

# District Council CPA Self-assessment Pro-forma for Meeting the Decent Homes Standard

1. What is the council trying to achieve in relation to the standard? Does the council know the condition of their housing stock and their compliance with the decent homes standard?

SUB DHS QUESTIONS	COUNCIL STATEMENT
<p>1.1 What is the council trying to achieve in relation to the standard?</p>	<p>As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2003, we had 2186 council homes in the Borough. Investment strategies for the council housing stock have been based on the Borough as a whole, with little need to disaggregate the stock for investment purposes based on, for example, construction type, age, stock condition, demand factors and turnover. This approach has taken into account the very traditional nature of council housing in the Borough (see section 2.5 of the HRA Business Plan 2003/04).</p> <p><b>The key elements for meeting the decent homes standard have been:</b></p>
<p>1.2 How good is the base information to help the council understand what needs to be done to meet the DHS?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stock condition based on a stock condition survey carried out in 2000;</li> <li>• Demand for council housing based on needs surveys, analysis of the housing waiting list and interaction with other housing providers and related organisations in the Borough;</li> <li>• Customer needs based on tenant customer consultation;</li> <li>• Life cycling and age of building components within the housing stock, including future risk of failure. This is based on the above stock condition survey and a comprehensive (desk top) review of component age and life expectancy of all properties within the housing stock;</li> <li>• Homes that currently do not meet the decent homes standard (there are currently 108 such homes in the Borough); and</li> <li>• Rate of component failure (and consequent impact on day to day repairs).</li> </ul>
<p>1.3 Has the council evaluated a range of options which would enable it to achieve the DHS and</p>	<p><b>The key dynamics for meeting the decent homes standard have been:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing stock levels through right to buy sales: over 80 homes are estimated to be sold per year over the next 5 years. We recognise that this activity will be extremely important in any appraisal of housing stock options. Whilst receipts from the sale of council housing augments substantially the Housing Investment Programme (HIP), enabling us to address non-decency at the present time, future sales are forecast to reduce significantly over the longer term period. This will impact adversely on our ability to deliver decent homes as the unit cost per dwelling becomes, as a result, unsustainable;</li> <li>• As a result of right to buy patterns, we estimate an increasing number of tenant customers will be reliant on benefits. This is likely to have an impact on demand for services, in particular repairs;</li> </ul>

<p><b>other objectives?</b></p> <p><b>1.4 Are there robust strategies and plans in place to help the council meet the DHS?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing priorities at local, regional and national level. The development of the regional housing strategy exemplifies how priorities will influence the direction of future resources at a regional level, where emphasis is very likely to be placed on housing renewal activity at a real risk of meeting decent homes across the region;</li> <li>• New arrangements for the allocation of future housing investment programme resources from April 2004. Over the longer term period such resources will be allocated on a different basis, thereby creating uncertainty about the ability to meet the decent homes standard and meet key objectives for improving private sector housing;</li> <li>• Age of the housing stock, this and all elements and facilities getting older and requiring new and modern installations;</li> <li>• Tenant customers aspirations and expectations for improving services and facilities; and</li> <li>• Corporate strategy with its emphasis on developing Partnering Arrangements for the procurement of services. In delivering the decent homes standard, the development of such arrangements has been both a necessity and key achievement in order to ensure the sustainability of a local contractor base within the Borough, and in turn the delivery of value for money services to tenant customers (see section 2.4 of the HRA Business Plan).</li> </ul> <p>In developing our plans and strategies that impact on meeting the decent homes standard, we have carried out the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set objectives and targets for meeting decent homes standard and improving the housing stock overall;</li> <li>• Consulted and involved tenant representatives in the development of plans and programmes;</li> <li>• Reviewed stock condition and base information;</li> <li>• Reviewed the resources that are likely to be available to the Council over the medium and long term;</li> <li>• Reviewed housing stock options appraisal and established further groundwork to be undertaken over the next 12 months that will involve elected members and tenant representatives. This work will help to determine which option(s) will enable us to achieve the decent homes standard and other objectives; and</li> <li>• Developed a Housing Investment Programme that sets out all capital schemes for improving the housing stock over the next 5 years and meeting decent homes targets.</li> </ul> <p>Around these activities, we have developed a Business Plan, based on 30 year financial forecasts, that sets out a robust Action Plan and targets for delivering a range of improvements to the housing stock and services provided under the Housing Revenue Account.</p>
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**2. Is the council delivering its plans to meet the decent homes standard?**

