human resource implications**

- 7 The development of the Community Involvement Strategy would have implications for certain staff within the department as those staff responsible would need to write the strategy, obtain quotes for design and print and ensure consultation was undertaken with staff and customers.

### **legal implications**

- 8 After consultation with the Legal Department there will be no legal implications with regard to the development of a Community Involvement Strategy for the Housing Services Department.

### **equalities implications**

- 9 The Community Involvement Strategy would aim to ensure the Housing Services Department was fulfilling its responsibility to promote equality throughout the service by ensuring all customers have equal access to services and methods of participation. The document once produced will also be available in the seven recognised languages in the District, as well as on audiotape, in large print or Braille as set out in the Housing Services Departments Equalities Statement.

### **timescale**

- 10 As work has already commenced on the Community Involvement Strategy it is envisaged that the development of a Strategy will take place over the coming months with a full draft of the strategy available in Autumn 2005. A consultation period will then begin with staff and customers and further amendments made to the strategy in response to the above. It is hoped the final Community Involvement Strategy will be available in early 2006.

## RECOMMENDED

- 1 That Committee notes the report on the Community Involvement Strategy
- 2 That once completed, the Community Involvement Strategy be presented to a future meeting of the Housing Services Committee.

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<b>Officer responsible for the report</b>	<b>Author of the report</b>
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Michael Laing Director of Housing Services Ext 281	Corinne Gardner Community Involvement Manager Ext 299
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## **SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 July 2005**

Report of the Director of Housing Services

### **A REVISED TRAINING PLAN FOR THE HOUSING SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

#### **purpose of the report**

To inform Committee of a revised training plan for the next six months.

#### **background**

- 1 Training must remain a priority in the department to ensure that staff and management are adequately prepared to provide the best possible service to all our customers.
- 2 Previous inspection reports have highlighted weakness in the middle management capability of the department. It is seen as a matter of some urgency that this be addressed.
- 3 There is a need to maintain our focus on customer care and diversity issues for all staff in the department.

#### **strengthening management**

- 4 The revised training plan places greater emphasis on developing management skills amongst senior and middle managers. Courses have been arranged to cover a number of skills, which have been neglected in the past, but are now seen as essential to the successful development of the department. A number of these such as learning processes and styles, motivation, leadership, and performance management fit in with the Performance Breakthrough model which has been discussed previously by the Housing Services Committee. Others, such as the best value update, procurement, managing budgets and value for money courses will concentrate on the governments efficiency agenda, and the requirement on local authorities to provide efficient, effective services.
- 5 Whilst many of the courses will be of most useful to managers, others will be of more general interest and will be available to a wider range of officers. Customer care and equalities and diversity training will maintain a high profile within the training plan. These will be made available to all new staff in the department, and refresher courses offered where appropriate. The training plan is shown at Annex 4. These courses are currently ongoing and will be run weekly.

### **apprenticeships and college courses**

- 6 We are maintaining our commitment to the appointment of apprentices within the property services workforce. At present we are in the process of appointing 2 plumber/gasfitters, 2 bricklayers, 1 electrician and 1 motor mechanic. Their development will involve one day release at Bishop Auckland college.
- 7 Staff within the department have also been identified who will complete academic courses on a day release basis. These are NVQ Level 3 in Business Administration, HNC in Housing management and HNC in construction/Building studies. These courses ensure that staff are developed beyond their day to day activities

### **future plans**

- 8 Members will be aware of the new Performance Management Framework reported to the last meeting of this committee. Training and development of all members of the department is essential to the success of the framework and the service we offer to our customers.
- 9 The process of service improvement can be mapped as a series of stages through which runs a 'golden thread'. As long as this thread is in place and unbroken, success will be achieved. The process begins with the development of a departmental vision which reflects the corporate objectives. From this we can develop departmental and section plans that will help us to achieve the vision. At this point we must assess how our staff and workforce fit into the picture.

### **personal development plans**

- 10 We are currently reviewing the personal development plans (PDPs) of all the staff and workforce in the department. This process is being done on the basis of the 'golden thread'. That is to say, staff are being made aware of the vision and service plans. At this point it is possible to discuss where they fit into the process and how their efforts can be best directed to help us achieve our overall objectives. SMART targets will be developed for individuals within their service area. Performance will be monitored on a regular basis and discussed with staff members. Once this has been done, any training or development gaps can be identified, and a subsequent Training Plan developed.

