Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee Report
Report of Head of Housing Advice Services
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Housing Advice Services
Service Plan and performance management

Recommendation to Committee
That the Committee considers the service plan performance management information and identifies any areas of performance that require further information or updates.

Reason for Recommendation:
To continue to develop the service planning and performance management process and identify areas for improvement.

1. Purpose of Report
1.1 At its meeting on 25 July 2013, the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee discussed the value of receiving regular performance management information and agreed that officers would produce a schedule of heads of service to attend its committee meetings with the relevant lead councillor to provide further information on their area of performance.
1.2 This report outlines the work of the Housing Advice Service, the first service on this schedule to be considered.

2. Strategic Priorities
2.1 The Housing Advice Service is primarily responsible for addressing housing need in the borough. We carry out a range of activities that contribute to this, and in doing so seek to meet the Council’s strategic priorities and key delivery targets (KDTs).
2.2 Our annual service plan sets out the objectives we hope to achieve during the year and our performance indicators that provide information about our service delivery and help us ensure we manage the service effectively, improve the
quality of our services and deliver the Council’s Key Strategic Priority of Excellence and Value for Money.

2.3 Our wider role in meeting housing need also contributes to the strategic priorities of creating a safe and vibrant community and supporting a dynamic economy.

3. **Overview of Housing Advice Services**

3.1 The Housing Advice Service is responsible for a range of functions, the majority of which are the strategic and enabling non-landlord services that exist in all councils including those that have disposed of their housing stock. We do however support and deliver some aspects of the Council landlord service where this fits within our wider service role. Similarly, we also work with Health and Community Care services, particularly in respect of private sector housing.

3.2 As a service our vision is that “everyone should have a home that meets their needs” and “with early intervention homelessness can be prevented in almost every case”. This sets the bar very high given the demanding environment and challenges we face on a day-to-day basis.

3.3 We have 35.46 full time equivalent (FTE) staff, excluding the Head of Service. The five teams who deliver different aspects of our work are listed below.

**Housing Development (3 FTE)**

This small team of three is responsible for securing the provision of new affordable housing on both Council owned land and on private developments. Their work includes:

- identifying sites and assessing their suitability and viability for development,
- working closely with Neighbourhood and Housing Management Services to bring forward sites for development in Council ownership,
- negotiating Section 106 planning agreements in consultation with Planning Officers and Registered Providers.

The Development Manager, is also responsible for co-ordinating the Council’s Housing Strategy, which addresses cross tenure housing issues. One of the team provides strategy and business support across the whole service.

**Re-housing and Information (14.5 FTE)**

This is the largest team and is comprised of three smaller teams dealing with a number of different work areas including:

- front line customer service on the housing advice desk
- managing the housing needs register including applications from tenants seeking to transfer, mutual exchanges and those seeking low cost home ownership options
- housing allocations and nominations to Registered Providers through Guildford Homechoice, voids management and lettings

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1 Housing associations and other social housing landlords
2 Our online choice based lettings system.
Agenda item number: 5

- securing private rented homes for those facing homelessness and administering our Homes4U rent deposit service
- business and administrative support across all the whole service.

**Homelessness Prevention (8.14 FTE)**
This team undertakes a number of work areas including our statutory homelessness functions. This includes:
- seeking to help prevent homelessness, dealing with homelessness applications, making statutory decisions and the provision of emergency housing or temporary accommodation
- commissioning and managing service contracts, such as: the Homeless Outreach and Support Team (HOST) that works with rough sleepers; the money advice service provided by Guildford and Ash Citizens’ Advice Bureaux, our employment support project and the properties leased to Rosebery Housing Association that we use to prevent homelessness
- implementing the homelessness prevention strategy service and joint working with other agencies.

**Supported Housing (3.82 FTE)**
We have five supported housing schemes for vulnerable people below pension age with mental health issues, learning disabilities and drug and alcohol problems. This service provides comprehensive housing management and support and is part funded by Surrey Council under a Supporting People contract.

**Family Support (6 FTE)**
We have recently established a new service as part of the Countywide Family Support Programme to work with ‘troubled families’ across the borough. The service provides intensive support based upon a ‘team around the family’ model. We are jointly funding the service with Surrey County Council until March 2015.

