

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder

16 November 2011

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AFFORDABLE HOMES DRAFT SERVICE PLAN 2012/13

Purpose

1. To provide the Housing Portfolio Holder with an update on the revised Affordable Homes Service Plan for 2012/13
2. This is not a key decision

Recommendations

3. That the Housing Portfolio Holder endorses the service plan actions identified in this report and suggests additions to or amendments to these service plan actions if required.

Background

4. The existing Affordable Homes Service Plan covers the period 2011/12 - 2013/14 and includes a number of service plan projects intended to run over a 2 or 3 year timeframe. This is therefore a refresh of the service plan designed mainly to introduce new service plan actions to address external challenges.
5. The Affordable Homes service plan has differed to other service plans within the Council as it has included the HRA Business Plan. The introduction of the self financing regime for council housing from April 2012 means that a separate 30 year HRA Business Plan is now required for 2012/13 onwards.
6. The HRA Business Plan in its new format is being taken to Cabinet this year as it needs to be considered alongside the new corporate Treasury Management Strategy and will go on to full Council to authorise the borrowing of over £200M to commence the self financing arrangements. In future years the Business Plan will be taken to the Housing Portfolio Holder meeting.
7. There is a linked Asset Management Strategy that sets out the Council's approach to managing its homes and other properties, which also covers a 30 year period. Arising from the Asset Management Strategy, the Five Year Housing Maintenance Plan sets out the planned expenditure to maintain the Council's homes and will form part of the HRA Business Plan presented to Cabinet in February 2012.
8. The service plan is set in the context of an overarching Housing Strategy, which in turn is related to the sub regional housing strategy, which reflects the sub regional strategic housing agenda of the sub regional housing market centred on Cambridge.

Considerations

9. The service plan takes account of a number of significant changes arising from the national policy changes. These include:
- Proposed changes to Housing Benefit and welfare benefits
 - The introduction of the Affordable Rent tenure
 - Proposed changes to allocations guidance
10. In addition the service plan addresses the key actions of the Council which include:
- Improved resident participation
 - Implementation of changes needed to maintain a quality sheltered housing service
 - Continued implementation of the Warm Homes Strategy
 - Monitoring of the new shared service Home Improvement Agency

Options

11. The Portfolio Holder is requested to consider these proposed actions and to suggest changes or additions where required.

Table 1

Service Plan Action	Objective	Lead Officer	Timescale
Warm Homes	<p>The Housing Portfolio Holder has already agreed a Warm Homes Strategy. This project will take forward this strategy into a second year focussing on poorly insulated properties and the needs of those tenants not on the gas grid.</p> <p>This project will also be the Council's link into the EU funded project on improving the infrastructure for green energy supply, if this project goes ahead.</p>	Anita Goddard	Activities will run throughout the year. There will be a review in November 2012 to ensure that the targets for the following year are set in a timely way.
Resident involvement development	The Council has a Resident Involvement Strategy, which is still being followed. The key objectives for the year are to establish the newly elected TPG, to put in place arrangements for	Gill Anderton	The activities planned will run throughout the year.

	tenant led scrutiny activity and to establish the framework for tenants led complaints procedure. A project will also be undertaken to consider the options for involving tenants in a wider review of governance for Affordable Homes.		
Sheltered housing	There are three main strands to this project. 1. Implement the changes to staffing structures that will have been agreed by the Housing Portfolio Holder as informed by the Task & Finish Group. 2. Prepare for the Supporting People procurement exercise. 3. Contribute to the Ageing Well Project, in particular the appraisal of the neighbourhood warden concept.	Tracey Cassidy	The staff restructuring changes will be operational from April 2012. The procurement exercise is likely to run between July 2012 and March 2013. The ageing well project is likely to be completed by December 2012.
Home Improvement Agency	The Council has agreed to the setting up of a shared service for the Home Improvement Agency. Work is underway during 2011 and the new service will go live in April 2012. This project is designed to ensure the first year of operation is closely monitored and that opportunities are sought for further operational improvement and the scope for improved Occupational Therapist access is assessed.	Stephen Hills	Project will run throughout the year and will be reported on in March 2013.
Robson Court	The Housing Portfolio Holder and cabinet has already agreed to the transfer of the existing	Sue Carter Schuyler Newstead	Project will run throughout the year with an expected completion in late 2013.