### **it implications**

- 11 There are no IT implications.

### **legal implications**

- 12 There are no legal implications

### **financial implications**

- 13 Much of the training will be carried out in-house. Any residual expenditure will be covered by existing budget provision.

### **conclusion**

- 14 The immediate training priority in the department is to develop the middle-management capacity. This was a weakness identified in previous inspections and must be addressed. This will produce a more rounded, better equipped group of managers who will help to drive performance improvement. At the same time we recognise the need to introduce 'new blood' into the service through the apprenticeship scheme.
- 15 We are reviewing the PDP process to help us to attain the vision that we have set.

### **RECOMMENDED**

- 1 Committee endorse the schedule of training as outlined in the report.

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**Officer responsible for the report**

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**Author of the report**

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Performance and Training Manager  
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## **SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 July 2005**

Report of the Director of Housing Services

### **HOUSING SERVICES DEPARTMENT – VALUE FOR MONEY STRATEGY**

#### **purpose of the report**

To outline to the Committee the plans to develop a 'Value for Money' strategy for the Housing Department.

#### **background**

- 1 Committee may be aware of the change in Housing Inspectors focus towards the value for money agenda. The Key Lines of Enquiry include three 'cross-cutting' areas, one of which is KLOE 32, value for money. In addition the drive for ensuring efficiency in all services is highlighted in the report 'Efficiency in Local Services' produced by Sir Peter Gershon that links directly to the Government's annual spending review.
- 2 The Housing Department has begun the process of identifying areas where efficiency gains can be made.

#### **progress**

- 3 To date a minor review of goods and services bought in by the Property Services section of the department has identified a potential saving of some £80,000. This can be achieved by introducing modern procurement processes into these areas of service delivery.
- 4 The department has, previously, introduced measures that improve efficiency and value for money, for example
  - Multi-skilling of operatives whereby an operative only visits a property once to undertake certain repairs that previously would have had multiple operative visits;
  - Geographical working, which reduces the amount of travelling within the district;
  - Improved void turnaround increasing rental income and reducing security costs;

- Introduction of framework and partnering contracts to deliver capital projects, reducing tendering costs and obtain value through long term relationships.

## **proposals**

- 5 It will be recognised by Committee that these measures have been introduced on an ad-hoc basis, and whilst generating efficiency gains, they have not been considered in a structured manner.
- 6 It is proposed that the department produces a 'Value for Money Strategy' that will provide the structure and processes involved in delivering efficiency gains. The strategy will establish guidelines Officers should consider when making changes to their service areas or delivery of services.
- 7 The strategy will be drafted with assistance from colleagues in the Central Resources Department to ensure compatibility with the authority's requirement to produce an Annual Efficiency Statement. Committee will be aware of the need for all authorities to produce the annual statement illustrating efficiency gains proposed during the forthcoming year.

## **consultation**

- 8 Value for money and efficiency are about 'getting more for your money'. Obviously service users will expect this authority to ensure this is achieved. Accordingly it is important that any strategy is made available to customers, via the Customer Panel, for full engagement and consultation.

## **human resource implications**

- 9 Work has already commenced on a review of sections within the department on Value for Money. However it is proposed that a departmental team are responsible for drafting the 'Value for Money Strategy'. The team will be supported by colleagues in the Central Resources Department for financial and legal advice.

## **financial implications**

- 10 As previously stated, there is the opportunity to review our service to get 'more for money'. At present it is impossible to estimate savings or efficiency gains. However a 3% saving on the influencable spend in the housing revenue account budget for this current year would equate to £150,000.
- 11 It is proposed that any 'cashable' gains encountered by introducing value for money and efficiency aspects into service review be retained within the housing revenue account for re-investment in the service. This will obviously have a direct positive benefit to our customers.



## **it/legal/crime and disorder implications**

- 12 These factors should not be affected by this report.

## **timescale**

- 13 It is considered reasonable that a draft value for money strategy be available for Committee's discussion during October 2005. This allows for the comments of the Housing Inspectors to be included if necessary.

## **conclusion**

- 14 It is recognised as good practice to ensure strategies are available to deliver on the Government's efficiency agenda. Within Wear Valley we have highlighted the ad-hoc nature of considering efficiency savings and it is proposed that a value for money strategy be produced that will provide the framework for future efficiency considerations.