3.4 Our expenditure is met by both the General Fund (GF) and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to reflect both services to the community and relevant housing management activities. The following table sets out the budget provision of the service for our main cost centre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost centre</th>
<th>Estimate 2013-14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable housing development (GF)</td>
<td>£211,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness and emergency accommodation including (GF)</td>
<td>£1,103,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary accommodation hostels management (HRA)</td>
<td>£5,380</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Cost centres are combined to show main areas of expenditure. Some costs fall in the General Fund and others the Housing Revenue Account.
### Table: Service Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing Advice (GF)</td>
<td>£284,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Registers and tenant selection (HRA)</td>
<td>£350,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Void Control (HRA)</td>
<td>£199,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supported Housing (HRA)</td>
<td>£397,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Support (GF)</td>
<td>£205,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£2,751,690</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5 Our service plan, attached at Appendix 1, includes the main work areas and projects we plan to address over the coming year. Along with our service plan, our housing strategy and homelessness strategy provide the wider framework for our service delivery. Each strategy has its own comprehensive action plan but the service plan will only include those actions that we consider appropriate. For example, the new homelessness strategy has 76 individual actions within the plan so their inclusion would make the service plan unmanageable.

3.6 The service plan and strategy action plans link to the personal appraisal targets of managers, teams and where relevant to individual members of staff.

3.7 There are 19 actions in the current service plan that vary in both complexity and size. We are a relatively small service and the team managers all have demanding operational roles so the service plan takes account of our capacity to deliver the various objectives as well. We consider what we must do, such as responding to legislative change or a corporate priority, along with what we want to do that reflects our ambition to drive forward our service delivery.

3.8 As there is a link to staff appraisal targets, we try to include actions in the service plan that apply to each team or service so that the plan is directly relevant to their day-to-day work. This can sometimes prove challenging as there are times when some team duties are routine and have limited involvement in any of the service plan priorities. For example, there is nothing in the plan this year specifically related to the supported housing service. In contrast, establishing the Family Support Programme is an important service plan objective that involves considerable work and stages of development that will involve the whole team.

3.9 The service plan is dynamic and may change over the year with initial timeframes often being uncertain. Some actions may also carry over to the next year or be deferred due to unforeseen factors such as the complexity of the objective requiring more work than initially expected.

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4 These figures include some costs recharged to the service from other services and likewise some of our costs are recharged to other cost centres. For example, the affordable housing cost centre includes some allocation of planning salaries whilst some salaries are allocated to housing management or community care cost centres.
4. Performance indicators

4.1 The service plan includes our quarterly and annual performance data. The performance management process includes key performance indicators (KPIs) at three levels:
Level 1: Performance information reported to Management Team and councillors
Level 2: Performance information reported by heads of service to their strategic director
Level 3: Management information used by services to monitor performance

Level 1

4.2 We have one KPI at Level 1.
‘The number of affordable homes delivered’
This is a Council KDT and the measure is based on the previous Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) National Indicator (NI) 155.

4.3 We have not had a target for this indicator since March 2012. Our previous target was to deliver 400 new affordable homes between 2008 and 2012. Unfortunately, we did not meet the target for a number of reasons including the economic situation, the limited land availability and lack of S106 sites coming forward, funding difficulties and other site specific delays.

4.4 Officers felt that it was not appropriate to set a new target until there was greater clarity about the future funding and delivery of affordable housing following the introduction of the Affordable Rent Model by the Homes and Communities Agency in 2011, the HRA financial reforms and our lack of an overall housing number agreed by the Council.

4.5 39 new affordable homes have been completed since April 2012 and no further homes are likely to be handed over before the end of March 2014. The position is set to improve from 2014-15, as the Council is now able to build its own housing again, with a number of sites under direct development and as further Registered Provider sites are now progressing.

4.6 This PI illustrates the complexity of setting performance targets when we only have limited control in meeting any target we set. Many factors affect the timescales for delivery of affordable housing most of which are outside the control of the Council. The outcome of the target is largely reliant on the efficiency of developers and those acting on their behalf, purchasing land, gaining planning permission, tendering processes, funding availability, the economy and various unforeseen circumstances such as the weather. It is extremely common for sites to be delayed by several months and slip into the next financial year despite the best efforts of all those involved.

