

# REPORT TO CABINET

REPORT OF: ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER

REPORT NO.: HST10

DATE: 6<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2006

<b>TITLE:</b>	Re-inspection of South Kesteven District Council's Strategic Housing Service
<b>FORWARD PLAN ITEM:</b>	No
<b>DATE WHEN FIRST APPEARED IN FORWARD PLAN:</b>	N/A
<b>KEY DECISION OR POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL:</b>	N/A

<b>COUNCIL AIMS/PORTFOLIO HOLDER NAME AND DESIGNATION:</b>	Councillor Mrs. Frances Cartwright Organisational Development and Housing Services	
<b>CORPORATE PRIORITY:</b>	Affordable Housing	
<b>CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS:</b>	Minor	
<b>FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT IMPLICATIONS:</b>	Inspection report available on both the SKDC & Audit Commission' websites	
<b>INITIAL EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>	Carried out and appended to report?  Not applicable	Full impact assessment required?  No
<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS:</b>	Report DRS 15 to Cabinet 23 May 2005 and Council 26 May 2005	

**(1) PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To inform members of the findings of the re-inspection of the Council's Strategic Housing Services by the Audit Commission in July 2006.

(A copy of the Audit Commission's inspection report published in October 2006 is appended for information)

**2) RECOMMENDATION**

Cabinet members are requested to note the contents of this report and acknowledge the improvements identified by the inspection team.

**(3) DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

Background

The Council's Strategic Housing Service was first inspected by the Audit Commission in February 2005 with the resultant inspection report published in May 2005. The report detailed some 37 weaknesses, identified only 5 strengths and scored the service as Zero stars (Poor) with uncertain prospects for improvements.

As a result of this report Council approved a wide ranging improvement programme in May 2005 containing, amongst other things:

- A 90-point improvement plan for the strategic housing service (SHIP)
- Extra capacity and resources to deliver both short term improvements and to ensure continued improvement
- A programme of review to bring about improvement in the Council's Housing Landlord Service

Housing Service Restructure

Following a full review the Council's Strategic Housing Service and its Landlord Function became separate service sections on 5th December 2005.

- The Strategic Housing service covering all the council's responsibilities on private sector housing, affordable housing, homelessness & housing advice, strategy & enabling
- The Landlord function embracing all services related to the council housing stock

Strategic Housing Improvement Plan (SHIP)

Work on delivering the improvement programme has continued over the past twelve months despite a number of difficulties with recruitment. From December 2005 to April 2006 only 2 of the 4 senior posts in the Housing Solutions Team were filled; and in total only 9 out of 15 posts were occupied.

There was inevitably some slight slippage on the improvement programme which was reported to members on a regular basis.

Re-inspection July 2006

The Audit Commission returned in July 2006 to carry out a re-inspection of the service.

This time the report identified some 7 strengths and only 10 weaknesses. The service was scored as One star (Fair) with promising prospects for improvement.

This improved score represents a real step change. Audit Commission inspection methodology is continuously updated and the ability to show improvement, and evidence economic, efficient and effective high quality local services to this independent watchdog becomes more challenging.

The input of officers, especially in the housing solution team, and the contribution from councillors over last 18 months should be recognised.

The six core recommendations on pages 9-12 of the report have been accepted and will be added to the on-going improvement plan for housing solutions.

### Summary

Having achieved an improved score it is important to maintain this momentum on what is a Priority A service for the Council. Further reports therefore will be presented to members over the coming months embracing and reflecting the:

- Current overall housing environment and the potential impact on the Council's strategic housing service
- Gateway review for housing solutions
- Improvement plan and
- Demand and delivery, on and against, the broader affordable housing agenda

**(4) COMMENTS OF THE CORPORATE HEAD OF FINANCE AND RESOURCES (SECTION 151 OFFICER)**

No comments

**(5) COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER**

No comments

**(6) OFFICER CONTACT**

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