



## Hart District Council Housing Service

### Best value improvement plan

This improvement plan has been developed following the considerations of the housing best value review group (November 2000 – January 2001) and the housing service peer review (December 2000).

#### Implementation

#### Progress to date

#### *Housing advice*

1	Develop a strategic approach to the provision of housing advice in Hart. Whilst various initiatives are taking place on the provision of advice, these need to be co-ordinated in a coherent strategy. The main points will be incorporated within the housing strategy.	Jan 02  KH / Hart HA	Work had commenced, now overtaken by the Homelessness Strategy Review due to be completed in July 03
2	Consider development of independent housing advice. Already provided through CABx, but promotion and development of that service to be considered in partnership with those agencies. Details of independent advice services to be included with all adverse homelessness decision letters.	Jan 02  KH / Hart HA	Will also form part of the above review.
3	Consider dedicated computer link between Hart DC and Hart HA. Can be considered for future IT development, but only one office for each organisation within very close proximity of each other is likely to lessen urgency of such a connection.	April 03  KH / Hart HA	On target for April 03 when Hart HA new IT system introduced.
4	Consider extension of deposit loan scheme. Current scheme is targeted at those accepted or likely to be statutorily homeless. Resources currently not available to extend existing scheme, but can be considered within future budgets.	April 03  KH / Hart HA	Not implemented, no additional resources available. Consider as part of above review.

5	Consider extension of lodgings scheme for single people. UB40 – a local voluntary agency, supported with Council funding – provides a lodgings scheme in large parts of the District. Current resources do not allow for an expanded service to be provided through Hart HA, but can be considered within future budgets.	April 03  KH / Hart HA	No additional funding source identified.
6	Develop corporate service level agreement with CABx. Acknowledged that the Council corporately needs to have a service level agreement with CABx, given level of overall funding provided. Joint housing training with CABx to be initiated where appropriate.	Jan 02  CCJ	Implemented
7	Progress discussions with Waverley and Rushmoor BC's on joint additional direct access hostel provision for young people. Potential site identified by English Churches Housing Group in Farnham, and joint funding agreement currently being discussed.	Dec 01  KH	The 3 councils jointly developing this initiative.
8	Improve provision of in-house debt counselling provided through Hart HA. Housing advisors to be trained in developing financial advice that is provided to those seeking assistance. Floating support specialist to be utilised as necessary. Referrals to be made to CAB where appropriate.	July 01  Hart HA	Implemented
9	Promotion of service throughout the District. Specialist homelessness consultant has been employed to assist in complete revision of housing advice information leaflet. New flyer also about to be printed and distributed.	April 01  Hart HA	Implemented

***Housing register***

10	Promotion of service throughout the District. As for housing advice service – new information leaflet and flyer to be distributed throughout the District.	April 01  Hart HA	Implemented
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11	Incorporate greater flexibility into no fixed abode policy. Single homeless people who have no fixed abode continue to be assessed individually, and Hart HA staff are implementing a flexible approach on prioritisation.	Completed	
12	Significantly reduce groups excluded from the register. Agreement reached on deleting exclusion of owner-occupiers and those with significant capital assets for a trial period of six months. List is now open to most applicants, regardless of current circumstances, with assessment being made on need.	Completed	
13	Consider greater use of medical expertise for assessment of applications. All bar straightforward cases, such as asthma, are currently referred to medical advisor. General advice on common complaints to be sought from qualified physician.	July 01 Hart HA	Implemented, however lack of budget in HDC threatens cessation.
14	Promote availability of appointments with staff. Dedicated parts of the week are currently set aside for personal interviews, but this option needs to be publicised more actively through leaflets and flyers.	April 01 Hart HA	Implemented
15	Finalise draft leaflet on re-housing prospects. This is a challenging area given variations in supply and demand, but leaflet being developed on likelihood of re-housing in different parts of the District, giving information on points level required for offers in specific areas. Consider for possible development as register newsletter. Information board now set up at Hart HA offices.	July 01 Hart HA	Implemented