4.7 Whilst setting a target for affordable housing is potentially difficult, this does not mean we should not set one. On the contrary, as this is a key priority it makes sense to have a target but we need to ensure there is the necessary framework in place to make achieving the target feasible.

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5 An interim housing number pending the new Local Plan was agreed in May 2012.
4.8 It can take at least two to three years from the initial identification of a possible affordable housing site before work starts on site and then the construction period is normally over a year excluding unforeseen delays. Even where planning permission is in place, economic factors, financial pressures, political and legislative changes can all affect this process. It is therefore sensible to set any target for affordable housing over a number of years as this provides an opportunity to make adjustments and review resources and input to the delivery. We can set optimistic targets or much more cautious ones but we must acknowledge and manage the risk if we fail to meet the targets we set.

4.9 The Corporate Plan advises that we will enable 200 new affordable homes by March 2016. We are also reviewing our Interim Housing Strategy Statement and officers are considering proposing a longer-term target for affordable housing delivery. There is potential for between 200 and 400 additional affordable homes to be developed by the end of 2017 but this is very much dependent on planning permission being agreed and the finance being available. The timescale will also be dependent upon the state of the economy and housing market.

**Level 2**

4.10 There are two Level 2 KPIs and both relate to homelessness.

*The number of households living in temporary accommodation*\(^6\)

This is the same as the previous DCLG (NI) 156 and reflects the position on the last day of each quarter.

*The average number of rough sleepers.*

This is based on the DCLG definition of a rough sleeper\(^7\) and records a census carried out by the Homeless Outreach and Support Team (HOST) on the last day of every month with the average calculated over the quarter and year for the final output.

4.11 These indicators were originally set at Level 2 because the position is potentially worsening. In both instances, we have also adjusted and relaxed the target to reflect the current situation of increasing homelessness.

4.12 The number of homeless households in temporary accommodation reduced dramatically from a peak of 180 in 2002-3 to 15 in 2006-7 reflecting the success of our strategy to reduce homelessness. From April 2007, we set a new target of 10 households in temporary accommodation. We met this target until 2011-12 when the figure increased to 27 and only reduced to 25 in 2013. Given that we expect homelessness to continue to increase, we agreed a higher target of 30 from April 2013.

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\(^6\) Definition: Households accepted as homeless under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 and placed in temporary accommodation (as reported in the quarterly P1e return to DCLG).

\(^7\) Definition: People sleeping in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments), or in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or “bashes”). The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or travellers.
4.13 This change in target could be seen to lack challenge and to simply accept the situation but leaving it at 10 would make it unachievable, setting us up to fail for the foreseeable future. This can be de-motivating for staff as they will not see the target as realistic and are likely to ignore it, which defeats the object. Homelessness is a difficult and challenging work area and we have a highly motivated and caring team so it is important that any targets are potentially achievable. We have met the revised target for the first quarter of this year with 25 households in temporary accommodation as of 30 June 2013. Our numbers are also much lower than those for most other Surrey councils.

4.14 We will keep the target at level 2 to ensure we manage the use of temporary accommodation effectively. However, there is a possibility that we may need to vary the target again in future if homelessness continues to increase with the impact of welfare reform.

4.15 The government set our original rough sleeping target of two in 1998, following a successful bid for funding under the final phase of the Rough Sleeper Initiative. This initiative sought to reduce rough sleeping nationally by two thirds by 2002. The target was set following a street count carried out in November 1997 that found eight rough sleepers in and around the town centre area\. An earlier count carried out in June of that year found 25 people sleeping rough but this was not an official count so did not influence the target. It does however illustrate the historic scale of the problem at that time.

4.16 We met the government target in 2003 and maintained the target until 2008-9 when the numbers began creeping up. We increased the target in 2012-13 to six but our outturn was 7.92 with the number varying from five to eleven over the course of the year. The most recent figure as of 31 August 2013 was nine.

4.17 We have limited ability to control the numbers of people who sleep rough in the borough as it occurs for a variety of reasons, and rough sleepers often come to Guildford from other areas as we have more hostels and services that help single homeless people. We commission the front line outreach work carried out by HOST from Stonham\. This target is included in their service contract and they have to account for the numbers through our contract management arrangements.

