

Strategic Housing Services

Craven District Council

July 2009



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Local Authority Housing Inspections

The Audit Commission is an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money is spent economically, efficiently and effectively and delivers high-quality local services for the public.

Within the Audit Commission, the Housing Inspectorate inspects and monitors the performance of a number of bodies and services. These include local authority housing departments, local authorities administering Supporting People programmes, arms length management organisations and housing associations. Our key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) set out the main issues which we consider when forming our judgements on the quality of services. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/housing.

This inspection has been carried out by the Housing Inspectorate using powers under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. In broad terms, these principles look to minimise the burden of regulation while maximising its impact. To meet these principles this inspection:

- is proportionate to risk and the performance of the Council;
- judges the quality of the service for service users and the value for money of the service;
- promotes further improvements in the service; and
- has cost no more than is necessary to safeguard the public interest.

Summary

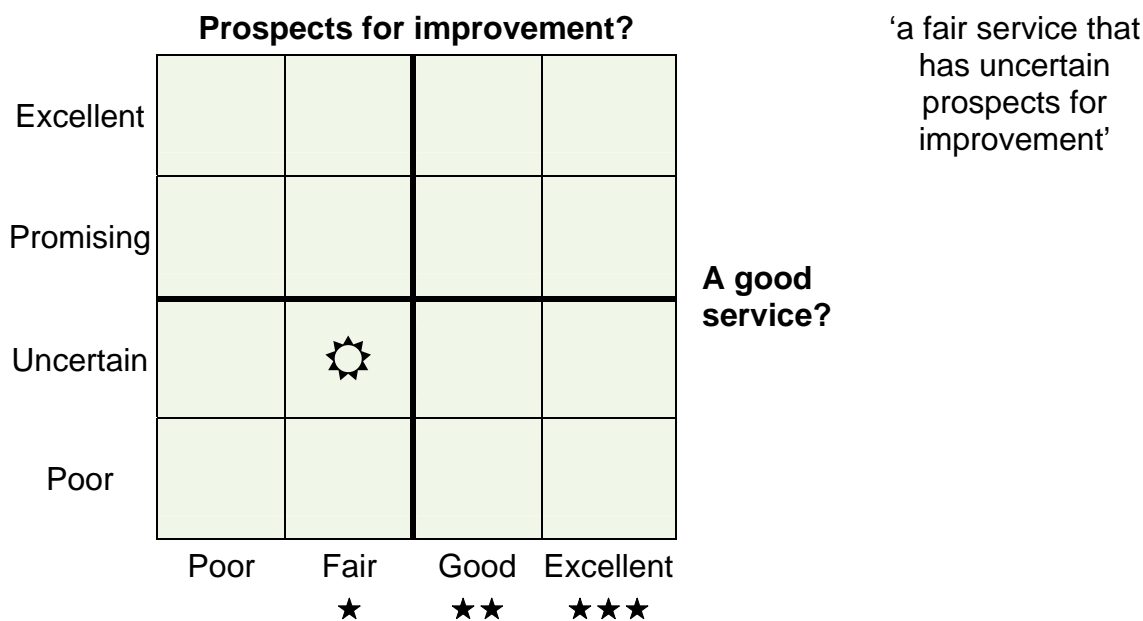
- 1 Craven District Council is providing a fair one star strategic housing service that has uncertain prospects for improvement.
- 2 There are a number of strengths in the delivery of the strategic housing service. The strategic housing, homelessness and housing options services are easily accessible and there is awareness of the range of services and support available. The housing strategy is fit for purpose and supported by a range of linked strategies and policies at a local, sub regional and regional level. The council has developed a joined up approach to respond to housing issues and is fully engaged in partnership working to deliver the strategic approach. The approach to housing advice and homelessness prevention is effective, in youth homelessness in particular, with a dramatic decline in the numbers presenting as homeless. The council engages effectively with partners to improve the quality of private sector. The council has brought empty homes back into use as affordable housing, and it has maximised the development of affordable housing through partnership working and its own resources, supported by effective policies and procedures.
- 3 However, there are some areas which require improvement. The corporate approach to equalities and diversity is weak and the service cannot demonstrate it is treating everyone fairly. There are barriers to accessing information or services and the approach to dealing with harassment and hate crime is under-developed. Housing needs are not fully known, with gaps in information for particular groups and stock condition information is dated without an assessment against the HHSRS¹. Temporary accommodation is basic, with homeless people spending too long in it. The sustainability of the stock is not considered, and there is no affordable warmth strategy. Despite positive performance in the provision of affordable housing, the LAA stretch targets have not been achieved. The approach to value for money is weak with limited action to embed a value for money culture and staff have little awareness of VFM. There is little accurate cost information and this impacts on the ability of the council to benchmark its costs. There is a lack of a robust modern procurement strategy.
- 4 Despite a positive track record of delivery improvements, and the use of partnership working to help increase the capacity of the service, there are a number of barriers to improvement. There are weaknesses in the approach to performance management and service improvement planning. Learning is not systematic and the service could do more to learn from other organisations, its own experience and customers. Business and service planning is not currently aligned to financial planning and financial management is weak. It is not clear if there is financial capacity to meet future increases in demand for services.

