

## WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 7 SEPTEMBER 2009

EXECUTIVE – 3 NOVEMBER 2009

AUDIT COMMITTEE – 24 NOVEMBER 2009

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**Title:**

**PROGRESS REPORT: LANDLORD SERVICES AUDIT COMMISSION INSPECTION**

[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Keith Webster]

[Wards Affected: All]

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**Summary and purpose:**

This report, which was considered by the Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 September, provides members with a six-month update of the work completed by the housing staff following the Audit Commission inspection report on 15 January 2009. To identify any issues that may affect the ability to meet all the recommendations.

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**How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:**

The Audit Commission made five overarching recommendations that relate to three of the Council's Corporate Priorities.

**Priority Two: Improve the quality of life for all, particularly the more vulnerable in our society.** The recommendation to strengthen the focus on customer care includes developing an approach to financial inclusion and developing new methods of tenant engagement.

**Priority Four: Work for more subsidised affordable housing to be built, and to manage Council housing well.** All the recommendations will improve the way we manage our housing. The recommendations to strengthen the focus on equality and diversity, improve performance in service areas and strengthen performance management will advance our management.

**Priority Five: ensure all our activities are customer-focused and provide good value for money.** The Audit Commission made two recommendations that directly fit within this priority: to strengthen the focus on customer care; and to strengthen the approach to value for money within the housing service.

**Equality and Diversity Implications:**

Recommendation Two to strengthen the focus on equality and diversity includes comprehensive actions regarding Equality Impact Assessments, contractor equality and diversity compliance and tenant profiling to ensure access to all.

**Resource/Value for Money implications:**

Recommendation Three specifically addresses value for money with points on benchmarking, quality and cost, value for money targets and efficiency opportunities. The Council have previously agreed a £120,000 budget for 2009/10 to assist in the implementation of the recommendations.

### Legal Implications:

The requirement to review the Council's Tenancy Agreement will have legal implications.

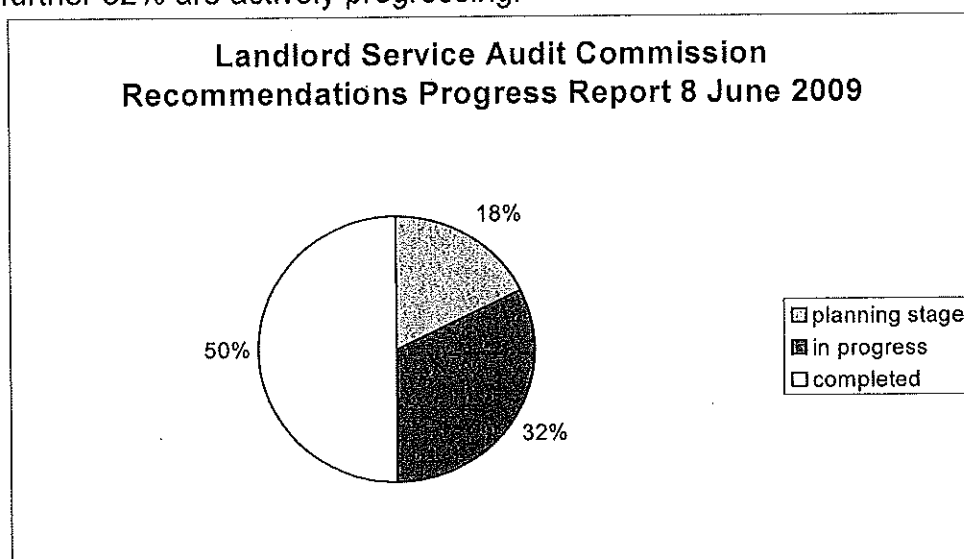
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### Background