4.18 This is a challenging target because Stonham is also reliant on the cooperation of the night shelter and hostels in Guildford and challenges such as people with no recourse to public funds, those with difficult and risky behaviour, complex needs and drug and alcohol problems. Although Stonham is responsible for delivering the day-to-day service, the Council does have an important role in ensuring multi agency buy-in and support and brokering local arrangements between services.

4.19 We could also make a difference to the number if we were to relax our housing allocation policy and make all rough sleepers a priority for housing, but this would have wider consequences such as encouraging people to come to the borough

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8 The area for the count (and subsequent ones) was agreed with the police and agencies working with rough sleepers based on local intelligence.

9 Stonham is the supported housing arm of Home Group, a large registered provider.
to be housed. This would potentially increase the problem, and given our limited supply of housing, would reduce the opportunity for those with a local connection.

4.20 There is a risk that rough sleeping will continue to increase so we need to monitor the situation carefully, understand the trends, and work with our partners locally and across the county. As part of this process, HOST produce detailed monitoring information under their contract, which also includes performance targets in addition to the overall number of rough sleepers.

**Level 3**

4.21 There are a number of Level 3 performance indicators. These cover individual service areas or functions, and some are for the whole service including common indicators for each service such as:

- **full time equivalent employees head count**
- **percentage of service plan actions on track**

4.22 The majority of the Level 3 indicators are simply statistics used to monitor trends including demand for service, such as the number of callers to the housing advice desk. This is useful important management information and this example is very relevant to our customer care strategy and resource management. We had 8,292 face-to-face customers in 2012-13 which represented a rise of just over eight per cent on 2011-12 which is significant, compared to the previous year where we had a 16 per cent rise from 2010-11. This trend is going in the wrong direction in terms of our customer service corporate objective to reduce footfall and encourage ‘channel shift’, but reflects the public demand for housing advice in the present economic environment and is consistent with the other trends we are seeing.

4.23 Other indicators count ‘outputs’ such as the number of re-lets, nominations, mutual exchanges and so on. Again, these provide relevant data but with this we may also measure outcomes that have time based targets attached that measure performance. For example:

- the target for Housing Needs Register application processing is 95 per cent to be processed within five days
- the number of mutual exchanges is recorded and there is a target of 100 per cent to be processed within 42 days
- the target for re-lets of general need void properties is 17 days.

4.24 Some areas of our performance have direct cost implications such as the void period. The longer a property is vacant, the more rent we lose. This is a Housing Advice specific target as we deal with tenancy terminations, allocations and lettings. However, the performance of the housing management repairs service affects the void period. Some properties can be in a very poor state of repair and the work to put it right may take a number of weeks, lengthening the void period. Careful monitoring is therefore required to ensure we work closely and minimise any loss of income.

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10 Empty homes are referred to as voids.
4.25 We also include qualitative measures such as those around customer satisfaction. We carry out an annual Housing Advice Service satisfaction survey as part of our overall Customer Excellence work. We do not currently have a corporate customer satisfaction target so set our own target of 80 per cent; we achieved an outcome of 90 per cent in 2011-12 and 95 per cent in 2012-13. We report the satisfaction of tenants within our supported housing service annually as part of our Surrey County Council Supporting People contract, and this feeds into the main tenants’ satisfaction outcomes. It is very pleasing to note that we have recorded 100 per cent satisfaction since being required to carry out this survey in 2010-11.

4.26 The performance indicators and details of all the statistical information we collect are attached as appendix 2.

**Reviewing indicators**

4.27 Performance indicators are only meaningful if they are relevant and tell you useful information about your business or service. Monitoring trends is just as relevant as measuring outcomes if applied in the right way. The commentary about the Level 1 and 2 indicators illustrates the difficulties involved in setting targets that we have limited ability to control. It also highlights the need to review targets in the light of changing circumstances.

