

# REPORT FOR COMMUNITY DSP

REPORT OF: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (REGULATORY SERVICES)

REPORT NO: DRS20

DATE: 15<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2005

<b>TITLE:</b>	IMPROVING OUR STRATEGIC HOUSING SERVICES BY LEARNING FROM BEST PRACTICE – A DAY IN RURAL WORCESTERSHIRE
<b>FORWARD PLAN ITEM:</b>	Yes
<b>DATE WHEN FIRST APPEARED IN FORWARD PLAN:</b>	April 2005

<b>COUNCIL AIMS/PORTFOLIO HOLDER NAME AND DESIGNATION:</b>	Community Cllr. Peter Martin-Mayhew
<b>CORPORATE PRIORITY:</b>	Housing Management
<b>CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS:</b>	None
<b>FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT IMPLICATIONS:</b>	None
<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS:</b>	Housing Improvement Plan approved by Council 26 <sup>th</sup> May 2005

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In May 2005 South Kesteven District Council received an inspection report from the Audit Commission which ‘scored’ our Strategic Housing Services as ‘poor and has uncertain prospects for improvement’. In June 2005 Council agreed an improvement plan which, when implemented, would deliver a ‘good’ or ‘2 star’ service when the Inspectors returned in 2006.

- 2.1 To help us understand what would likely be needed on our improvement journey on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2005 ten representatives from South Kesteven travelled down to Pershore in Worcestershire. 5 councillors (Cllr Mrs Gaffigan, Cllrs. Martin-Mayhew, Taylor, Joynson and Parkin) and 5 officers (Duncan Kerr, Sally Marshall, Mandy Gee, Dawn Clark and Kevin Martin) attended an 'Excellence in Housing' event being staged at Wychavon District Council.
- 2.2 This report attempts to provide some feedback on the day and our findings.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Wychavon has very similar demographics to South Kesteven and is in our Audit Commission family group. Member numbers, political make up and indeed council tax levels are similar to ours also. They had however transferred their housing stock to the private sector (1994).
- 3.2 During the 2003 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Wychavon achieved an overall 'good' rating but were told that their Strategic Housing Services were not meeting residents' needs. It was this that made Wychavon embark on a 5-year pledge to turn things around for its customers.
- 3.3 By February 2005 however, after an inspection, the Audit Commission have now dubbed Wychavon's housing service as 'excellent, with excellent prospects for development'; thus making them the first district council to receive a double excellent ranking for Housing Services.

### **4. THE EVENT**

In the morning there were 3 presentations:

- 4.1 The Improvement Journey presented by the Managing Director and the Head of Strategy. This was an overview explaining how they got to where they are now from where they were 2 years previously
- 4.2 The Top 10 drivers for Housing Success by the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Head of Revenues, Housing and Democratic Services

The ten drivers identified were:

- Improving for residents, not the Audit Commission
- Having the guts to confront poor performance
- Political buy-in
- DIY and knowing what matters
- Money matters
- Recruiting for attitude not qualifications
- Empowering staff
- Encouraging innovation
- Training and Development
- Think about the customer experience

- 4.3 What does excellent look and feel like? By the Housing Services Managers and the Senior Housing Needs & Projects Officer. This presentation related the experiences of customers, staff and partner organisations and what had changed to improve the service so dramatically.
- 4.4 In the afternoon Members and Officers double teamed to attend all of the 5 workshops. These covered
- Member Involvement and Commitment
  - Achieving a Fit for Purpose Housing Strategy
  - Housing Advice & Homelessness – A Proactive Approach
  - Working in Partnership to deliver additional Affordable Housing
  - Private Sector Housing – Focussing on those in Housing Need

A summary of the top tips and key feedback from these workshops is appended to this report for information. Members will also find attached a copy of a summary information sheet produced by Wychavon.

## **5. OUR FINDINGS**

- 5.1 On the journey home there was general agreement that as soon as we walked into Wychavon's offices there was 'something in the air'. The surroundings gave off the 'ambience' of a strong and motivated organisational culture.
- 5.2 During the day it was also easy to identify with the Team Wychavon - One Council approach that had been adopted. Wychavon staff gave the impression of being highly motivated and valued, Leading members and senior officers together talked of strong leadership & relationships and the existence of member led strategies.
- 5.3 All the SKDC attendees agreed that it had been an interesting and useful visit. On the back of this we have attempted to foster a relationship with Wychavon District Council and are hopeful that we will be able to use them as a critical friend in the future wherever possible.
- 5.4 At the time of writing this report it is hoped that the Housing & Revenues Manager from Wychavon will be attending our Community DSP meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> September to give a presentation to our Members on Wychavon's Strategic Housing Service.

## **6. CONTACT OFFICER**

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