

BEST VALUE REVIEW – HOUSING MANAGEMENT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This is a progress report in respect of the above review and seeks Members approval to amend the timetable and notify the Audit Commission, in order for them to alter their inspection requirement for the Council.

2 EXTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1 Following advice gathered from various bodies since setting a target for the Best Value Review of Housing Management, it became clear that the timetable was ambitious. Most commentators now advise that a timetable of four to five years is required to review all of the various activities of Housing Management.
- 2.2 The Audit Commission Inspectorate would expect to find a complete process review having been carried out on the following areas:
- i) Allocation of Letting of Houses.
 - ii) Consultation and Tenant Involvement.
 - iii) Repair and Maintenance.
 - iv) Tenancy Management.
 - v) Setting and Collecting Rent.
- 2.3 In carrying out each review, the Council is expected to have complied totally with the regime of challenge, compare, consult and compete. Each of the above would be a major review in its own right and would require enormous staff input to complete the programme by the end of December.
- 2.4 As mentioned in the concurrent report to this committee in respect of Housing Strategy, there is a question mark over whether or not housing staying with Rochford in the future is a serious proposition.
- 2.5 If the financial projections clearly show that options other than the status quo should be considered, the Council could waste considerable staff resource in carrying out the process reviews.
- 2.6 If Large Scale Voluntary Transfer was shown to be an obvious first choice, staff resource should be deployed to fully investigate the option as soon as possible.

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- 2.7 One other option may be an arms length management company. In this case the first priority would be to improve the housing strategy. This would need to be followed by ensuring that we performed within the top 25% of authorities in respect of performance indicators. As mentioned in the Housing Strategy report, this could take two years before attempting to move to an arms length company. As such, it would perhaps only be necessary to carry out reviews on those areas where we know we can be criticised by Government Office, or do not fall within the top 25% for performance.
- 2.8 Should status quo be the preferred option, all of the areas for Best Value Review need to be addressed. In-house provision of the service will clearly need to demonstrate that it can compete against possible private sector providers.

3 PRIORITISATION OF SERVICE REVIEWS

- 3.1 It is proposed that the priority for service reviews should be:

2000/01 - 2001/02 - Allocation and Re-Letting of Houses

This is an area where improvements need to be made to performance, with a total review of policy.

2001/2002 – Repair and Maintenance

Building maintenance is timetabled for 2001/2002. It would not be practical to attempt housing maintenance and repairs as a separate review.

Setting and Collection of Rent

Whilst our performance on rent collection is good, we must review our rent setting policy as a matter of urgency.

2002/2003 – Tenancy Management

This will need to dovetail in with the new Housing Strategy.

2003/2004 – Consultations and Tenant Involvement

The Tenants Compact has been agreed and is being implemented. Efforts must be made early to improve tenant participation, but a wholesale process review would be the lowest priority.

4 ANTICIPATED OUTCOME OF CURRENT REVIEW

- 4.1 Efforts are now being made to obtain examples of best practice as a starting point for the above reviews. It is anticipated that bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Housing or the Housing Quality Network, will be able to provide assistance. Statements of best practice from these bodies would be a far more robust starting point for the reviews than attempting to contact individual authorities.
- 4.2 After comparing our own procedures to what is regarded as best practice, officers will be better able to quantify the resource needed to carry out the reviews. The main aim will be to minimise any impact on day to day services of the authority.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are significant staff resources required in carrying out best value reviews. As yet we are not in a position to fully quantify that resource.

6 RECOMMENDATION

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**
- 1 To note the limits of the current review and notify the Audit Commission accordingly.
 2. Subject to any initial comments at this stage, to further consider the best options for Housing Management when the full financial implications are available.
 3. Officers to report back on progress on the review, with firm details of review dates and resource implications.(CD(FES))

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