## **RECOMMENDED**

- 1 Committee recognises the need for a formal 'Value for Money Strategy' and approves of proposals and timescales.
- 2 Committee receives further reports on the 'Value for Money Strategy' at relevant stages.

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**Officer responsible for the report**

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**Author of the report**

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**SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 July 2005**

Report of the Director of Housing Services

**HOUSING SERVICES DEPARTMENT – PROCUREMENT STRATEGY**

**purpose of the report**

To seek Committee's approval of the proposed procurement strategy for the Housing Services department.

**background**

- 1 As members will be aware, the Government and Housing Inspectorate have highlighted the need for organisations to ensure they obtain good value for money and that services are provided efficiently. This can be illustrated in the Byatt review, the Rethinking Construction agenda and more recently the Gershon review and the Key Lines of Enquiry.
- 2 It has been acknowledged that the one of the key vehicles to deliver the value for money agenda is via improved procurement.
- 3 The recent review of services using the KLOEs has highlighted a number of gaps within the procurement activity of the Housing Services Department. One of these gaps is a lack of a procurement strategy.

**proposals**

- 4 It is proposed that the procurement strategy attached in Annex 5 is adopted by the Housing Services department. This strategy will provide the main focus for further development of the department's procurement activity.
- 5 It should be noted that the Housing Services Procurement Strategy will be subsequently amended to tie-in with the corporate procurement strategy once it is developed.

**financial implications**

- 6 This report will not have any direct financial implications, however, indirectly, improved procurement will enable efficiency gains to be realised.

## RECOMMENDED

- 1 Committee approves the Procurement Strategy for the Housing Services department.

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**Officer responsible for the report**

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**SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 July 2005**

Report of the Director of Housing Services

**RE-INSPECTION REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS - UPDATE**

**purpose**

To ask Committee to consider progress on the time bound recommendations of the re-inspection of the Housing Services Department.

**background**

- 1 Following re-inspection of the service in 2003, a number of recommendations were identified by the Housing Inspectorate. Most had specific time related targets attached for implementation.
- 2 As part of this Council's response to inspection, an update on progress was requested by the Inspectors in September 2004. This was despatched and, as yet, no comment has been received from the Inspectorate.
- 3 Members will be aware of the scoring system of the inspectors; awarding a 'star' rating and also identifying the 'prospects for improvement'. Using the Key Lines of Enquiry, the department has made an assessment of the Prospects for Improvement (KLOE 1) and considered progress against previous best value inspection recommendations. Not addressing Inspectors' recommendations was one of the key areas of failure of East Durham Homes in their recent ALMO inspection.

**assessment**

- 4 Of 27 recommendations in the re-inspection report, our 'self-assessment' submitted in September 2004 illustrated :-
  - Full compliance and no further work on 8 of the recommendations;
  - Compliance with recommendation, but further work required on 8;
  - 11 where the recommendations have only been 'partly' complied with and require further work; and
  - progress reports to be submitted in September 2004 on 3 of these 'further work' areas.

- 5 This means that of 27 recommendations, we were satisfied that we had fully complied with 8.

### **progress**

- 6 All managers within the Housing Services Department have revisited the report submitted in September 2004 and have updated the report and also identified any future works required.
- 7 Attached in Annex 6 is the updated progress against the 2003 inspection report recommendations. In addition the report also highlights any outstanding work required to fully comply with the recommendations.
- 8 An updated assessment showed that at July 2005:-
- 16 of the 27 recommendations have been complied with, although we will continue to undergo regular reviews to ensure continuous improvement;
  - 6 have been partly complied with, with some actions still to achieve;
  - 5 have been complied with. However we are proposing to implement further changes to the service delivery.

### **RECOMMENDED**

- 1 Committee notes the progress against the 2003 Inspectors' recommendations.
- 2 That further progress reports on the Inspectors' recommendation be considered by Committee.

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**SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 July 2005**

Report of Director of Housing Services  
**HATE CRIME POLICY AND PROCEDURE GUIDE (DRAFT)**

**purpose of the report**

To advise Committee of the Draft Hate Crime Policy and Procedure Guide, which can be found at Annex 7.