4.28 At times monitoring information may highlight concerns that require closer attention and possible escalation from level 3 to level 2. Currently this is a possibility for our use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) type accommodation for homeless households in an emergency. The number of households in B&B is included in the quarterly temporary accommodation figure but not separately identified. It also only reflects the number on the last day of the quarter, not the cumulative picture. In 2012-13, we made 35 B&B placements over the whole year but were also concerned that the placements were for longer periods. This increased our expenditure and resulted in an associated overspend in the budget by some £8,000 (although the overall budget was not overspent). We have begun much closer continual monitoring since April, but, despite doing so, we are increasingly needing to use B&B. We have had as many as eight households in this type of accommodation at any one time and had made 28 placements by the end of August 2013. The budget is also under pressure with a risk of overspend. We do know that one factor influencing this is staff capacity. We are currently carrying a staff vacancy for a Homelessness Prevention Officer and there has been some sickness within the team. Although we are recruiting, these positions are difficult to fill and the calibre of agency staff carrying out this work is very variable. Experience has taught us that interim staff need very close supervision, and this puts extra pressure on the team because they need to teach new staff our local systems, procedures and resources. That said, homelessness is increasing and other councils are in similar positions, with many in a much worse position than we are. Although not formally escalated to Level 2, we are raising these figures to strategic director level.

4.29 As with the service plan, not all the statistics we collect are in the current version of the plan. For example, we have yet to include any performance information about the Family Support Programme. Surrey County Council (SCC) has given
us an overall target to help 137 families by March 2015. This figure is derived from their government target of 1050 families that they split down to borough and district level, based on their data about families meeting the criteria for the programme. We are currently collating information for SCC and are assessing what data we need for measuring local performance and activity together with any other local targets.

4.30 We also carry out annual equalities monitoring of our housing registers and allocations, publishing an annual report in the councillors’ newsletter *Wey Ahead*\(^1\). This year we have extended this report to include our housing options work. This is not included in the service plan as an action or as a performance indicator.

5. **Financial implications**

5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report but the link between performance management and both our income and expenditure is clear.

5.2 We currently receive significant annual grant funding from the DCLG which pays for a number of our core homelessness and housing advice services. This grant is not ring-fenced. The homelessness amount included in the 2013-14 settlement and 2014-15 provisional settlement is approximately £352,000 each year. This will be the last time that we will be able to identify the homelessness element of the total settlement, as in future it will be included in the Business Rates Retention Scheme\(^2\). Given that our settlement is likely to reduce in future years\(^3\), we will need to seek ways of improving our efficiency to ensure our services are cost-effective and demonstrate value for money.

5.3 We also need to ensure that we understand the economic environment in which we operate so we can plan for the future. We need to take account of the income levels of our customers and potential customers, the wider impact of welfare reform on our community and the changing housing market.

6. **Legal implications**

6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7. **Human Resource implications**

7.1 There are no human resource implications arising from the report.

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\(^{1}\) The 2012-13 report is scheduled will be included by the end of September 2013. The previous report was in edition 89.

\(^{2}\) For 2013-14, we can see that £207,048 was included within our Revenue Support Grant and £144,925 within the Baseline Funding Level that forms part of the new business rates retention scheme. In future years, it will not be separately identified. We expect our overall grant to fall in 2014-15 although the DCLG has indicated that this settlement will still include the £351,973 for homelessness prevention.

\(^{3}\) When the Comprehensive Spending Review takes place in 2014 we expect it to lead to further reductions from 2015-16.
8. **Issues for Scrutiny**

8.1 The Committee may wish to consider whether the current set of performance measures provide a good overall assessment of the performance of the service. The Committee may also wish to consider the following:

- Do you consider that the Housing Advice Service Plan Services strikes the right balance between corporate, strategic and operational priorities?
- Do you think there should be any other Level 1 indicators?
- Do you think there should be any other Level 2 indicators?
- Do you think our current targets are relevant?
- Do you think the targets are sufficiently challenging?
- Do you think there are other targets that should be set?
- Do you think we should remove some targets?
- Do you think we should be monitoring anything else?
- Do you think we should cease to monitor anything we do at present?
- Do you have any other comments or observations?

9. **Conclusion**

9.1 The service planning and performance management process underpins the quality of our service and directly affects our customers. We need to ensure that it supports the Council’s Corporate Plan strategic priorities and Key Delivery Targets.

9.2 We will keep the plan and KPIs under review to ensure that they remain relevant and reflect current and future needs. The plan must also drive internal service improvement and focus on cost effectiveness and value for money.

10. **Background Papers**

Housing Advice Service Plan 2012-13 (available on the intranet)
Housing Advice Service Plan 2013-14 (available on the intranet)

11. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 Housing Advice Service Plan 2013-14 (abridged version)
Appendix 2 Housing Advice Performance Indicators and statistics summary