KEY DHS QUESTIONS	COUNCIL STATEMENT
<p><b>2.1 Has the council maximised its capacity to deliver the DHS?</b></p> <p><b>2.2 Are work programmes designed to meet the DHS and have these been delivered?</b></p>	<p><b>QUESTION 2 – MEETING THE DECENT HOMES STANDARD</b></p> <p>The HRA Business Plan and associated work has been developed by a small cross-authority working group comprising housing, technical and finance staff. Development of this years Plan has been very much influenced by the outcomes of the BVR of planned maintenance services. This work was lead by representatives across all council departments.</p> <p>A key outcome of the above BVR has been the introduction of Partnering, based on the Rethinking Construction approach. This has been established in partnership with Berwickshire Housing Association for the procurement of building maintenance and associated services (see section 2.4 of the HRA Business Plan). The main thrust to the introduction of this initiative has been increasing concern about the availability of skilled tradesmen and associated specialist skills in the Borough and surrounding area. Partnering will be delivered for all major repair schemes under a Strategic Partnering Agreement with Berwickshire Housing Association. This initiative not only represents a key partnership, upon which further partner organisations can be involved, but has put in place a robust strategy for delivering decent homes in the Borough.</p> <p>It is also recognised that our work towards delivering the DHS contributes significantly to the economic regeneration of the Borough. As such regeneration, which continues to play a key role in shaping corporate priorities, is supported by housing activity through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing high quality and affordable housing;</li> <li>• Improving the quality of life on housing estates;</li> <li>• Enabling new affordable housing for younger and newly formed households (to retain the younger age groups in the Borough); and</li> <li>• Delivery of improvement programmes to the housing stock and the introduction of Partnering Agreements with public and private partners.</li> </ul>

Our key achievements in the delivery of the HIP have been:

- Meeting targets for reducing the number of non-decent homes in the Borough. The delivery of a range of HIP schemes during 2002/03 has enabled us to make a significant step in meeting our target that by 2004, at least 40% of non-decent homes within the Borough will meet the decent homes standards. As a result of the schemes that will be delivered during 2003/04, we will meet this target in full by 2004. More importantly, we believe these improvements have been welcomed enormously by tenant customers and are largely in line with their priorities for improving their homes;
- The delivery of the HIP to date has also contributed towards maintaining healthy and sustainable demand for council housing in the Borough, including in formerly more difficult to let estates in Eastcliffe;
- The HIP continues to contribute significantly towards the economic regeneration of the Borough, as highlighted above; and
- The introduction of Partnering Arrangements for the procurement of all planned maintenance services and HIP schemes, as highlighted above.

### **QUESTION 3 – MEETING THE DECENT HOMES STANDARD**

A working group comprising housing, technical and finance staff meets on a bi-monthly basis to monitor and review progress in delivering the Housing Investment Programme. This group focuses on the delivery of individual schemes against the overall timetable, spend against budgetary estimates, quality of work carried out and performance of contractors.

A review of stock condition alongside overall performance in meeting the decent homes targets set, is carried out annually in preparation for submission of the business plan to Government Office for the North East. The plan has also become a key working document internally for developing financial forecasts and estimating decent homes delivery in future years.

In general terms, a key lesson learned from the development of plans and strategies has been the need to set realistic targets for delivering improvements. Being a very small local authority, resources, both human and financial, can be scarce and planning is all the more significant. With regard to meeting the DHS specifically, and following the development of our most recent business plan, we have learned not to take for granted that the HRA will remain 'healthy' as it has done for a number of years, unlike the General Fund. As a result we have put in place mechanisms to review the overall financial health of the HRA in the very near future, rather than leave this situation until it becomes a crisis. This approach will enable us over the next 12 months to properly assess whether we can deliver the DHS through stock retention in the medium to longer term, or whether alternative options for the housing stock have got to be developed.

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**3. How well does the council monitor its progress and how effectively does this feed into future strategies and plans?**

<b>KEY DHS QUESTIONS</b>	<b>COUNCIL STATEMENT</b>
<p><b>3.1 How well does the council monitor its progress towards meeting the DHS?</b></p> <p><b>3.2 How well does the council learn from itself and from others?</b></p>	<p><b><u>QUESTION 3 – MEETING THE DECENT HOMES STANDARD</u></b></p>