16	<p>Information technology improvements – 4 key areas, all of which are dependent on the installation of a new applications programme:</p> <p>a) Re-registration. Rather than re-register all applicants annually each April, it is proposed that applicants are re-registered in the month of their initial application.</p> <p>b) Standard letters. A record would be kept of all correspondence sent and received, with reminders sent to the officer dealing with the application if correspondence has not been answered within the target period. Standard letters can easily be produced, and telephone conversations can be stored.</p> <p>c) Acceptance letter. A full points breakdown will be provided for all applicants at the point of registration.</p> <p>Management reports. Provision for statistical information on groups of applicants, and checks on points entitlement for specific applicants.</p>	Jan 02	Implemented
		Hart HA	

### ***Homelessness***

17	<p>Refresher training to be provided by experienced homelessness advisor.</p> <p>Specialist homelessness consultant employed Jan-March 01 to advise on standard documents &amp; complete training needs analysis.</p>	Ongoing	Implemented
		KH / Hart HA	
18	<p>Leaflet on homelessness to be completely reviewed.</p> <p>Consultant as above employed to advise on re-working of homelessness and housing advice information leaflets.</p>	Completed	
19	<p>All standard letters to be revised and checked by experienced homelessness advisor.</p>	Completed	
20	<p>Housing advice pack to be enhanced for homeless applicants.</p> <p>Additional information now included in revised information leaflet.</p>	Completed	

21	Greater use of homeless at home to be considered. Use of homeless at home now actively utilised, particularly given high numbers currently in bed & breakfast accommodation.	Implemented	
22	Reduce use of bed & breakfast generally. High homelessness demand and low supply over the last 18 months have presented a particularly difficult challenge, with high numbers currently in bed & breakfast placements. All possible options for alternative provision are actively being pursued, including the possible use of local housing association accommodation scheduled for redevelopment as short life housing. Long-term solutions depend, to a large degree, on the availability of housing association vacancies, but the target should be to reduce use of bed & breakfast to single figures by the year-end.	Ongoing  KH / Hart HA	Homelessness demand continues to be high. New temporary staff member appointed with remit to reduce homelessness (ODPM funding). Homelessness Strategy Review in progress.
23	Ensure that full homelessness assessments are made. Case law earlier this year determined that full decisions should still be given where an applicant does not qualify under one of the grounds for homelessness. This affects very few cases, but is now being implemented.	Implemented	
24	Revise entire review procedure Complete review of homelessness review procedure completed, and checked by specialist homelessness consultant. New leaflet explaining the process also developed.	Implemented	
25	Ensure that correct advice is given on loss of temporary accommodation. All standard letters now revised, and checked by consultant.	Implemented	
26	Ensure that decision letters are clear on consideration of affordability. Affordability of last settled accommodation is always considered, although it is accepted that some decision letters may not have been clear on that process being undertaken.	Ongoing  Hart HA	Implemented

27	Ensure that appropriate assistance is given to 16/17 year olds. New Hampshire wide protocol on assistance for 16/17 year olds implemented from 1 January 2001. Housing advisors now see all applicants under 18.	Ongoing Hart HA	Implemented
28	Provide cover for Council contract manager. Employee within residential Environmental Health team identified as having an interest in homelessness issues. Training to be provided to ensure that homelessness service can continue in absence of contract manager.	Dec 01 KH	Housing services provision currently under review.
29	Appropriate separation of duties to be applied in managing temporary accommodation. Hart HA have recognised the need to separate in correspondence the two functions of homelessness management and collection of temporary accommodation charges. Letters confusing the two roles are to be eliminated.	April 01 Hart HA	Implemented
30	Improve homelessness prevention. The Council, in partnership with Hart HA and voluntary sector agencies, will seek to develop a strategy to improve homelessness prevention and services within the District.	April 02 KH / Hart HA	Strategy Review in progress.
31	Enable easy access to housing advisors. Hart HA to examine the role of their reception staff, and ensure that appropriate advice & assistance is given to all applicants.	April 01 Hart HA	Implemented

