

3. Key developments since the Housing Strategy 2004-2007

3.1 Housing Stock Options Appraisal 2006

We, together with our tenants and other stakeholders, undertook a Housing Stock Option Appraisal (during 2004/06) to identify and review the options for the future ownership and management of the Council's housing stock.

The final result was a decision to keep the housing within Council ownership at the current time, subject to certain recommendations (listed below), but that this decision would be reviewed again by 2010.

Recommendation	Action
A new project board of tenants, councillors and independent representatives is established to continue to review the retention situation and this work is completed within 5 years.	Housing Review Board established in June 2006, under the Council's constitution, which oversees all landlord matters.
A Communication Strategy is produced setting out how tenants will be informed and involved in the process.	Stock Options Appraisal will not be revisited until boundary commission changes are known. A Communication Strategy will be developed for this and for further consultation on a 'large scale voluntary transfer' option, if appropriate.
Tenants and leaseholders have access to continued advice throughout this process.	Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel (TLCP) considered working with The Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) to assess working towards accreditation but decided not to proceed.
We commission a warranted stock condition survey and valuation exercise as part of any preparations for housing stock transfer or new management arrangements.	The budget has been approved for the necessary software and the survey will be undertaken as part of the Stock Options Appraisal when this is revisited.
We meet the tenant and leaseholder aspirations that can be afforded.	30 year HRA Business Plan produced based on tenants aspirations.
We undertake further work, with independent specialist advice, on an evaluation of our housing management activities against Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry, and produce an Improvement Plan to achieve higher standards of housing management.	Audit Commission Inspection ¹ occurred in September 2007 and a delivery plan (Annex 3) of all recommendations is being implemented.

3.2 Restructuring of the Housing and Social Inclusion Service

The restructuring, carried out in 2006 following the Stock Options Appraisal, allowed for greater clarity of roles. A new unit was set up to overview housing strategy, affordable housing, and community development, as well as a business unit to cover income management and coordinate the work of our sheltered housing and alarm services. Further details are given in the Housing and Social Inclusion Service 2007 Directory which together

¹ Housing Management Services East Devon, Local Authority Housing Inspection Report December 2007, Audit Commission – www.eastdevon.gov.uk

with the structure of the Housing teams can be seen on our website at www.eastdevon.gov.uk

3.3 Audit Commission Inspection of Housing Management Services²

The Housing Inspectorate undertook an inspection of our management services in September 2007 and rated our service as one star (fair) with uncertain prospects for improvement. It is important to read the complete report for a full understanding of this comprehensive inspection. A copy of the report can be found on our website.

The inspectors recognised that:

- homes are decent, warm and well managed
- tenant satisfaction is high
- costs are low
- the repairs service is good
- gas appliances are well serviced
- adaptations are carried out efficiently
- antisocial behaviour is dealt with effectively.

The report makes a number of recommendations in four broad areas which cover:

1. increasing customer focus
2. improving performance management
3. addressing weaknesses in specific services
4. improving the value for money of the service.

The inspection report has informed the production of this Housing Strategy and we have produced a comprehensive delivery plan to address all of the recommendations (**Annex 3**).

3.4 Service planning

We have adopted and refined a series of objectives, actions and priorities in the Service Plan for Housing. These are “in tune” with local needs, realistic, wide-ranging and measurable. Every year we organise a ‘service planning day’ with staff and tenants to look at achievements during the year, and plan for key events in the coming year. This helps inform our annual Service Plan.

The Service Plan produced in December 2007 lists 28 key service outcomes planned for 2008-2011 and can be seen on our website. The key priorities and targets are incorporated into the Action Plan for this strategy.

3.5 Improving customer service

Since the last Housing Strategy was written in 2004 we have produced many key documents which clearly explain the level of service that tenants and leaseholders can expect from the Housing and Social Inclusion Service. These include:

- the Housing Customer Charter* (revised March 2008) – setting out service standards
- a Welcome Pack for new tenants with information about their tenancy, housing and other council services and the local area
- a Tenant Handbook* – currently going to new tenants with the Welcome Pack
- the Tenant and Council Partnership Agreement April 2008* which sets out how tenants and leaseholders can be involved with housing services

² Housing Management Services East Devon, Local Authority Housing Inspection Report December 2007, Audit Commission – www.eastdevon.gov.uk

- the Leasehold Home Owners Handbook*
- a revised Secure Tenancy Agreement*.

(* available to view on our website www.eastdevon.gov.uk)

Customers can expect:

- to be attended to within 5 minutes of arriving, if they have a specified appointment time
- to be attended to within 20 minutes of arriving, or be offered an appointment, if they call at the offices without a specified appointment time.
- all confidential enquiries will be carried out in private.
- letters and emails will be responded to within 10 working days.
- if necessary we will visit customers at their home.

Each year we hold at least four '**area forum**' meetings across the district, to which all tenants and leaseholders are invited, as well as a series of customer 'drop ins' and Housing Review Board coffee mornings. Tenants are able to raise issues of concern to them with members of staff in an informal setting. Also the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel organises an annual Residents' Conference.

Complaints: If a customer is dissatisfied with the service received they can raise the issue with one of our Service Managers. If they remain dissatisfied we have a complaints procedure, details of which we will send out on request. Details of the complaint should be given to us by letter, telephone or email.

If, after following the Council's complaints procedure, the customer is still dissatisfied they can approach the Local Government Ombudsman for an independent review.

3.6 Key achievements in recent years

Providing a range of affordable housing to meet housing needs

- increasing numbers of new affordable homes being provided – 128 units since 2005
- Housing strategy and enabling role developing to bring developers, planners and the social housing sector together to create more new affordable homes
- 30 additional privately owned homes leased by RSL partners up to March 2007
- good understanding and research into local housing market
- housing and planning policies aligned
- rent deposit/rent in advance scheme.

Prevent homelessness wherever possible and ensure that accommodation is provided for those who do become homeless

- no families in bed and breakfast accommodation for longer than 6 weeks
- Tenancy Sustainment Officer appointed
- homeless acceptances reduced through prevention initiatives
- temporary accommodation reduced by 50% meeting government targets
- enhanced housing options interviews and an improved 'sign up' process for new tenants.

Bring sub-standard housing up to current standards

- targeted intervention to ensure standards in the private sector are maintained
- a high performing Home Improvement Agency assisting older people repair, improve, and adapt their homes.

Maintain and manage the council owned housing stock to a high standard, actively involving tenants in all aspects of the service

- high quality council homes resulting from continual investment – the Council continues to meet the Decent Homes Standard
- high levels of tenant satisfaction – 86% of tenants satisfied with the overall service provided by the landlord
- supported housing schemes provided to meet identified needs
- the Housing Stock Options Appraisal of the Council's housing stock undertaken in 2004/06 and the establishment of the Housing Review Board in 2006
- revision of the Secure Tenancy Agreement.

Enable older and disabled people to remain in their own homes

- Home Safeguard service reviewed and reorganised to become a predominantly floating support service to compliment the Supporting People plans for the future of services for people with support needs in the county.

Improve the energy efficiency of housing and eliminate fuel poverty

- SAP rating of council owned dwellings increased from 61 in 2003 to 71 in June 2008.

Widen the choice of housing especially for those in priority need

- Choice Based Lettings scheme introduced in 2006
- new initiatives introduced to improve access to private sector accommodation, such as private sector leasing and rent deposit schemes.