**background**

- 1 In 2002 Committee agreed to adopt a Tenancy Enforcement Policy and Procedure Guide which outlined the Department's response to complaints of neighbour nuisance and anti-social behaviour caused by tenants. In 2003 this was augmented by a Racial Harassment Policy and Procedure Guide which specifically addressed issues of racial harassment as defined in Section 12 of the Stephen Lawrence Report.
- 2 In consulting with customers and partner agencies has become clear that the current policies did not fully address the range and diversity of customers contained within the District.

**proposals**

- 3 It is proposed that Committee adopt a Hate Crime Policy and Procedure Guide that will inform the Department's actions in regard to threats or harassment directed at individuals because of their race, religion, gender, sexuality, disability or other identifying factor.
- 4 The Hate Crime Policy and Procedure will address problems of harassment directed at tenants and customers by other tenants, incidents of harassment directed at staff by customers and also incidents in which no connection to the Authority can be found but which staff can then refer to partner agencies for appropriate action.

- 5 It is essential that the Hate Crime Policy and Procedure Guide receives wide and full consultation with partner agencies, the voluntary sector, local forums, customers and national peer-review organisations. It is intended that the Hate Crime Policy & Procedure Guide be circulated to the following bodies for consultation;
- Customer Panel
  - RaceActionNet website
  - Wear & Tees Hate Crime Forum
  - Durham & Darlington Race Equality Council
- 6 Hate Crime is an under-reported phenomena for reasons outlined in the policy document. Wear Valley District Council Housing Services Department has no way to gauge the real level of these incidents. To encourage victims to report incidents and seek the help of the department it is proposed that an awareness raising campaign involving the Street Wardens in the distribution of literature and information take place to link in with adoption of the Policy.

### **financial implications**

- 7 The proposed policy would be managed by the Tenancy Enforcement Manager in conjunction with other officers of the Department. The policy would link into existing recording and monitoring systems. There are no resource or financial implications involved in the adoption of this policy.

### **legal implications**

- 8 There is no statutory requirement on the Authority to record and monitor Hate Crimes other than incidents of racial harassment. Information shared with partner agencies regarding victims and perpetrators of hate crimes would be covered by existing information sharing protocols and any enforcement action taken against tenants as a result of complaints investigated under this policy would be dealt with as breaches of the tenancy agreement under appropriate legislation.

### **crime and disorder and other implications**

- 9 The Hate Crime Policy and Procedure Guide will allow for detailed monitoring of incidents of nuisance and harassment aimed at minority groups across the District. It will guide the Department in offering a fair and equitable service to all customer and assist in tackling this hidden phenomena.
- 10 Information gathered will be shared with partner-agencies to assist victims and pursue perpetrators and statistics will be fed into local and regional reporting mechanisms such as the County Durham Observatory to produce a detailed overview of hate crime in County Durham.

- 11 The adoption of the Hate Crime Policy and Procedure Guide will directly link to the Authorities Corporate Objective on Crime to increase community safety and reduce incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour.

### **timescale**

- 12 If the Hate Crime and Policy Procedure Guide is to be a credible document that enjoys the confidence of our partner-agencies and customers it is vital that full and detailed consultation occurs and appropriate revisions made. The consultation process can begin immediately upon Committee's approval however the local CDRP Hate Crime Forum does not meet until 5 October 2005. This group contains local community representatives from many of the groups the policy is designed to protect and its views will be vital to the success of the policy. It is anticipated that a final draft can be submitted for the November Committee.

### **conclusion**

- 13 The outcome would be to streamline the basket of indicators collected into a concise set of performance information relevant to the Tenancy Enforcement Team.

### **RECOMMENDED**

- 1 Committee notes the Hate Crime Policy and Procedure (Draft) and supports the extensive programme of consultation detailed above.

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**Officer responsible for the report**

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**Author of the Report**

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## **SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 July 2005**

### **Report of the Director of Housing Services HOUSING EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY**

#### **purpose of report**

To inform Housing Services Committee of the need for an Equality and Diversity Strategy within the Housing Services Department.