¹ Housing Health and Safety Rating System

Scoring the service

5 We have assessed Craven District Council as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has uncertain prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart²



Source: Audit Commission

6 We found the service to be fair because it has a range of strengths:

- homelessness and housing option services are easily accessible;
- a proactive approach to respond to domestic violence;
- the council has an understanding of housing markets and land availability;
- the housing strategy is fit for purpose and supported by a range of linked strategies and policies at a local, sub regional and regional level;
- the council has developed a joined up approach to respond to housing issues and is fully engaged in partnership working to deliver the strategic approach;
- a clear strategic approach to homelessness and effective use of partnership working to deliver homelessness and housing option objectives;

² The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

- an effective approach to housing advice and homelessness prevention, in particular youth homelessness, with a dramatic decline in the numbers presenting as homeless;
- arrangements to support the move on of homeless people, and effective management of housing applications;
- a comprehensive Private Sector Renewal Policy, supported by an empty homes strategy;
- effective engagement with partners to improve the quality of private sector stock;
- the council has been effective in bringing empty homes back into use as affordable housing;
- the Council has maximised development of affordable housing through partnership working and its own resources, supported by effective policies and procedures
- strong relationships with developers and the partner RSLs;
- the council has enabled housing developments that meet needs, located in the most appropriate places;
- housing is working effectively with planning to increase levels of affordable housing development; and
- the council has been effective at securing additional funds to deliver the service.

7 However, there are some areas which require improvement. These include:

- performance against service standards is poor or cannot be demonstrated;
- the majority of leaflets do not publicise availability in alternative languages or formats;
- an under developed approach to complaints, and limited use of customer feedback to improve services;
- a weak corporate approach to equalities and diversity, and the service cannot demonstrate it is treating everyone fairly;
- an ineffective approach to dealing with harassment and hate crime;
- housing needs are not fully known, with gaps in information for particular groups and stock condition information is dated without an assessment against the HHSRS;
- intelligence from partnership arrangements and other sources is not routinely used to inform strategy and approach;
- temporary accommodation is basic, with limited access to emergency accommodation and homeless people spending too long in temporary accommodation;
- weaknesses in the allocation policy;
- some weaknesses in obtaining regular and systematic information on HMOs;
- the sustainability of the stock is not considered, and there is no affordable warmth strategy;

Scoring the service

- private sector grants and action are not targeted to those areas or people which need it most;
 - despite positive performance in relation to affordable housing, the LAA stretch targets have not been achieved;
 - the cost of the delivery of the strategic housing service is not known and there is a lack of accurate cost information impacting on the ability of the council to benchmark;
 - limited action to date to embed a value for money culture, and staff have a lack of awareness of VFM; and
 - a lack of a robust modern procurement strategy.
- 8 The service has uncertain prospects for improvement because:
- there are key areas of work where delays have hampered the delivery of improvements;
 - improvement plans and strategies for the strategic housing service are not fully integrated;
 - a performance management culture is not fully embedded within the council and the service;
 - learning is not systematic and the service could do more to learn from other organisations, its own experience and customers;
 - there is limited performance information reported to members of the public;
 - business and service planning is not currently aligned to financial planning and financial management is weak;
 - training and development opportunities are very limited;
 - the workforce of the Council is not representative of the local community;
 - it is not clear if there is financial capacity to meet the future increases in demand for services; and
 - there are challenges in delivering against the LAA targets for affordable housing.

