

## ***Report to the Council***

**Committee:** Cabinet **Date:** 28 September 2010

**Subject:** Housing Portfolio **Item:** 6(e)

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor David Stallan

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**Recommending:**

**That the report of the Housing Portfolio Holder be noted.**

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### **Customer Service Excellence Award – Housing Directorate**

I am pleased to announce that the whole of the Council's Housing Directorate has been awarded the Government's prestigious new Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Award.

The Housing Directorate has held the Government's Charter Mark Award since 2004. The Charter Mark has now been replaced by the even more challenging CSE Award. This award demonstrates the Assessor's finding that:

*"The Housing Directorate was found to have a deep understanding and commitment to Customer Service Excellence. The commitment was found from Senior Management levels through to operational and front line staff."*

Although to meet the "pass" level, an organisation can have up to 11 "Partial" Compliances against the 57 elements of the detailed standard (equating to a pass mark of 80%), the Assessor found no "Non" or "Partial" Compliances – Housing was fully compliant in all respects (equating to a mark of 100%).

The Award followed a three-day assessment by an external assessor, covering a detailed document review; interviews with officers, members, customers and partners; visits to housing offices and facilities; and a lunch with numerous partner agencies.

The Award lasts for three years.

### **ISO 9001:2008 Quality Assurance Award – Housing Directorate**

I am also pleased to announce that the Housing Directorate has been re-accredited with the (new) ISO 9001:2008 Quality Assurance Award for a further year.

Adherence to the standard is assessed twice a year by an external assessor (Lloyds Register Quality Assurance). In July 2010, LRQA undertook a "surveillance visit" to review the performance of Housing's quality management system. The visit verified that "the Housing Directorate has a well-constructed management system".

The Assessor identified that: the Directorate is continually improving its management system; there is good evidence of forward planning through Business Plans, with SMART objectives, consistent with the needs of the business; there is good evidence of commitment to continual improvement, and good initiatives have been undertaken to involve customers, such as the development of Mystery Shopping and the support of the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation.

The two functional areas that were transferred to the Housing Directorate at the time of the corporate restructuring in 2008 (Private Sector Housing and the former Works Unit - now incorporated within the new Housing Repairs Service) have now been confirmed by the assessor as being fully brought within Housing's quality assurance system

### **Visit by the Tenant Service Authority (TSA)**

On 4 August 2010, two representatives from the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) – the social housing regulator – met with the Council's Housing Management Team to discuss the Council's progress with its compliance with the new Regulatory Framework for Housing, introduced in April 2010.

Officers were able to explain the good progress that has been made to date and that the Council is able to comply with the Regulatory Framework. Although formal feedback was awaited, it appears clear that the representatives were impressed with the Council's approach and generally satisfied that the regulatory requirements are being, and will continue to be, met. They were particularly impressed with Housing's recent Customer Service Excellence Award and ISO 9001 Quality Assurance re-accreditations (see above), since external assessors had validated the Council's approach to customer care and quality.

### **Local Offer to Tenants**

At its meeting on 7 June 2010, the Tenants and Leaseholders Federation agreed the approach to, and content of, the Council's Draft Local Offer, on which the TSA requires social landlords to consult with all their tenants and then confirm the final version of its Local Offer by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. The Local Offer must set out the service that tenants can expect, and explain how the Council will meet the TSA's National Standards.

The Federation has agreed that, subject to the views of all tenants, the Local Offer should comprise three components: the Council's published Housing Standards and Housing Charter, and a "Tenant-Agreed Action Plan".

The Tenant-Agreed Action Plan sets out the key actions and improvements that tenants would like to see the Council deliver in the forthcoming year, and comprises 16 actions / improvements, together with supporting information.

All of the Council's tenants will now be consulted on the Draft Local Offer, either with the Annual Report to Tenants in October, or through "Housing News". Copies of the revised leaflet setting out the updated Housing Service Standards and Housing Charter will be included within the pack sent to tenants.

All tenants will be invited to comment on the Draft Local Offer, through a postal Feedback Form and Feedback page on the Council's website. The Federation and Housing Portfolio Holder will then consider the views received from tenants, before agreeing, together with the Federation, the final Local Offer prior to April 2011, which

would be publicised prior to the deadline of 31 March 2010, probably in Housing News.

### **New Licence Conditions for Park Home Sites**

I am grateful to the Housing Scrutiny Panel for undertaking a detailed review of the proposed new licence conditions for all of the park home sites in the District. Once again, many park home residents attended the meeting, and heard a detailed presentation from the Director of Housing on his report on the various issues. Eight representatives of park home residents and one site owner addressed the meeting to give their views, and two representatives from the Essex Fire and Rescue Service attended to give their views and answer questions.

All park home residents in the District will now be consulted on both the report that the Scrutiny Panel considered and the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations. The results of the consultation exercise, and the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations, will then be reported to the Cabinet for a final decision.

### **Open Market Shared Ownership Scheme**

At the Cabinet meeting held earlier in the month, it was agreed that the Council should introduce an innovative new Open Market Shared Ownership Scheme with Broxbourne Housing Association.

House prices within the District continue to be very high, resulting in many local people being unable to purchase their own home. The Scheme will enable housing applicants on the Council's Housing Register to have an opportunity to get a foot on the home ownership ladder, and select a property on the open market that they would like to purchase on a shared ownership basis.

The Scheme will initially assist 8 applicants this year, with a possible extension to a further 6 applicants next year.

One of the benefits of the Scheme is that, apart from assisting local first-time buyers, if house prices increase, the Council's investment in the Scheme will increase proportionately and will be re-couped when shared-owners purchase additional equity shares up to 100% (called staircasing). The receipts would then be re-invested in further equity purchases to assist other applicants. A Risk Sharing Agreement will minimise and mitigate the Council's risk, especially if property prices decrease.