	<p>hostel to a housing association for redevelopment. The transfer will be completed by March 2012 and this project will ensure the needs of the Council are met by the redevelopment programme that will follow.</p>		
Robinsons Court	<p>The redevelopment of an obsolete block of flats following Council approval for demolition given during 2011.</p>	Schuyler Newstead	<p>The project is likely to complete in mid 2014.</p>
Your Service: establish neighbourhood teams	<p>Part of the Your Service project. Project includes bringing together of existing staff within three sub district areas. This will be communicated to the tenants and leaseholders in that area to help establish a more personal connection between the housing service and the residents of the various villages. This will include improvements to the Affordable Homes web pages. A hub office will be identified for each sub area and officers will be encouraged to work out of these sub offices on a regular basis to help build the feel of one team in the district.</p>	Anita Goddard	<p>The new team structure will be brought together by June 2012. A communication strategy will be put in place to ensure that tenants are aware of the changes and the benefits. This will run throughout the year. The establishment of hub offices is likely to be a low cost addition to some of the existing office facilities at the sheltered housing schemes and will be programmed to be completed before March 2013.</p>
Homelink: Private rented sector landlord accreditation scheme	<p>This is part of the countywide improvement to the operation of the Homelink system and will enable all the sub regional partners to improve the access of their customers to the</p>	Andy Glaves	<p>The project will run throughout the year and will be reviewed in March 2013.</p>

	private rented sector.		
Welfare reform	There are significant changes in the pipeline proposed for a range of welfare benefits. Many of these changes have direct and significant impacts for our customers and our services particularly in housing and housing benefits. This project will be a corporate project to track the progress of the welfare changes and to ensure that the Council is well prepared to respond effectively to the issues that will arise.	Stephen Hills	The project will run throughout the year and will be reviewed in March 2013.
Allocations	The Government is due to issue a new set of guidance to coincide with the Localism Bill becoming law. This project will ensure that the Council continues to track the proposed changes, respond in a timely way to any consultations and is able to implement the changes needed to meet the new guidance.	Sue Carter	It is anticipated that the new guidance will be required to be effective from June 2012.

Implications

12. Financial	There are financial dimensions to all of these projects but there is no significant new funding required. The proposed changes to welfare benefits have potentially significant implications for the income stream for both the HRA (rents) and the Council (Council Tax).
Legal	Some of the proposed legislative changes have legal implications e.g. changes to tenure.
Staffing	Where staffing changes are required these will be identified in the Affordable Homes Staffing restructure report due to come to the Housing Portfolio Holder in January 2012.

Risk Management	A number of risk logs will be developed for each project and the overall Affordable Homes risk register amended.
Equality and Diversity	Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out on each policy change as it is developed.
Equality Impact Assessment completed	No
	NA
Climate Change	The Warm Homes Strategy has direct implications for the Climate Change agenda.

Consultations

13. The draft service plan has been produced with the help of the Tenant Participation Group.

Consultations with Children & Young People

14. None

Effect on Strategic Aims

15. The affordable housing programme is one of the key roles of the Council in providing first class services accessible to all: building new homes is essential to ensure those in housing need have safe and healthy accommodation; new homes in the district aid the sense of place, helps to provide local jobs, and helps to ensure that the village remains sustainable.

Conclusions / Summary

16. This report sets out in summary form the key drivers that need to be addressed by the 2012/13 service plan. Table One contains a draft service plan actions list that will be incorporated within the final form of the service plan.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

None

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