- 9 However, there are some positive indicators for improvement. These include:
- Craven responded positively to Audit Commission work on affordable housing in 2006 which resulted in a range of service improvements;
 - progress has been made in delivering the affordable housing agenda, the quality of private sector housing, returning empty homes back into use and in homelessness prevention;
 - there is some progress in achieving efficiency targets and the Council, including elected members, has clear vision of what it wants to achieve in relation to strategic housing;
 - there is strong focus within the strategic housing service to deliver service objectives and improvements and arrangements are in place for the Directorate and Executive Members to scrutinise performance;
 - corporate initiatives are underway which will address some of the weaknesses highlighted during the inspection and action has been taken to ensure the service had the appropriate capacity to deliver and improve the service;
 - there are appropriate human resources frameworks and practices and ICT is being used to support service delivery and improvements; and
 - partnership working is used to help increase the capacity of the service.

Recommendations

10 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, organisations need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the organisation. In addition, we identify the approximate costs³ and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context, the inspection team recommends that the Council shares the findings of this report with tenants and councillors; and takes action to address all weaknesses identified in the report. The inspection team makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation

R1 Develop an improved approach to responding to equality and diversity within service provision by:

- assessing compliance against the CRE Code of Practice for Housing and ensure gaps are incorporated into the service improvement plan;
- developing and implementing training and awareness raising for staff and councillors to update their knowledge and understanding of diversity, legislative requirements, and good practice and how this relates to their roles and service delivery;
- prioritising approval of the new equality impact assessment process, completing EIAs on all housing related strategies and policies, and on all future approvals for policies, strategies or structure changes;
- developing an approach and training for all staff on dealing with harassment and hate crime;
- ensuring that partner organisations are meeting their requirements in relation to equalities and diversity;
- establishing a system to routine capture monitoring information across at least six diversity strands for service access, take up and satisfaction;
- developing a system to ensure monitoring information is routinely reviewed to identify diversity issues in relation to access to services and to ensure action taken where issues arise;
- ensuring appropriate straplines to promote access to alternative formats and languages are included in all new leaflets and at the time of reprinting existing leaflets;
- providing staff with training on using access equipment, and
- ensuring service improvement plans incorporate actions resulting from EIAs.

³ Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- services which are delivered fairly and equitably and which meet the needs of diverse groups within the community.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by March 2010.

Recommendation

R2 Improve value for money in delivery of the strategic housing service and corporately by:

- completing a value for money assessment and option appraisal of the current housing options service and prioritise action in response to this;
- providing all staff with awareness raising on value for money and involve them in challenging the VFM of the current service;
- identifying the cost of the overall service and individual components;
- routinely reviewing service cost performance alongside service performance;
- setting value for money targets as part of future plans and monitor them through the performance management system; and
- continuing to support the development of a sub regional procurement strategy, ensuring this includes consideration of the involvement of service users and local residents in the procurement process.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved value for money;
- the identification of improvements to the service; and
- potential identification of efficiency savings.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by June 2010.

Recommendations

Recommendation

- R3** Improve performance management and improvement planning within the service and corporately by:
- integrating the range of improvement plans for the service and its associated action plans;
 - developing a performance management report which monitors all elements of the strategic housing service including commentary and analysis of performance;
 - benchmarking performance with other similar organisations;
 - ensuring learning from other customers and top performing organisations is embedded into service reviews, policy development etc; and
 - introducing a customer facing performance report for residents.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- identification of improvements to the service; and
- improved accountability and challenge by key stakeholders and residents.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with high costs. This should be implemented by March 2010.