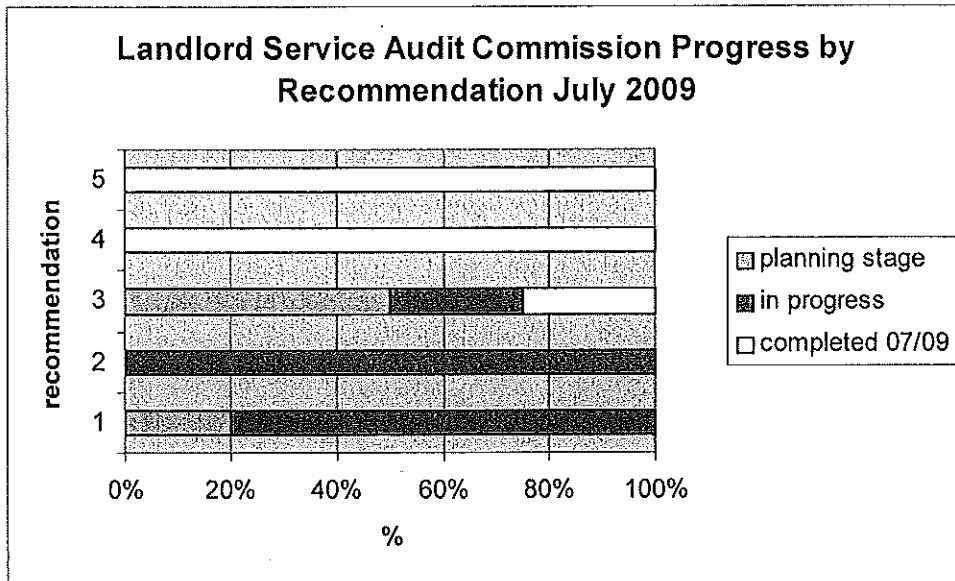
1. The Audit Commission inspected Waverley Borough Council's Landlord Services in Autumn 2008. The report was published on 15 January 2009 with five recommendations headers and 28 detailed recommendations for the service. Each recommendation has an implementation date, the earliest July 2009 and latest March 2010. The recommendations have formed the basis for the Service Plan for the Landlord service for 2009/2010.

### Introduction

2. Officers have a Housing Improvement Board chaired by John Swanton (Head of Housing) to implement the Audit Commission recommendations. The Board meet monthly to monitor progress and discuss any issues regarding implementation. The Board also "signs off" each completed recommendation.
3. Initially officers identified the relatively "quick to fix" recommendations to address promptly. Some of the recommendations were in hand before the recommendations were made. However a number of the recommendations are challenging and will take time to implement. Officers have started action planning for the larger recommendations.
4. The following charts give a pictorial indication of the progress made on the recommendations. 50% of the recommendations have been completed and a further 32% are actively progressing.



5. The below chart indicates progress made on each recommendation.



NB: The recommendations are not equal in terms of time and resources required.

### Completed Recommendations

#### **Improving performance in service areas.**

6. Officers have implemented all eight of the Audit Commission recommendations to improve performance in service delivery.
7. Officers undertook a comprehensive consultation exercise when creating the letters and forms informing tenants of asbestos in their homes. Draft letters were sent to the tenant consultation group and the Plain English organisation. Officers started sending letters in July 2009 and are programmed to have sent all the letters by the end of August. The phased approach is to ensure customer care with staff having capacity to deal with enquiries.
8. The cleaning contract was reviewed and a programme for each block was agreed in Spring 2009. Notice boards were placed in all communal areas in April 2009 to display the cleaning timetable and allow tenants to monitor the cleaning standard. The grounds maintenance specification was summarised and agreed in February 2009. The specifications differ for general estates and sheltered schemes. Housing staff monitor the contracts through tenant feedback and estate walkabouts. Three Environmental services staff manage the grounds maintenance contract with weekly, monthly and quarterly meetings with the contractor. Officers have noticed a fall in the number of calls relating to cleaning and grounds maintenance issues since the Spring.
9. The Executive agreed to formal consultation on a new tenancy agreement in July 2009. A draft updated tenancy agreement was created in March 2009 following a comprehensive review of all contract clauses and latest legislative requirements. The Tenants Panel reviewed this document and legal advice was sought to ensure clarity and legality. Formal consultation will commence at

the end of July with tenants having a month to respond. Depending on the level of response from the consultation the new tenancy agreement will be in effect by the end of November 2009 or mid January 2010. The Council considered the use of Introductory Tenancies in July 2009. Given the level of anti-social behaviour and current support available to tenants it was decided that there was currently no need for them in Waverley. This decision will be reviewed in three years time or earlier at the request of the Housing Portfolio Holder.