#### **background**

- 1 Socio-economic and demographic trends in the UK show that the population is ageing, becoming more ethnically diverse and more mobile. The growth in asylum seekers and refugees increases the diverse nature and changing needs of the population. Equality and Diversity issues are therefore high on the Government's agenda.
- 2 All local authorities have a statutory duty to promote race equality as required by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2000), the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), the Lawrence Enquiry and Macpherson Report and the European Directives which forbid discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, disability, age, sexual orientation and ethnic origin. Social housing providers also have a duty to comply with the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice. The main requirement within the Code of Practice is to continually monitor service provision to ensure all our customers are treated equally.
- 3 Although the Housing Services Department have an on-going Race Equality Action Plan designed to comply with the Code of Practice as well as a Housing Services Department Equality Statement, both agreed by Housing Services Committee in 2003, increasing emphasis has been placed on the need for housing providers to embed equality and diversity issues within the organisation through developed and monitored Equality and Diversity Strategies.

#### **the need for a housing equality and diversity strategy**

- 4 The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister have paved the way forward in emphasising the need for housing providers to develop Equality and Diversity Strategies through the development of their own strategies and based on their recommendations. The need for a Housing Equality and Diversity Strategy is also supported by the recent Audit Commission's

Document list for the Housing Services Department's forthcoming indicative inspection which requested a copy of the 'BME Strategy', this cannot be provided at the present time.

5 The advantages of developing a Housing Equality and Diversity Strategy based on Good Practice examples and recommendations from the ODPM, NHF and CIH are listed below:-

- Equality and Diversity Strategies deal with the issue of exclusion of potential customers, not just existing customers;
- Equality and Diversity Strategies are a part of learning organisations who challenge attitudes towards equality and diversity issues;
- Equality and Diversity Strategies support the organisation's commitment to equality and diversity by providing a framework for continuous improvement;
- Equality and Diversity Strategies are tied to organisational culture;
- Equality and Diversity Strategies ensure equality and diversity issues are developed within a managed framework;
- Equality and Diversity Strategies present the opportunity to celebrate differences and provide services that are responsive to the differing needs of customers;
- Equality and Diversity Strategies aim to ensure that, as a provider of services, the housing sector cater for the diverse needs of customers and that all customers are able to access the services offered.

#### **general format of equality and diversity strategies**

6 Generally, equality and diversity strategies follow the same format which includes:

- Foreword/Opening Statement
- Introduction/Context of Strategy
- Strategic Framework of organisation/department
- Consultation
- Implementation of strategy (including Action Plan)
- Best Practice Principles
- Monitoring and Review

The sections outlined above are by no means conclusive as equality and diversity strategies vary between housing providers.

## **proposal**

- 7 To develop a Housing Equality and Diversity Strategy for the Housing Services Department.

## **financial implications**

- 8 The production of a Housing Equality and Diversity Strategy is financially achievable due to the resources available within the Equalities Budget for the financial year 2005/2006. The costs incurred within this process would be for the design and print of the strategy.

## **human resource implications**

- 9 The development of the Housing Equality and Diversity Strategy would have implications for certain staff within the department as those staff responsible would need to write the strategy, obtain quotes for design and print and ensure consultation was undertaken with staff and customers.

## **legal implications**

- 10 The production of a Housing Equality and Diversity Strategy will demonstrate the Council's commitment to its statutory powers and duties in the promotion of equality and diversity.

## **equalities implications**

- 11 The Housing Equality and Diversity Strategy would aim to ensure the Housing Services Department was fulfilling its responsibility to promote equality throughout the service, also ensuring all customers have equal access to the services the department offer and providing a framework for continuous improvement. The document once produced will also be available in the seven recognised languages in the District, as well as on audiotape, in large print or Braille as set out in the Housing Services Departments Equalities Statement.

## **timescale**

- 12 It is envisaged that research into the development of a Housing Equality and Diversity Strategy will take place over the coming months with a draft of the strategy available in Autumn 2005. A consultation period will then begin with staff and customers and further amendments made to the strategy in response to the above. It is hoped the final Housing Equality and Diversity Strategy will be available in early 2006.

## RECOMMENDED

- 1 Committee notes the report on the Housing Equality and Diversity Strategy
- 2 Committee approves the development of a Housing Equality and Diversity Strategy

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**Officer responsible for the report**

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**SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 July 2005**

Report of Director of Housing Services

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY AND PROCEDURE GUIDE (DRAFT)**

**purpose of the report**

To consider the Domestic Violence Policy & Procedure Guide (Draft), which can be found at Annex 8.