Recommendation

- R4** Strengthen the focus on access and customer care by:
- reviewing the complaints procedure and developing a system to ensure learning from complaints is used to improve services;
 - introducing a system to collect and analyse appropriately customer feedback on all strategic housing services (including analysis against the diversity strands);
 - monitoring and publishing performance against service standards;
 - developing a strategic approach to collecting and evaluating customer views in shaping future strategic housing plans, and the other strategies and policies to support this area; and
 - reviewing the approach to DFGs with a view to streamlining and improving ease of customer access.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- easier access to information and services for local residents;
- improved accountability to local residents and stakeholders; and
- improved services which are developed in line with customer's needs and aspirations.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with high costs. This should be implemented by March 2010.

Recommendation

R5 Improve the quality of the strategic housing approach by:

- continuing to contribute to the development of the regional action plan and ensure the accompanying action plan for Craven comprehensively responds to the specific local needs and housing market;
- continuing to participate in the North Yorkshire housing needs and private sector stock condition assessments;
- investigating the cost benefits of accessing desk top house condition data;
- prioritising action to fill the existing gaps in housing need information;
- developing systems to gain regular access to intelligence held by partners to inform the approach and prioritisation of strategic housing services;
- investigating the reasons behind the drop in homeless presentations and acceptances, and to develop a full understanding of preventative action taken;
- completing an option appraisal on options for resolving the temporary accommodation issues;
- reviewing the allocation process in light of the weaknesses reported particularly to focus on reducing the time in temporary accommodation; and
- establishing prioritisation arrangements and build these into the policies for grants such as DFGs and empty home grants.

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- improved needs information on which to base future strategies; and
- a strategic approach which better meets the needs of the local community.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with high costs. This should be implemented by June 2010.

- 11** We would like to thank the staff of Craven District Council who made us welcome and who met our requests efficiently and courteously.

Dates of Inspection: 30 March - 3 April 2009

Report

Context

The locality

- 12 The Craven District covers 450 square miles (15 per cent of North Yorkshire County area). Craven is predominantly rural, with urban pockets including the market towns of Skipton and Settle, and Crosshills. Two thirds of the District is within the Yorkshire Dales National Park.
- 13 With a population of 56,000 and 23,000 households⁴, the District is sparsely populated. It has a population density of 46 persons per square kilometre, placing it among the lowest densely populated council areas in England (UK average 244 people per sq km). The population is set to increase to 63,400 by 2020 (14.2 per cent increase), with households to increase to 30,000 by 2029.
- 14 Young people aged 19 and under make up 23 per cent of the population, with those aged 20 to 64 making up 56 per cent, and those aged 65 and over 21 per cent. At 4.4 per cent⁵ the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population is considerably lower than the national average of 13 per cent, but significantly higher than any other North Yorkshire District. Just over 17 per cent of the population consider themselves to have a long term limiting illness or disability.
- 15 Craven is an affluent district with a few pockets of higher deprivation. With an overall IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation) score of 11.59, Craven's level of deprivation is low; ranking in the lowest 25 per cent (270 out of 354) of local authority areas in England. The District contains 32 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) of which 2 in South Skipton are in most deprived nationally.
- 16 Unemployment at 4 per cent which is lower than the regional (5.6 per cent) and national (4.9 per cent) average⁶. In 2004 almost three quarters of all employed jobs in the district were in three sectors, namely distribution, hotels and restaurants (31 per cent), banking, finance and insurance industries (21 per cent) and public administration, education and health (21 per cent).
- 17 At April 2008 there were 25,718 residential properties within the district. At 9.6 per cent the level of social rented stock is considerably lower than the Yorkshire and Humberside average (21 per cent) and England (19 per cent). Levels of owner occupation at 81 per cent are considerably higher than the Yorkshire and Humberside levels of 69 per cent and England levels of 71 per cent. Average house prices for all property types between July and September 2008 were £212,389 which is considerably above the Yorkshire and Humberside average of £137,036 but slightly lower than the North Yorkshire average of £224,933.

⁴ Mid year population estimate 2007

⁵ Mid year population estimate 2006

⁶ Source: Annual Population Survey (Apr 06-Mar 07) and Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2007 - ONS.