10. The Housing Services signed up to the Respect Standard for Housing Management in May 2009. The standard forms a key part of the Government's Respect initiative. Officers have worked through the self-assessment guidance ensuring all core commitments are met. Actions have including arranging Neighbourhood agreements and adding CCTV to interview rooms.
11. Officers have worked with the Tenants Panel and Estate Monitors to clarify their roles and responsibilities. Estate monitors are tenants, leaseholders or residents on estates who have volunteered to monitor the grounds maintenance contractors. In addition, they will report any vandalism, fly tipping and graffiti. The Estate Monitors may also attend walkabouts, give advice to others and hold relevant contact details for estate issues.
12. The 2009/10 Estate budget has £8,000 for each of the five estate areas, to address local tenant priorities identified through estate walkabouts and local meetings. Officers have completed 100% of the planned estate walkabouts and tenant led improvements have been made including bollard installation and additional fencing. Officers have also created a created database to record all actions and follow ups required. These reports will be added to notice boards.
13. Officers worked with Occupational Therapists in Spring 2009 to establish a clear priority criteria for applying for aids and adaptations. A service level agreement was agreed in May 2009 and the policy, procedure, application form and leaflet were all updated accordingly. During the review of the policy and procedure officers also used a "Toolkit" to identify areas for service improvement.

#### **Strengthen performance management**

14. Officers have implemented all four of the Audit Commission recommendations to strengthen performance management.
15. Officers have updated the Council website with Performance Indicators for 2008/9 and performance information has been included in Waverley Homes and People tenant magazine including a "What we did in 2008/9" article. The article highlighted the level of rent collection, decent homes works and work with tenants among other things.
16. The introduction of Sentinel an Anti-social behaviour software database in March 2009 has greatly improved case management. Moving away from paper files the system records all letters, notices and notes. Officers can access the system at any location in the borough with an internet connection. The Senior

Officers are able to monitor the quality and workload of staff and hold fortnightly case management meetings with each officer. An automated email notification is sent to senior officers if a racial or physical violence case is reported. The system also produces data for the Housemark benchmark group and Respect agenda statistics.

17. Officers reviewed the service action plans and identified new measures and outcomes to ensure the tasks are explained and understood. As part of the process officers worked with the Corporate Development Officer to develop SMART guidance for all staff when creating action plans.

### **Progress on Recommendations**

18. Strengthen focus on customer care:

Officers have appointed TPAS to review the current Tenant Engagement arrangements to seek advice on how to widen involvement. The review will start in July and recommendations are expected in January 2010. Officers have launched a Tenants Blog and held DIY training, which was targeted to younger tenants.

19. Officers held Mystery Shopping training for tenants in June. The mystery shopping exercise is being held in July. The exercise will be reviewed in August and recommendations made on how to improve and develop mystery shopping further. Members of the Tenants Panel will shortly resume quality checking void properties following the appointment of a new Chair.

20. Strengthen focus on equality and diversity:

Officers are developing the information held about tenants to help delivery appropriate services. The Rents team completed some tenant profiling on tenants in April 09 to identify potential poor payers and to develop preventative measures. The Repairs team identified properties for "property MOTs" where three or more out of hours emergency appointments had been made or where no repairs had been requested for over 12 months.

21. Officers developed a work plan to create a rolling programme of Equality impact assessments. So far nine Equality impact assessments have been completed on key policy and strategy documents.

22. In December 2008 Officers surveyed our main contractors to ensure compliance with their Equality and Diversity policies and codes of conduct. Recommendations were made to contractors following the survey and Repairs and Maintenance staff are reviewing these at their monthly monitoring meetings.

23. Strengthen the approach to value for money:

As part of the appraisal process in July 2009 each member of staff will receive a value for money target.

24. Managers received Value for Money training from HQN consultants in June 2009 to assist them in developing a Value for Money Strategy and Value for Money reviews of service areas. Officers will work with the Landlord Services SIG to develop this approach over the coming months.

### **Conclusion**

25. Officers have made a good progress with implementing the Audit Commission recommendations. All 12 recommendations with a July deadline have been met and a further two have been completed. The six month review illustrates that progress has been made in all areas. Officers have a clear action plan and are on target to meet the second implementation date of September 2009.

26. **Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee welcomed the progress being made on implementing the Audit Commission's recommendations, endorsed the contents of the report and agreed that officers continue to implement the Audit Commission recommendations.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Executive endorse the report.

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### **Background Papers (SDC)**

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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### **CONTACT OFFICER:**

**Name:** Annalisa Howson

**Telephone:** 01483 523453

**E-mail:** [ahowson@waverley.gov.uk](mailto:ahowson@waverley.gov.uk)