

**REPORT TO:** Housing Portfolio Holder  
**LEAD OFFICER:** Stephen Hills

18 March 2015

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## Housing Advice and Options Service Review

### Purpose

1. To advise the Housing Portfolio Holder of the outcome of the self-assessment and the actions to take forward to improve the service further.
2. This is not a key decision because it is for information only.

### Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Housing Portfolio Holder note the results of the self-assessment and actions identified to improve the service.

### Background

4. The government has given all local authorities the option to apply for 'Gold Standard' status to reflect the housing advice, options service and homelessness assistance they provide to local residents.
5. As part of this process, local authorities have to go through a peer review assessment. As a first step to this the Housing Advice and Options Team have undertaken a self-assessment of the criteria used for the peer review as a focus for determining what improvements the service can make.

### Considerations

6. The outcome of the self-assessment was quite favourable with most of the requirements already being achieved (see **Appendix 1**). A number of the activities are also already in place, but need to be highlighted more through the Homeless strategy.
7. The self-assessment peer review is separated into seven sub section:  
**Homeless Strategy** – the current homeless strategy covers the period 2013-18, however, we had previously established that this would benefit from annual reviews. This is also a requirement of the peer review criteria. The initial annual review (currently underway) will enable us to include further details in the strategy that the criteria requires, most of which is already undertaken, but not specifically specified in the existing strategy.  
**Website review** – This is an area that needs complete re-working for the housing advice and homeless service, as pages are currently blank. However the Home-Link website provides lots of information on housing options and links to other services.  
**Reception and interview facilities** – some of the gaps identified here will require corporate decisions.

**Customer interviews/Home visits** – this largely involves reviewing the paperwork we use and providing all clients with written follow up advice.

**Housing Options file review** – ensure all staff use checklists for investigation and assessment, and ensuring full details are always recorded. In the majority of cases these actions are already in place.

**Homeless assessment file review** - ensure all staff use checklists for investigation and assessment and ensuring full details are always recorded. In the majority of cases these actions are already in place.

**Overall quality of Housing Options** – regular quality checks on files, and greater awareness of on-going advice on housing options to those accepted as homeless.

### **Options**

8. The majority of actions identified are already in place or they can be achieved within existing resources.

### **Implications**

9. There are no significant implications.

### **Effect on Strategic Aims**

#### **Aim 12 -**

10. Increase the range and supply of temporary accommodation to help minimise the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless households.

### **Background Papers**

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Homelessness Strategy 2013-18

**Report Author:** Sue Carter/ Heather Wood – Head of Housing Advice and Options  
Telephone: (01954) 713044

## APPENDIX 1

### Housing Advice and Options Service review

#### Self-assessment – gap analysis

##### *Homeless Strategy*

Homeless strategy	Action already underway or can achieve within existing resources	Further consideration required
Annual review and include: Demonstrate cost effectiveness of prevention Local homeless forum (describe alternative) Resolving problems at first point of contact. Partnership working in relation to EET Demonstrate appropriate pathways into accommodation. Actions to prevent homelessness – landlords and lenders Proactively helping people move from temporary accommodation Partners supporting households effected by welfare reform How new initiatives can be funded Involve partners in the review Show how other departments are committed to the homeless strategy Demonstrate one-off payments to prevent homelessness Expand on joint services i.e. THL	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Revised gap analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Include statistical compiler	<input type="checkbox"/>	
TA supply and demand model	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Update action plan with progress	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Strategy updates to PFH	<input type="checkbox"/>	

*Website review*

Website Review	Action already underway or can achieve within existing resources	Further consideration required
Create and add info to Housing Options/ Homeless pages (ensuring pages can be found from A-Z)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Review leaflet info and add to website	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Check policy documents are easily identifiable	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Add links to other services	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Add useful contacts	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Add service standards	<input type="checkbox"/>	

*Reception and interview facilities*

Reception and interview facilities	Action already underway or can achieve within existing resources	Further consideration required
Signs required for out of hours and emergencies		<input type="checkbox"/> - should be achievable
Information easily identifiable at reception i.e. leaflets, display screens and forms	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Phone sockets available in the interview rooms		<input type="checkbox"/>
CCTV so reception can monitor rooms		<input type="checkbox"/>

*Customer interviews and Home Visits*

Customer interviews/ Home Visits	Action already underway or can achieve within existing resources	Further consideration required
Regularly review form	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Consider an interview pattern that enables immediate follow up	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Continuous training on dealing with difficult customers	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Written advice to take away (info packs and follow up letters)	<input type="checkbox"/>	

*File reviews (Combine housing options and homeless assessment files)*

Files review	Action already underway or can achieve within existing resources	Further consideration required
Check lists to ensure through investigation	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Maintain full records including scanned docs, all contacts, progress and TA requirements	<input type="checkbox"/>	

*Overall quality of Housing Options*

Actions not already identified above include:

Quality of Housing Options	Action already underway or can achieve within existing resources	Further consideration required
Quality checks on case files	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Local offer for those not stat homeless	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Record all advice enquiries	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ongoing advice and assistance after homeless application taken and decision letter issued	<input type="checkbox"/>	