The Council

- 18 Craven District Council is made up of 30 Council Members making three political groups: Conservatives - 15 Councillors; Independent - 10 Councillors; and Liberal Democrats - 5 Councillors. From May 2008 the Conservatives form the political administration due to an Independent Councillor wishing to be affiliated to the group for the purpose of allocating Committee seats.
- 19 The Council employs 313 staff, split across three Directorates: Environmental and Planning Services, Community Services and Corporate Services. The council has undergone significant changes in executive leadership in the last 12 months with an interim Chief Executive since May 2008 and the appointment of new Chief Executive in December 2008, and an interim Director of Corporate Services appointed. The Council faces significant financial pressures, with a requirement to make revenue efficiency savings of £2.5 million in 2009/10 and 2010/11.
- 20 The council received a 'fair' Comprehensive Performance Assessment rating from the Audit Commission in 2008.

The service

- 21 The service is delivered by the Strategic Housing Team which has responsibility for delivery of the housing strategy and housing enforcement. The team comprises a head of service and eight officers, including the Rural Enabler Officer. The council transferred ownership of the housing stock to Craven Housing in March 2003. Craven Housing is also responsible for delivery of housing options and homeless services. Home improvement support is carried out through Anchor Staying Put, the Home Improvement Agency partner.
- 22 This inspection covered access and customer care, diversity, value for money, housing strategy and enabling, homelessness and housing needs and private sector housing. These are key services retained by the Council after the housing stock was transferred in 2003.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

23 The Corporate Plan for 2008-2011 included the Corporate Priority 'Addressing Housing Needs' and includes the following strategic objectives relating to housing:

- meeting the need for affordable housing;
- delivering better homes;
- ensuring fair access to housing; and
- modernising the district's spatial strategy by progressing with the Council's Local Development Framework.

24 The Corporate Plan has been reviewed and is replaced from April 2009 with the Craven District Council Plan 2009-2012. This sets out the new vision of the district as:

- 'The Council will spearhead the development of and strengthen Craven's economy while conserving and enhancing its unique rural environment. To deliver this vision we will strengthen our relationship with North Yorkshire County Council, and our other partners; and seek greater influence through our membership of the Leeds City Region.'

The corporate plan includes ten strategic objectives, two of which relate to housing:

- improving the availability of employment and housing land; and
- improving the supply of good local affordable housing and raising the quality of existing homes.

25 Craven District Housing Strategy 2007-2010 sets out four strategic priorities in relation to improving housing and meeting housing needs across the district:

- clear framework for improving delivery;
- increasing the supply of affordable housing;
- delivering better homes - increasing the availability of and quality of housing; and
- fair access to quality housing.

26 Strategic Housing Service Plan for 2008/09 service aims are as follows:

- to improve private sector housing conditions;
- to address housing needs; and
- to address homelessness.

Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

Access and customer care

- 27** Strengths and weaknesses are in balance in this area. Strategic housing, homelessness and housing option services are easily accessible through the one stop shops and the website. Action has been taken to increase awareness of the range of services and support available. Housing option services are customer focused. Service standards are in place, however performance is poor, or cannot be demonstrated. There is no overall strategic approach to customer access arrangements. There are barriers to accessing information or services in an alternative language or means. The approach to DFGs⁷ is not customer focused. The approach to complaints is under developed, and customer feedback is not used to drive service improvement.
- 28** There is a range of ways for service users to access the service. Contact Craven⁸ has some flexibility in opening hours including Saturday mornings. One stop shops in Skipton and Settle are located in DDA compliant offices with outreach services in four other areas. Customer services staff in Contact Craven are provided with question and answer reference guides in order to deal with basic service enquiries, and have received some basic training on homelessness. More complex enquiries are passed through to the relevant service. Contact Craven has achieved Customer First and Charter Mark accreditation. Strategic housing, homelessness and housing options services are easily accessible.
- 29** Action has been taken in the last year to increase awareness of the range of services available to improve the quality of housing. A programme of roadshows has been carried out since July 2008 at sites across the district. Information is made available in a number of locations including notice boards and leaflet displays in supermarkets, and via meetings with community groups, such as local Women Institutes and Age Concern. All parish councils have been offered articles for their newsletters, leaflets to be handed out, or for the team to give a talk on the services available. However, take up on this is variable throughout the district. Further roadshows are planned for 2009. This has resulted in improved take up of services across the district.
- 30** Housing options services are customer focused. The Craven Housing office in Skipton is accessible and DDA⁹ compliant. Staff are welcoming and are able to provide information on a range of housing options. Leaflets are on display and are user friendly. There is a guide for customers on the joint housing waiting list and how the allocations system works. Appropriate information is provided to customers about their rehousing prospects, including the promotion of private sector housing as an option and the rent bond scheme. Appointments are available within 24 hours for people presenting as homeless and a person with nowhere to stay that night would be seen immediately. The housing options team works with other agencies to provide a signposting and referral service. There is an out of hours service available through a rota-based system. This ensures that customers get the information, advice and support when they need it.

