

Draft Decision by Portfolio Holder



Epping Forest
District Council

Report reference: C/ /200 - 0

Date of report: TBA

Portfolio: Housing – Cllr D. Stallan **Author:** Alan Hall, Director of Housing
Committee Secretary: Rebecca Perrin

Subject: Housing Service Standards 2009 & Housing Charter

Decision: (1) That performance against the previously agreed Housing Service Standards in 2008/9 (where measured), as set out in Appendix 1, be noted;

(2) That, following consultation with the Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation, the proposed changes and additions to;

(a) The Housing Service Standards, as set out in Appendix 1; and

(b) The Housing Charter, as set out in Appendix 2;

be approved, and that the relevant leaflets be updated; and

(3) That the Housing Service Standards, and performance against the standards in 2009/10, be reviewed again in either October 2010, or when required in order to comply with the new Regulatory Framework to be introduced by the Tenant Services Authority, whichever is the earliest.

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I have read and approve/do not approve (delete as appropriate) the above decision:	
Comments/further action required:	
Signed:	Date:
<i>Personal interest declared by Portfolio Holder/ conflict of interest declared by any other consulted Cabinet Member:</i>	<i>Dispensation granted by Standards Committee: Yes/No or n/a</i>
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Initialled as original copy by Portfolio Holder:

Reason for decision:

The Housing Service Standards and Housing Charter were previously agreed by the Housing Portfolio Holder in 2007, following consultation with the Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation. It is good practice to review the Housing Service Standards and performance against the standards annually.

Options considered and rejected:

- (1) Not to review or update the Housing Service Standards and/or the Housing Charter.
- (2) To make different changes/additions/deletions to the Housing Service Standards and/or the Housing Charter than those proposed.

Background

1. In 2007, following consultation with the Housing Scrutiny Panel, Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and the Housing Customer Interface Project Group, the Housing Portfolio Holder agreed a range of Housing Service Standards, covering all of the Housing Directorate's main areas of activity. An updated Housing Charter was also agreed, which sets out the Council's approach and ethos to the delivery of its housing service to customers.
2. Subsequently, a leaflet setting out all of the agreed Housing Service Standards was issued to all the Council's tenants and added to the Tenants Handbook. In addition, a number of leaflets were produced setting out the Housing Service Standards for particular areas of activity.
3. At the same time as agreeing the Service Standards, it was also agreed that the Housing Directorate's performance against the Housing Service Standards (where possible and appropriate) should be considered annually. It was also agreed that, since the Service Standards did not include standards for Private Sector Housing (since this function had not yet been incorporated within the Housing Directorate), standards for Private Sector Housing should be introduced when the Service Standards were reviewed.

Discussion Paper from the Tenants Services Authority (TSA) – “Building a New Regulatory Framework”

4. The Tenant Services Authority (TSA) is a relatively new organisation, that has taken over the regulatory housing functions of the former Housing Corporation.
5. Earlier in the year, the TSA published a “discussion paper” on “*Building a new regulatory framework*” which set out its initial proposals for a new regulatory framework for housing and the national standards on which the framework will be built. From 1 April 2010, local authorities will also be regulated by the TSA. The discussion paper invited comments, ideas and suggestions from all stakeholders to help shape the standards and overall regulatory regime, following which formal consultation would be undertaken later in 2009. At the time of writing, this formal consultation has not yet commenced.
6. The TSA intends to adopt an approach that it calls “co-regulation”. Whilst the TSA has a key role in regulating and driving forward the quality of services on behalf of consumers, it says that a co-regulatory approach will enable it to scale back the burden of formal regulation whilst increasing the responsibility of landlords to ensure their own high quality, locally focused, performance.
7. The TSA has set out a vision for its approach to regulation, which emphasises greater co-operation between landlords and tenants to improve outcomes for tenants. There is a strong focus on development of a co-regulatory model which encourages landlords, tenants and the regulator to work more closely together to define future direction. The proposals around co-regulation strike a balance between direct regulation and self-regulation.

8. Underpinning the TSA's proposals is the need for flexibility within the regulatory framework, to enable landlords to respond to local issues and provide tailored solutions for local people. Landlords will be encouraged to develop challenging, local standards in partnership with tenants to address local priorities, which will supplement nationally set standards.