**background**

- 1 In consulting with customers and partner agencies it has become clear that the current policies did not fully address the issue of domestic violence within the District.
- 2 Research suggests that 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence at some point in their lives - that's about 8,000 women in Wear Valley.
- 3 Domestic Violence is not limited to any particular class, ethnic or social group. It affects women of all ages and social groups.
- 4 Domestic Violence not only causes damage to its immediate victims, but also affects children, families and communities.
- 5 The British Crime Survey 2000 highlighted that, nationally:-
  - Of all crimes reported more than one in 20 were classified as domestic violence;
  - Domestic Violence accounts for almost a quarter (23%) of all violent crime;
  - No other crime has such a high rate of repeat offences on the same victim;
  - The Police receive an average of 1,300 calls every day about Domestic Violence;
  - In 1999, 37% of women murder victims were killed by their present or former partners, (compared to 6% of men) – more than 2 a week.

- 6 A Domestic Violence incident takes place every 6 seconds in this country.

### **proposals**

- 7 It is proposed that Committee adopt a Domestic Violence Policy & Procedure Guide that will inform the Department's actions in regard to threats or harassment directed at individuals by partners, ex-partners or other close family members.
- 8 It is essential that the Domestic Violence Policy & Procedure Guide receives wide and full consultation with partner agencies, the voluntary sector, local forums, customers and national peer-review organisations. It is intended that the Domestic Violence Policy & Procedure Guide be circulated to the following bodies for consultation;
- Customer Panel
  - RaceActionNet website
  - Wear & Tees Hate Crime Forum
  - Local voluntary and statutory groups and agencies
- 9 Domestic Violence is an under-reported phenomena for reasons outlined in the policy document. Wear Valley District Council Housing Services Department has no way to gauge the real level of these incidents. To encourage victims to report incidents and seek the help of the Department it is proposed that an awareness raising campaign take place to link in with adoption of the policy

### **financial implications**

- 10 The proposed Policy would be managed by the Tenancy Enforcement Manager in conjunction with other officers of the Department. The Policy would link into existing recording and monitoring systems. There are no resource or financial implications involved in the adoption of this policy.

### **legal implications**

- 11 Information shared with partner agencies regarding victims and perpetrators of domestic violence would be covered by existing information sharing protocols and any enforcement action taken against tenants as a result of complaints investigated under this policy would be dealt with as breaches of the tenancy agreement under appropriate legislation.

### **crime and disorder and other implications**

- 12 The Domestic Violence Policy & Procedure Guide will allow for detailed monitoring of incidents of domestic violence. It will guide the department in offering a fair and equitable service to all customer and assist in tackling this hidden phenomena.

- 13 Information gathered will be shared with partner-agencies to assist victims and pursue perpetrators and statistics will be fed into local and regional reporting mechanisms such as the County Durham Observatory to produce a detailed overview of domestic violence in County Durham
- 14 The adoption of the Domestic Violence Policy & Procedure Guide will directly link to the Authorities Corporate Objective on Crime to increase community safety and reduce incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour.

#### **timescale**

- 15 If the Domestic Violence Policy & Procedure Guide is to be a credible document that enjoys the confidence of our partner-agencies and customers it is vital that full and detailed consultation occurs and appropriate revisions made. The consultation process can begin immediately upon Committee's approval however the local CDRP Hate Crime Forum does not meet until 5 October 2005. This group is made up of local community representatives from many of the groups the Domestic Violence policy is designed to protect and its views will be vital to the success of the policy. It is anticipated that a final draft can be submitted for the November Committee.

#### **RECOMMENDED**

- 1 Committee notes the Domestic Violence Policy and Procedure (Draft) and supports the extensive programme of consultation detailed above.

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<b>Officer responsible for the report</b>	<b>Author of the Report</b>
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**SPECIAL HOUSING SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**28 July 2005**

Report of the Director of Housing Services

**PROPOSED ALMO NAME**

**purpose of the report**

To inform Committee of the proposed name for the new Arms Length Management Organisation, as suggested by customers and staff at a series of focus groups in July 2005.