⁷ Disabled Facility Grants

⁸ Craven District Council's customer contact centre

⁹ Disabled Discrimination Act

How good is the service?

- 31** There is clear information for customers about their rehousing prospects. Information is provided on the number of lettings made in a given area over a recent period and the length of time the successful applicants had been on the waiting list. This enables people to make more informed decisions about their choice of areas and not to have unrealistic expectations about the availability of properties.
- 32** The strategic housing section of the website is well developed. This is updated regularly, for example, it includes information on credit crunch support. A wide range of leaflets and further information can be downloaded. Information is generally clear and includes use of frequently asked questions. Direct emails and contact numbers are provided to access more information. This provides easy access to a range of information and policies relating to different aspects of the strategic housing service.
- 33** The strategic housing service has customer standards, but only some of these are tested or monitored. A strategic housing customer service charter was recently introduced which includes reciprocal service standards setting out what the council expects from customers. However, these standards are not monitored, making it difficult to demonstrate customers receive the standard of service promised. There is a range of service standards for the housing options service. Performance however is weak¹⁰. Performance against service standards is not being used to drive forward service improvement.
- 34** There is limited access to translation and interpretation services. Staff demonstrate some awareness of the translation and interpretation services available, however training has not been provided on the use of telephone interpreters or the hearing loop equipment. There is no access to signers within the council. The CDC newsletter is available as an audio CD, and strategies available in large print. There is an inconsistent approach to the use of translation and alternative format straplines. Some leaflets include the relevant straplines (mainly those relating to homelessness and housing advice), others include the strapline in English including the complaints procedure guide, and some do not have a straplines including the DFG leaflet and strategic housing service charter. The website does not have a browsealoud facility on each page and there is no automatic language translation or large text option. This acts as a barrier to customers receiving information on services.
- 35** Customer focus in the disabled facilities grant (DFGs) service is weak. The service for DFGs is disjointed with the applicant required to contact three different organisations dependent on the progress of their application. The website information on DFGs lacks clarity and is not user friendly. It does not state the standards customers can expect or the timescales for different stages in the process. This can act as a barrier to customers accessing the service.
- 36** The approach to complaints is poor. The complaints process has not been reviewed for about eight years, and does not meet modern standards. The customer facing leaflet is not user friendly and contains internal procedural notes. There are no clear timescales beyond stage one. Informal complaints are not routinely captured or used for learning. Formal complaints are only logged in departments and not corporately, and there is no evidence of corporate learning from complaints. Complaints leaflets do not carry community language or alternative format straplines. Complaints are not used to systematically inform service improvements.

¹⁰ Only 46 per cent of sampled cases for quarters one to three 2008/09 meeting the performance standards set

- 37 There are limited opportunities for service user involvement and feedback. Service user involvement in the homeless service is limited to interviews where residents of the hostel identified issues relating to repairs and size of accommodation. There is limited feedback in relation to other issues such as access to the service, how customers are dealt with, the ease of understanding the information and process etc. There is no system to capture and learn from low level complaints. Customer feedback on their experience of services is not routinely collected. Where information is collected, for example on energy efficiency works and DFGs, there is no evidence to suggest this is used to assess the impact of the service or to identify improvements. There is little evidence of customer views being used to drive forward service improvements.