***Housing strategy & enabling***

32	Consider staffing levels. The service has been demonstrated to be very low cost against other authorities, but key targets are achieved. Increased resources to be considered within context of Community Plan consultation and other best value reviews, providing overall assessment of Council priorities.	Ongoing CCJ	No new resources.
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<p>33 Consultation process to be reviewed. Short summary sent to all interested parties, and consultation meeting held. Supported housing strategy follows similar process. Feedback could be improved, and options for increasing external involvement to be considered.</p>	<p>April 02 KH</p>	<p>Additional consultation will be incorporated in current strategy review.</p>
<p>34 Selection of housing association partners to be considered. The Council has three principal housing association partners, but others are brought in for specialist supported provision. A general needs new build programme of around 60 homes per annum probably does not justify any additional providers. The existing partners have worked in Hart for many years, and perform well against all others on performance indicator comparisons. To ensure transparency, however, it would be appropriate to consider an open selection process in the near future.</p>	<p>April 03 KH</p>	<p>Implemented</p>
<p>35 Ensure challenging targets are set. Targets have to be challenging but achievable. All those included within the housing strategy and the best value performance plan will be reviewed in that context.</p>	<p>July 02 KH</p>	<p>Part of this year's review</p>
<p>36 Black &amp; minority ethnic housing issues to be assessed. 2001 housing strategy acknowledges the need for more information, and to undertake further assessment of housing register applicants in this context. The need for continuing work in this area is acknowledged.</p>	<p>July 02 KH / Hart HA</p>	<p>Hart HA policy provided to HDC.</p>
<p>37 Address the wider government agenda for housing. Some elements of that agenda, such as housing and employment initiatives, are not particularly relevant when local employment is less than 1%. Other initiatives, such as the Egan agenda in construction, are being actively embraced at the large Elvetham Heath development. An appropriate local response should be formulated to all such initiatives.</p>	<p>Ongoing KH</p>	<p>To be more fully addressed as part of this year's review</p>

<p>38 Initiate a housing association forum. With only three principal partners, liaison takes place with each on a regular basis. All three are also working in a consortium to provide the affordable housing at Elvetham Heath. A regular 6 monthly forum has been established, however, with the first meeting set for 30 March.</p>	<p>Implemented</p>	
<p>39 Provision of cover for enabling service. Employee within strategic planning section identified to provide cover on funding of housing associations and enabling generally. Training to be provided within next 6 months.</p>	<p>Jan 02 KH</p>	<p>Housing Services provision currently under review.</p>
<p>40 Re-assess balance of tenure provision. Of 376 new affordable homes completed since 1994, 43 were for shared ownership. Current requirements usually suggest 15% rented and 10% shared ownership provision on larger sites. Assessment of whether provision is an appropriate response to local needs to be made.</p>	<p>Oct 02 KH</p>	<p>Currently reviewing balance of tenure.</p>
<p>41 Ensure that housing association design standards are agreed. The Housing Corporation Regional Policy Statement makes clear the Council's commitment to affordable warmth. The design standards of the Council's principal partners are similar, and meet Housing Corporation expectations, but it is recognised that summaries of those standards need to be agreed by all concerned.</p>	<p>Jan 02 KH</p>	<p>Not completed, still need to agree common design criteria with the 3 partner housing associations.</p>
<p>42 Involvement of housing associations in s106 sites. Housing associations are involved in negotiations on s106 sites (affordable housing through planning obligations on larger sites), but it is accepted that they could be more involved in finalising the wording of the affordable housing obligations.</p>	<p>April 01 KH</p>	<p>Implemented</p>

43	Consider more detailed assessment of affordable housing supply & demand. Projected supply of affordable housing known and itemised in detail. Demand assessed from both independent housing needs surveys and housing register assessments. Development of demand model to be considered in future housing needs surveys.	03 KH	Will be part of the Balancing Housing Markets review.
44	Consider greater use of service level agreements. Clear service specification included in contract for housing advice, register and homelessness. Other areas of service, including CABx, to be considered.	03 CCJ / KH	Need to revisit this service as part of the Homelessness Review.
45	Repeat peer review exercise for all housing services within the next two years, leading to an updated and revised improvement plan.	03 KH	

***Private sector housing – general***

46	Focus group for Environmental Health. The importance of stakeholder feedback is recognised and it is intended to set up a focus group to gauge public opinion of the overall standard of service provided by Environmental Health. It is expected that this process will begin early this year.	May 01 IT	Implemented
47	Use Hart DC citizens panel. The citizens panel to be used to gain customer feedback on current policy in relation to allocation of discretionary grants and other aspects of the housing service.	Dec 01 IT	Due to be involved in current review of Private Sector Renewal.