**background**

- 1 In January 2005 the council applied for a place on round 5 of the Government's Arms Length Management Organisation programme.
- 2 In June 2005 the Council was notified that ministers have supported the Council's application for a place on the programme. Officers must now meet with representatives of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to finalise a funding allocation to enable the Council to improve homes to meet the Decent Homes Standard in 2010.
- 3 In the meantime the Council will proceed with the proposed project plan which includes extended consultation with customers and staff, the development of a management agreement and an application to the Secretary of State for permission to delegate the housing management function the ALMO.
- 4 The ALMO must operate at arms length from the Council and will have the freedom and flexibility to make its own management decisions. The ALMO must also be distinguishable from the Council and it must have its own name, which will be registered with Companies House, and its own logo. Therefore the council must identify a suitable name and logo for the ALMO.
- 5 From February 2005 the Council offered the opportunity to customers and staff to put forward their suggestions for a name for the ALMO.



6 The most common potential names for the ALMO were identified as being:-

- Wear Valley Homes
- Town and Country Homes/Housing Company
- Castle and Country Homes
- South West Durham Homes/Housing Company
- Durham Dales Homes/Housing Company

7 These names were then supplied to the Council's Marketing and Communications Department, who were asked to design a selection of logos and to lead on a marketing focus group for customers and a separate marketing focus group for staff to determine a preferred name and logo.

### **customer focus group**

8 In June 2005, a letter was sent to over 200 tenants who have registered on our community involvement database as being interested in attending focus groups, inviting them to attend a focus group on the ALMO name on the 7 July 2005.

9 Six residents expressed an interest in attending the focus group, but only two customers one from Crook and one customer from Bishop Auckland, attended the focus group on the day.

10 The focus group was facilitated by the Marketing and Communications Manager and a Policy Officer in the Council's Management Support Unit.

11 Variations of the proposed names and visuals for logos and branding were presented and discussed with the customers present.

12 Customers strongly felt that the name "home" should be included within the ALMO name to establish that it is a housing organisation and to avoid any possible confusion. The word "home" was also considered to be more comforting and welcoming than the words "housing" or "houses".

13 Customers felt that the name "Town and Country" could be mistakenly identified as a pub, a golf club or a leisure club.

14 Customers felt strongly that "Weardale" or the word "dales" should be included in the chosen ALMO name to address the issue and concern of exclusion of rural areas of the district.

15 A sample of visual logos was presented to participants. Both participants were partially sighted and selected the same unique design because of its strong visual appearance and colour contrasts. A copy is attached at Annex 9.

16 After agreeing a corporate logo participants discussed the most appropriate name. The name "Dale and Valley Homes" was proposed by participants and

this name proved to be very popular as they stated that it successfully unites both Weardale and Wear Valley.

- 17 The customer focus group was a success, but the Council should consider further consultation on the proposed ALMO name as the number of participants for the focus group was very small.

### **staff focus group**

- 18 On 19 July 2005 a marketing focus group was held for staff to discuss the proposed ALMO names and logos.
- 19 The focus group was attended by 9 members of the Council's Communications Forum, which includes membership from each directorate across the Council. The focus group was facilitated by the Marketing and Communications Manager and the Service Development Manager.
- 20 Staff felt strongly that the name "Wear Valley Homes" was too closely affiliated with the Council and that the new name should demonstrate the ALMO's independence from the Council.
- 21 Staff also felt that the word "homes" should be included somewhere in the name as it represents "comfort" and "warmth".
- 22 Staff felt that the name "Town and Country" could be mistaken for an agricultural magazine, or for a leisure club.
- 23 Staff felt that the name should reflect the diversity of the area and should make a reference to Weardale. A member of staff subsequently suggested the name "Dale Valley Homes" to incorporate both Weardale and Wear Valley into the ALMO name.
- 24 A sample of visual logos was presented to participants. Staff elected the same logo as the customer focus group because of its strong visual impact. A copy is attached at Annex 9.
- 25 The staff focus group was a success but consultation is needed with the extended staff of the Council and the workforce to agree a final proposal for the ALMO name.

### **human resource implications**

- 26 The Management Support Unit will lead on the full development of the proposed name and logo.

## it implications

- 27 Once a decision is taken on the proposed ALMO name, the logo will be properly developed and will be submitted with the name to Companies House when the ALMO is registered as a company.

## RECOMMENDED

- 1 Committee recognises the proposed name and logo for the ALMO.
- 2 Committee instructs the Director of Housing Services to undertake more consultation on the proposed name and logo with customers and staff.

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