Diversity

- 38 This is an area where weaknesses significantly outweigh strengths. The corporate approach to equalities and diversity is under developed and there are weaknesses in meeting external requirements. The service cannot demonstrate it treats customers fairly, with little monitoring information and weaknesses in the approach to equality impact assessments (EIAs). The council does not have an effective approach to dealing with harassment or hate crime. Not all staff demonstrate an awareness of equality and diversity. Some action however has been taken to help embed equalities and diversity within the culture of the organisation and the way the service is delivered. The council is using some partnership working to support this area. The council has been proactive in responding to domestic violence.
- 39 There are weaknesses in the approach to EIAs. There is no programme or system for the completion of equality impact assessments on new or revised policies, procedures, strategies or functions prior to approval. An EIA was completed on the Environmental Health and Housing Service in December 2006 but not of the new service structure. The 2006 assessment was not based on any robust evidence, with an overall impact assessment of 1 (positive impact) across six diversity strands. A number of actions were flagged but it is not clear how these have been addressed. This was followed in April 2008 by a number of EIAs completed against the relevant housing strategies and policies, however there are weaknesses in the way the methodology was applied within strategic housing. Only the initial scoping exercise was completed, there was no direct assessment of the impact in relation to the different diversity strands and no indication of further evidence needed. Some actions were identified and taken through the process, but the level of challenge was limited. The service cannot demonstrate it is treating everyone fairly.
- 40 There are weaknesses in meeting external requirements relating to legislation and good practice. The Council does not perform well in relation to the Local Government Equalities Scheme. Level one was achieved in 2007/08. An internal target of level two was set, but no published target, and no formal assessment planned. Instead an initial assessment is to be carried out against the new Equality Framework released in March 2009. The council has not assessed its performance against the Statutory CRE Code of Practice on Racial Equality in Housing (2006), and cannot demonstrate compliance with the code. This is a missed opportunity to identify ways to further improve services and approaches to meet the needs of the diverse community.

How good is the service?

- 41 The strategic housing service does not effectively monitor access to and use of the service. A corporate guide to service monitoring provides a standard monitoring form, however this only covers age, disability, ethnicity and gender. Complaints are not monitored for diversity. The strategic housing service does not monitor service users, for example, grant and loan take-up, or satisfaction against the diversity strands. Lettings information includes the ethnicity of the tenant, but this is not reported as a global figure, and other strands are not monitored. The council cannot demonstrate all customers have access to services.
- 42 Not all staff demonstrate an awareness of equalities and diversity. There is serious concern around assumptions made in classifying the diversity characteristics of individuals for monitoring or consultation purposes. There are limited opportunities to address these concerns as there is a lack of compulsory, ongoing training for staff and members to increase their awareness of equalities and diversity and their responsibilities. An equalities and diversity ethos is not fully embedded within the culture of the organisation.
- 43 The Council does not ensure contractors and consultants are committed to diversity in service provision. The procurement policy is not well developed and out of date. Whilst stating there is a commitment to meeting the wider council objectives around equal opportunities it does not set out how this will be achieved. There is no information on what the requirements are for consultants and contractors, how this will influence the decision making process and how the council will monitor adherence to them. The council has not proactively sought to influence its partners and other stakeholders to ensure their actions meet the diverse needs of the community.
- 44 The council does not have an effective approach to dealing with harassment or hate crime. There is no policy other than an employee policy on Harassment, Discrimination, Victimisation and Bullying from 2003. There is no agreed or approved approach to dealing with different types of harassment reported by local residents. Staff are not provided with training on harassment and hate crime or the response which should be taken. There is no evidence of the support provided for those experiencing harassment, and limited contact with organisations to support minority groups which could be subject to harassment. The stance the council takes against harassment is not communicated to customers. This means victims can be left feeling vulnerable and subject to further harassment or intimidation.
- 45 There is some corporate commitment to the promotion of equalities and diversity. A community engagement officer is responsible corporately for equalities and diversity. Service improvement plans are expected to have specific equalities and diversity targets, and the housing service plan for 2008/09 includes an action on responding to the actions resulting from the EIA process. Articles on delivery of Craven Pride¹¹ have been included in Core Brief, a summary leaflet on Craven Pride sent to all staff and it is covered at the induction training. Safeguarding Children training is provided to staff. This helps to improve some understanding and commitment to equalities and diversity.