9. Although the TSA's proposed form, coverage and content of local standards is not yet known, the Council is "ahead of the game" in not only having agreed its own Housing Service Standards (in consultation with the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation) two years ago, but also through being able to review the appropriateness of the Service Standards and associated targets in the light of two years' experience.

10. Although it may be necessary to review the format, coverage and content of the Council's Housing Service Standards in the future (i.e. once the TSA's final guidance is issued), the Council and the Federation will be in the fortunate position of having a good basis to discuss and agree any revised standards, in order to comply with the new regulatory framework.

Performance Against the Housing Service Standards in 2008/9

11. Appendix 1 provides details of the Housing Service Standards agreed by the Housing Portfolio Holder in 2007, and – where measurable and appropriate – the Housing Directorate's performance in meeting the standards in 2008/9. As a comparison, Appendix 1 also provides details on the performance in 2006/7 (the year before the Housing Service Standards were introduced), which were reported to the Housing Scrutiny Panel, Tenants and Leaseholders Federation and Housing Portfolio Holder at the time the Housing Service Standards were agreed in 2007, to inform the formulation of the Service Standards.

12. It is emphasised that it is not possible to measure performance against every Service Standard. In a number of cases, there is nothing that can be measured, since the Standard is a "statement of intent"; in a number of other cases, whilst performance could potentially be measured, it is considered that the time and resources that would be required to properly record and monitor performance is not warranted.

13. In a small number of cases, performance could be relatively easily monitored, but has not been to date. In these cases, Appendix 1 refers to performance data that is being collected from April 2009, or that will be collected from April 2010.

Proposed Changes and New Service Standards

14. The Director of Housing has reviewed the Housing Service Standards, having regard to performance in 2008/9 and changes in legislation and Council policy. As a result, a number of changes are proposed. These are set out in bold italics under the description of the relevant standard in the first column of Appendix 1.

15. A number of the proposed changes result from:

- (a) The Housing Directorate's intention for the Careline Service to be accredited by the Telecare Services Association (TSA). Accreditation demonstrates that the Careline Service meets nationally agreed standards, and is necessary if the Council is to offer its Careline Service to other councils or housing associations. The TSA has its own standards that the Council would have to adopt and publish – hence the reason for the proposed changes; and
- (b) The proposed introduction of Housing Service Standards for Private Sector Housing, following the incorporation of this function within the Housing Directorate, following the Top Management Restructure in 2007.

Housing Charter

16. The Council's Housing Charter is attached at Appendix 2, and has also been reviewed. Two changes are proposed, which are set out in bold italics at Appendix 2. The first is an additional commitment, to comply with the accreditation requirements of the Telecare Services Association; the second is a revised wording of the commitment relating to equalities, to reflect the requirements and coverage of the Equalities Bill currently passing through Parliament.

Consultation with the Housing Scrutiny Panel and Tenants and Leaseholders Federation

17. The Housing Scrutiny Panel and the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation have been consulted on this report, the performance against the Standards and the proposed changes and additions, at their meetings held on 15th December 2009 and 24th November 2009 respectively.

18. Their comments are as follows:

- (a) The definition of Service Standard HM8 ("Try to meet with you to discuss any rent arrears before any court hearing takes place") should be re-worded to make it clear that officers will make every effort to try to meet with tenants, since the current wording could give the impression that other commitments of officer time could result in no meeting taking place;
- (b) The Federation notes the Housing Directorate's performance against the Service Standards in 2008/9 and supports the proposed changes to both the Housing Service Standards and the Housing Charter for 2010/11.

19. Housing Service Standards HM7 and HM8 have both been amended in the schedule at Appendix 1 accordingly.

Adoption of the New Housing Service Standards

20. It is recommended that the proposed changes and additions to the Housing Service Standards and the Housing Charter - as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 - be approved, that the relevant leaflets be updated and that performance against the standards be reviewed again in either October 2010, or when required to comply with the new Regulatory Framework to be introduced by the Tenant Services Authority, whichever is the earliest.

Consultation Undertaken:

As set out in the detailed report above.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The appropriate setting of Service Standards and the monitoring of performance against those Standards is considered to contribute towards good governance.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None

Background Papers:

None

Impact Assessments:

The regular consideration of Housing Service Standards, to some extent, helps to mitigate risks.

It is not considered necessary to undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment

Key Decision Reference (Y/N):

Yes

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Portfolio Holder:**