48	<p>Application for Charter Mark for residential Environmental Health. The Environmental Health residential team is currently working towards an application for Charter Mark; this will be submitted in June. A Technical Officer will be attending a training course to assist in this process and the team are producing the necessary procedures and supporting evidence to accompany the application. A customer feedback sheet is also being developed to demonstrate our response to suggestions/issues put forward by our customers.</p>	<p>June 01  IT</p>	<p>Charter Mark obtained December 01</p>
49	<p>Update and expand procedures. Whilst residential Environmental Health has a comprehensive range of procedures, these continually need to be updated. Specific attention will be given in the coming months to those procedures relating to grants and houses in multiple occupation.</p>	<p>Jan 02  NP</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
50	<p>Update and expand leaflets. An extensive set of Environmental Health leaflets is in place, and a range specific to private sector housing is being produced. It is also hoped to make these accessible to customers via the website.</p>	<p>Jan 02  NP</p>	<p>Website development ongoing</p>
51	<p>Website development. The Council's website is currently in a very early developmental stage as far as most sections are concerned. It is considered important to add information, particularly relating to grant policies to the website as soon as possible. In-house training has been organised to bring the basic skills into Environmental Health.</p>	<p>May 01  LD</p>	<p>Website development ongoing</p>
52	<p>Staff development. The team is generally short of experienced housing officers and has in the past encountered difficulties in its attempts to recruit such staff. Currently various officers are involved in training initiatives to fill this skills gap. A particular need relates to enforcement responsibilities on houses in multiple occupation. The sharing of information needs to continue through the cascade system. Provision made in training budget for specific courses.</p>	<p>March 02  NP</p>	<p>Recruitment &amp; retention issues persist. Shared HMO officer with Rushmoor BC could not be recruited</p>

<p>53 Public health shadowing project. Throughout this document there is a constant theme about the gains to be made from closer, more effective links with healthcare providers. Housing is a significant determinant of health, and the health services have significant numbers of staff actually visiting clients in their homes who can deliver wider messages than at present. This project is currently being planned, initially as a sharing exercise at manager level with the expectation that front line staff will commence the shadowing phase later this year.</p>	<p>Feb 01 NP</p>	<p>Project not proceeded with, but local Public Health Network has been formed</p>
<p>54 Information technology improvements. There continues to be a challenge in exploiting the full value of the software system we currently use, and additional training for relevant staff is planned within the budget. Specific areas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional data on unfit homes.</li> <li>• Incorporating use of standard letters for grants and monitoring the routine inspection programme of houses in multiple occupation.</li> <li>• Compiling information on the private rented sector generally.</li> </ul>	<p>Jan 02 MR</p>	<p>Some progress made</p>
<p>55 House condition &amp; energy efficiency survey. It is planned to repeat the recent survey in approximately four years time to update the data available to the authority to plan its future housing activities. Budgetary provision will need to be agreed nearer the date.</p>	<p>05 LD</p>	<p>Currently part of a Hampshire consortium working to secure surveys in 2003/4/5</p>
<p>56 Level of staff resources. The recent peer group review of the affordable housing service touched briefly on our private sector activity and recommended that the resourcing level of the service be reviewed. Priority will need to be considered within the context of Community Plan consultation and other best value reviews, providing an overall assessment of Council priorities.</p>	<p>April 02 NP</p>	<p>No additional resources</p>

<p>57 Benchmarking. There is a continuing need to produce comparative data and costs, so that this authority's activities can be robustly compared with those of other councils and, where appropriate, private sector suppliers. The current benchmarking exercise within the County is working to the following timetable: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality review matrix – completed Feb 01</li> <li>• Detailed cost comparison – June 01</li> <li>• Comparative data available – Nov 01</li> </ul>	<p>Nov 01  NP</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>58 <b>Peer review.</b> The Environmental Health peer review scheme within Hampshire, currently covering food safety and health &amp; safety, is to be expanded to include private sector housing.</p>	<p>April 02  NP</p>	<p>Peer review now scheduled for late 2003.</p>

