

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE – 1 NOVEMBER 2006

IMPROVING HOUSING REPAIR SERVICES IN EAST AYRSHIRE

Report by the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform Members of progress in implementing the agreed plan to improve the Council house repairs service.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the meeting of this Committee held on 17 May 2006, Members agreed to a series of proposals put forward by a joint working group comprising officers and tenant representatives to address concerns around performance and levels of tenants' satisfaction. The proposals for change focused on repair categories and timescales, repairs by appointment, job ordering processes, and current "contractual" arrangements between Housing and Building and Works. Members also agreed to proposals to review existing business processes in the housing repairs service and implement any actions needed to improve service efficiency and cost effectiveness.
- 2.2 The need to improve response times and the quality of work carried out to address customer dissatisfaction has been highlighted in the Council's Improvement Plan arising from the recent Best Value Audit of East Ayrshire Council by Audit Scotland. Progress on delivering the Improvement Plan will be reviewed and monitored by the Council's local external auditor as part of the annual audit process.
- 2.3 In May 2006, the Corporate Management Team agreed to extend the remit of the proposed Building and Works Best Value Service Review to include a cross cutting review of property maintenance, including housing repairs. This review will support delivery of the Council's Asset Management Strategy which is ranked as a high priority action in the Council's Improvement Plan arising from the recent Best Value Audit.

3. PROGRESS

- 3.1 At the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 19 September 2006, Members agreed to engage Vanguard Limited for the provision of consultancy and training services in respect of work being undertaken in the cross cutting service review of housing and property repairs. Following an initial check on the existing systems which highlighted a number of weaknesses, a control team of officers from Housing, Property and Building and Works has been established to identify how different ways of working can be introduced to streamline bureaucracy, reduce costs and deliver a better service to

customers. The re-designed service will be piloted in one geographic area to prove its effectiveness prior to roll-out across the whole housing and property maintenance service.

- 3.2 Work is also underway with VT/Servitor to ensure that the appropriate IT systems are in place to support the introduction of the re-designed housing and property maintenance service. This review process is now underway and will be completed by March 2007.
- 3.3 Arrangements to develop a new Best Value Contract covering both the Housing Revenue Account and the Central Repairs Account are now under discussion between officers from Housing, Building and Works and Technical Services. These discussions will focus on streamlining existing contract conditions, developing new composite job codes and pricing structures.
- 3.4 A robust project plan is in place and progress will be monitored on an ongoing basis by the three Heads of Service for Housing, Building and Works and Contracting and Technical Services reporting directly to the Executive Head of Finance who will act as Project Sponsor on behalf of the Chief Executive.

4. EXTERNAL MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

- 4.1 The previous cyclic painter work programme was discontinued some years ago as a result of the increased use of low maintenance building components such as UPVC doors, windows and guttering. Although these UPVC elements require no painting, the time elapsed since their initial installation has resulted in window and door mechanisms requiring repair adjustment lubrication to ensure correct operation. It is proposed to reintroduce a cyclic maintenance programme to do this work as well as other items such as fascias and bargeboards, cleaning and repair of gutters and down pipes, and other minor works within the curtilage of the building. A full list of the works to be included in the revised cyclic programme is appended. It is proposed that this programme would cover all council houses across East Ayrshire over a 5 year cycle largely picking up where the previous programme left off.
- 4.2 Colleagues from Building and Works have carried out preliminary surveys on houses within the Knockinlaw and Muirkirk areas and arrangements are being put in place to begin carrying out the necessary works over the coming weeks. This will allow average costs per house to be calculated, on the basis of the works done and this information will be used to determine budget requirements over future years. A report on the outcomes of this pilot project will be submitted to members in March 2007.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The cost of the pilot cyclic programme works identified in this report can be met from within agreed Housing Revenue budgets as set out in the separate report elsewhere on this agenda outlining the current budgetary control situation for the Housing Revenue Account.

5.2 Funding for the external consultancy and training services to be provided by Vanguard Limited will be met from underspend in the current year within Miscellaneous Services recognising the benefits to all services which is anticipated to accrue.

6. LEGAL AUTHORITY/IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no implications associated directly with the terms of this report.

7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The introduction of the revised cyclic maintenance programme supports the Council's progress towards the achievement and continued compliance with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and meets objectives to improve the environment as set out in the Community Plan. Delivering the plan to improve the Housing and Property Maintenance Services will address the issues around housing repairs and asset management raised by the recent Best Value Audit.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Members are asked to:-

- (i) note the current position in respect of the ongoing Housing and Property Maintenance repairs improvement process;
- (ii) note that a report on the outcomes of the review process outlined in paragraph 3.1 above will be submitted to members in March 2007;
- (iii) agree the proposals to pilot the revised cyclic maintenance programme as outlined in paragraph 4 above; and
- (iv) otherwise, note the contents of the report.

William Stafford
Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

CMCA/LA
2 October 2006

List of Background Papers - Nil

For further information, please contact Chris McAleavey, Head of Housing, telephone 01563 554876.

Implementation Officer: chris.mcaleavey@east-ayrshire.gov.uk