

Service Area: Access to services and customer care	
Recommendations	Response
<p>Provide a more holistic and comprehensive housing options service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a culture and environment that will improve the seamlessness of provision of housing options, advice and information; • provide training and shadowing opportunities for staff that will develop their ability to advise and assist customers across the related services of housing register, homelessness, housing advice and private sector housing; • consider the impact of the stock transfer on allocations and if retention is proposed, bring forward structural changes that will mimic the future separation of responsibility for the allocations policy, nominations and lettings; and • prepare a comprehensive housing options information pack for customers with up to date leaflets which publicise methods for preventing homelessness, schemes to enable people to remain in their own home and details of access to shared and low cost ownership, social and privately rented housing. 	<p>The restructuring proposals recently agreed by Council include the establishment of a comprehensive housing options, advice and information service, including allocations policy, nominations and lettings.</p> <p>Accepted.</p>
<p>Develop a more consistent, systematic and comprehensive approach to customer satisfaction monitoring that enables the Council to respond to thematic as well as individual issues. Develop and publish service standards for private sector services. Make use of post tenancy visits and telephone surveys to gain feedback, rather than relying solely on postal surveys which often have a poor response rate. Provide feedback for customers that indicates clearly where their comments have led to changes in service.</p>	<p>Accepted. The newly established Service Development and Improvement Sub-Committee of the Senior Management Team will be looking at best practice in customer survey work, and at access equality issues.</p>
<p>Consistently collect and analyse ethnicity information across all services in order to be able to demonstrate that the Council gives fair access to all. Compare results with the population profile of the District and investigate further any indications that some parts of the community are under represented in access to services. Use the information to ensure services are strategically planned and delivered appropriately.</p>	

Service Area: Strategy and enabling, housing needs	
Recommendations	Response
<p>From the elected membership, appoint a 'champion' for housing. Undertake a programme of training and awareness-raising for Members to break down negative perceptions of affordable housing and to ensure Members are aware of the high needs for housing which are currently hidden. Provide stronger community leadership by working with Housing Associations, developers and other stakeholders to provide a clearer message to local communities about the need for affordable housing.</p> <p>Maximise the opportunity presented by the development of the housing section of the LDF by;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using the Council's new housing strategy and needs analysis to inform the content – specifying housing requirements, including affordable housing for each site, for example the minimum density, types of housing and number of bedrooms needed; • ensuring that housing is in a position to match the key dates and milestones set out in the local development scheme in order to have the maximum influence; and • working with planning colleagues to propose a large increase to the percentage of affordable housing required on development sites and a reduction of current size thresholds. 	<p>This is a decision for the Committee. In other areas of work, such as Benefits, appointment of a Member Champion has been helpful.</p> <p>It is intended that development plan documents will when prepared provide detailed information about density, tenure, house types, etc. to guide developers. LDF milestones are published in the Local Development Scheme. The East of England Plan requires a minimum of 30% and preferably 40% affordable housing. Site thresholds will be considered during the preparation of the relevant development plan documents.</p>

Service Area: Strategy and enabling, housing needs	
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<p>Consider whether the development control officers should continue to have responsibility for negotiation of S106 agreements or whether housing, with a greater vested interest in maximising the output, should take the lead role.</p> <p>Improve the advice and guidance given to developers about what the Council will require in terms of S106 agreements by working with planning to develop design briefs for developers and RSL's to design schemes which meet the Council's overall strategic housing objectives. Ensure these briefs are followed.</p> <p>Research why concealed households are not joining the housing register and use this information to help shape the structure and delivery of the more holistic housing options service recommended earlier.</p>	<p>The current arrangements should continue – planning officers are responsible for negotiating and advising on all S106 matters and to separate one aspect would not be sensible. Furthermore, new LDF guidance will be very specific on the requirements, thus reducing doubt and the potential for developers to argue reduced contributions. However, there has already been increased liaison between housing and planning officers and this will continue to be developed. It is intended that the preparation of developer briefs will be a key component of the LDF.</p> <p>Accepted. This work will have to be programmed with other tasks for the new Strategic Housing Team.</p>

Service Area: Strategy and enabling, housing needs	
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Consider how excess sheltered housing schemes might serve the needs of other housing needs groups by redesignation and/or remodelling.	As the strategic housing authority, the Council will need to consider how best to meet housing needs of all sections of the community, including older residents
Service Area: Private sector housing	
Recommendation	Response
<p>As a matter of urgency, undertake a private sector stock condition survey, in order to provide up to date information to underpin and justify the development of a new housing strategy for the private sector.</p> <p>Improve understanding of the reasons behind the numbers of private sector empty homes and develop clear policies and initiatives for offering owners ways of bringing empty homes back into use. Include research on 'over the shop' opportunities as part of planned research on reasons for empty homes.</p> <p>Take greater advantage of opportunities afforded by the RRO to target actions and resources to areas need not currently addressed, for example the use of loans would provide better value for money by recycling funds and could be extended to private sector landlords in return for nomination rights for a period – thus providing more assistance to those in housing need.</p>	<p>Budget agreed for 2006/07. Procurement being progressed.</p> <p>Accepted. Research programme is about to start. Research results will guide decisions on what initiatives/action are needed.</p> <p>The Head of Financial Services' current advice is that the financial markets offer the best options for householders to secure loans. However, this position will be reviewed periodically.</p>

Service Area: Private sector housing	
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<p>Strengthen internal working processes and relationships with planning officers in respect of their contribution to delivery of private sector energy targets.</p> <p>To reduce delays in obtaining individual quotes for disabled adaptation work, tender common items of work against a schedule of rates and put term contract(s) in place.</p>	<p>Accepted, however, Building Regulations are the main determinant of standards.</p> <p>Work has started with Essex County Council on procurement of specific work such as installation of stairlifts. This will continue.</p>
<p>Improve the regularity of contact with DFG applicants to keep them advised of the progress of their application.</p>	<p>Accepted. Revised procedures are in place to ensure better contact with applicants.</p>

Service Area: Homelessness and housing advice	
Recommendation	Response
Develop a standard reporting format and style for homelessness reviews and ensure that applications have a checklist that mirrors this in order to make it easy to complete when necessary. Set up dates in advance and cancel them if there are no cases to consider.	There may be merit in adopting a simplified Committee report format. However, the very small number of cases as present mean this is not a priority.
Produce more information for users for example service standards in leaflet form, explanation of the priority groups – see recommendation under ‘access to services and customer care’.	A range of new information leaflets has been drafted and these are being finalised.
Service Area: General	
Recommendation	Response
There is a lack of clarity about how service plans fit with strategy action plans/BVPP/community plan/corporate plan and a clearer cascade from corporate priorities downwards would be beneficial. There is currently no corporate style for action planning and this would help to address the clarity issues. Greater attention is needed to ensure that outcomes are measured rather than process and that priorities within and between plans are clear.	The corporate planning and performance management frameworks are undergoing changes. Divisional plans are to be introduced.
Diversity/ethnicity monitoring is an example where data is being collected but not well used and is therefore not driving strategic decision making. There are a number of similar examples where performance is being observed rather than managed. Once the Council’s internal performance management framework is fully developed, this might usefully be extended this to cover agencies delivering services on behalf of the Council, for example the Home Improvement Agency.	As above.