

MEETING:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE & STRATEGIC HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE:	13TH DECEMBER 2010
TITLE OF REPORT:	AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION OF STRATEGIC HOUSING SERVICES
REPORT BY:	Assistant Director Homes and Communities
PORTFOLIO AREA:	ENVIRONMENT AND STRATEGIC HOUSING ADULT SOCIAL CARE, HEALTH & WELLBEING

CLASSIFICATION: Open

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To note the outcome of the Audit Commission Inspection of Strategic Housing Services

Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- (a) **Committee considers and notes the Audit Commission Inspection Report on Strategic Housing Services;**
- (b) **Key recommendations emerging from the Inspection are incorporated into relevant Service Business Plan Action Plans**

Key Points Summary

- The Inspection Report assessed that Herefordshire Council's Strategic Housing Service as Fair with Promising Prospects for Improvement
- The Inspection Report has made a series of recommendations designed to assist the Council to address any weaknesses identified in the report.

Alternative Options

- 1 The Council could determine not to implement any of the recommendations set out in the report and since the abolition of the Audit Commission there remains no inspection framework for housing. However, the inspection provides a benchmark for the service from which

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
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improvements can be identified for inclusion in Service Business Plans.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 To enable Committee to identify and consider the identified strengths and weaknesses of Strategic Housing Services and ensure that, where appropriate, the service takes steps to implement the inspection recommendations.

Introduction and Background

- 3 During May 2010 the Audit Commission undertook an inspection of the Council's Strategic Housing Service. The final inspection report, attached at Appendix A, was published in July 2010.
- 4 The inspection was of the first undertaken under a new and challenging set of Housing Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE's).
- 5 On 13 August 2010, Eric Pickles, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (CLG) announced plans to abolish the Audit Commission. The intention is to have new arrangements in place for auditing England's local public bodies by 2012/13.
- 6 The Audit Commission has, therefore, ceased undertaking inspections and the monitoring of post-inspection improvement.

Key Considerations

- 7 The Audit Commission Inspection assessed Herefordshire Council as providing a one-star Strategic Housing Service which is performing adequately and has promising prospects for improvement.
- 8 The Inspection identified a range of strengths including:-
 - ambitions for housing which support the Council's vision for sustainable growth
 - widely understood housing priorities which are championed effectively
 - Evidenced-based investment/priorities
 - Successful strategic approach to reducing homelessness
 - Strategic approach increasing the supply of affordable housing
 - Joint working with partners increasing supply of supported housing and related services
 - Easily accessible advice and information for residents
- 9 Areas of improvement included:-
 - Lack of published vision setting out role of all housing
 - Some areas less effective in terms of engagement with stakeholders and partners
 - Evidence gaps in research base and engagement with some diverse groups
 - More strategic investment/focus on private sector role
 - Need to improve understanding of comparative value for money

The Inspection considered the service had promising prospects for improvement on account of the following:-

- Strong performance against Local Area Agreement Performance indicators and

targets

- Increased supply of affordable and affordable housing
- Reduced number of households in temporary accommodation
- Good performance management
- Improving services through ICT investment
- Procurement activity delivering service improvements and capacity
- Access to a range of skills with positive skills development

In terms of barriers to improvement the following issues were identified:-

- Slow progress on meeting some areas including meeting needs of gypsies and travellers
- Measuring outcomes from key projects
- Maximising capacity of partners to help deliver priorities
- Lack of staff resources in private sector area

- 10 The services included within the scope of the Audit Commission Inspection have commenced work on a number of recommendations identified and it is proposed to incorporate recommended improvements within service business planning processes.

Community Impact

- 11 None

Financial Implications

- 12 The recommendations resulting from the Inspection will be implemented within existing budgets.

Legal Implications

- 13 There are no legal implications resulting from this report.

Risk Management

- 14 There are not considered to be any risks resulting from the inspection report.

Consultees

- 15 Not applicable.

Appendices

- 16 Appendix A – Inspection Report

Background Papers

- None identified.