***Private sector housing – home energy conservation***

<p>59 <b>Increase partnership schemes.</b> Increased use of partnerships can produce cost effective means of increasing activity. Schemes being proposed include condensing boilers, various DIY products and combined heat and power plants. Staffing resources will mainly come from the pilot project staff (see 63 below) and finance will be allocated from the already agreed budget.</p>	<p>Ongoing  LD</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>60 New Home Energy Efficiency Scheme training. This has strong linkages with the Fuel Poverty Strategy. Training would not just involve members of this team, but could include mobile wardens, reception staff, occupational therapists, CAB advisors, voluntary sector agencies, health &amp; social service staff. The Energy Action Grants Agency will provide free training.</p>	<p>Sept 01  LD</p>	<p>Warmfront training provided into voluntary sector</p>

61	<p>Health &amp; energy combined action programme. This project was established through Home Energy Conservation Act Action funding, and partners include the Energy Advice Centre, local authorities and two NHS Trusts. The aim is to highlight the links between health and energy efficiency in the home to householders in Hampshire, and to strengthen partnerships between local NHS trusts and local authority energy efficiency projects. This will be achieved through widespread publicity regarding insulation grants, and presentations to health professionals to promote energy efficiency as a preventative measure against cold-related ill health. The project is expected to develop into a Hampshire fuel poverty forum, led by the local Energy Efficiency Advice Centre.</p>	Jan 02  LD	Still being piloted in south of county.
62	<p><b>Improved monitoring.</b> Reliable information on improved energy efficiency within owner occupied homes is difficult to obtain, although the recent house condition survey was invaluable in demonstrating what has actually been achieved over the last four years. Plans are being made to include most of Hampshire in a cost-effective monitoring exercise. Given relatively low costs, this can be funded from the existing budget.</p>	May 01  LD	Monitoring problems continue, last years monitoring provided very poor results.
63	<p>Hampshire local authority support pilot. The continuation of this project is seen as vital to the authority's Home Energy Conservation Act programme due to the low level of internal resources. The modest financial provision can be made within the existing budget.</p>	April 02  LD	Ongoing

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***Private sector housing conditions***

64	Accident prevention in older people. Last year the Council hosted a very successful accident prevention conference. One result of that day was the suggestion of working groups being set up to co-ordinate activities, particularly with the voluntary sector, to reduce accidents. Statistics show that levels of accidents locally among the elderly are above national averages.	June 02 NP	Ongoing activity
65	Homecheck. This is a service aimed at the vulnerable, particularly the elderly, which will offer home visits to advise on a range of subjects, including repairs, security and energy efficiency. There is a significant implication as far as resources are concerned, and this will be considered within future budget setting.	April 02 NP	Has not started due to staffing issues at Staying Put Agency
66	Landlords forum. When resources allow, the proactive inspection of rented property should be expanded beyond houses in multiple occupation. In parallel with that initiative there will need to be increased contact with landlords. Clearly the data gathered under item 54 above will assist this process.	03 LD	Being discussed with Rushmoor BC

***Private sector housing – grants***

67	Reduce time of grant process, particularly Disabled Facilities Grants. The Disabled Facilities Grant process involves officers from both County and District Councils. Customer satisfaction surveys have shown up that the length of time a grant takes is a major issue. Larger grants can take several months from initial contact with Social Services to the completion of the works on site. Work will be carried out between both Councils to reduce the time taken to a minimum.	April 02 LD	Time reductions achieved particularly with Hart HA applications
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68	<p>Increased publicity. The recent focus group on grants highlighted the problem that the message about the availability of grants was not reaching many of the target audience. A display in the local library is planned and additional contact with local voluntary groups was recommended.</p>	Implemented	
69	<p>Action from internal audit of grants. The action points from the recent internal audit of grants will be implemented, with particular attention given to fraud prevention and means testing of grants in line with the verification framework.</p>	<p>Feb 01 NP / LD</p>	<p>Implemented, and second review has confirmed increased activity to verify financial claims.</p>
	<p>A. <i>Staying Put Service Tender</i>  <i>To tender, and expand if possible, the service in include enhanced speed of delivery and homecheck, plus possible inclusion of HECA work</i></p>	<p>April 02 NP</p>	<p>Implemented</p>