¹¹ The Council's Corporate Equality Scheme

- 46 Some effort is made to consider equality and diversity in the way the service is delivered. The Housing Strategy 2007-2010 considers in detail 'fair access to quality housing' and considers the need and approach to ensure diverse needs are met including BME communities, gypsies and travellers, those with learning difficulties, older people and those experiencing domestic abuse. There is evidence of action in response to this, for example, working with the Learning Disability Partnership. The roadshows were targeted, for example, with Age Concern and Women's Institute to reflect the aging population and the priority within the strategy of meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. One member of staff has attended a Polish course in response to the increased Polish community. This service is helping improve access to the service for diverse groups.
- 47 The Council has a comprehensive Equality Scheme, 'Craven Pride'. This incorporates the race, gender and disability schemes, and considers age, rural isolation, faith/belief and sexual orientation. It incorporates an action plan for three years with areas for improvement. However, this was developed with limited consultation, which means the document may not reflect the needs of the groups it focuses on. Delivery of the scheme is monitored on an annual basis. However, progress is not known as six monthly monitoring was not carried out in 2008/09. The scheme will help embed a diversity culture within the council.
- 48 There is some evidence of partnership working. This includes the introduction of a North Yorkshire information pack for new residents from the A8 countries, which includes a section on accommodation and what to do if they are homeless. The strategic housing team is actively involved in the Craven Learning Disability Partnership. Through this partnership improvements have been made to service access in homelessness and housing advice through the development of easy-to-read versions of information and application forms. This helps to meet the needs of particular groups in the community.
- 49 Craven has some understanding of the local resident profile. This includes access to information on a number of areas through the York and North Yorkshire Partnership (the economic partnership for the region). Through this the council has access to data updates on key areas, for example, on employment data. However it is recognised there is a gap in obtaining routine and regular information to be able to identify changes in communities which local services need to respond to.
- 50 The council is proactive in responding to domestic violence. A joint working protocol deals with domestic violence. The Council has raised the profile of domestic violence, including theatre presentations and is shortly to start promotion of the issue on car parking tickets. Awareness raising has led to an increase in the numbers of people accessing the service from 89 for the whole of 2007/08 to 99 for the first three quarters of 2008/09. Domestic abuse is discussed and action taken through a dedicated Safer Craven Community Partnership Task Group which includes strategic housing representation. A range of options help to meet the housing needs of those experiencing domestic violence. Specialist support is available through the Craven Domestic Violence Service (CDVS). Two tenancies are available through Foundation Housing. The Making Safe Scheme, funded through Supporting People, helps victims to remain safe in their own home. Support is available to those who experience domestic violence.

How good is the service?

The strategic approach to housing

51 Strengths and weaknesses are in balance in this area. The Council has an understanding of housing markets and land availability. Housing needs are not fully known for the district, but some action has been taken address these gaps. There is some understanding of the condition of housing, but this is dated and does not have a full assessment against Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). There is a fit for purpose housing strategy, supported by a range of linked strategies and policies at a local, sub regional and regional level. The council has developed a joined up approach to respond to housing issues and is fully engaged in partnership working. There are no examples however of using the partnerships to update the Council's understanding of housing needs, stock condition and the housing market. Intelligence from partnership arrangements and other sources is not routinely used to inform strategy and approach. It is not clear what the housing needs are for some groups and how they will be met. Stakeholder and partnership involvement in the development of strategies is varied.

Understanding the housing needs of the district

- 52** The council has an understanding of the housing market in its areas. A Yorkshire and Humberside Housing Market Assessment was commissioned through the Regional Assembly and published in early 2008. This provides comprehensive information on housing markets and housing demand for Craven and Richmondshire. A Craven Strategic Housing Market Assessment was consulted on in 2008. This provides a more detailed assessment of the housing market and housing needs up to 2026. However the final document is taking some time to finalise, with consultation responses still being considered. Action has been taken to improve knowledge of land availability. A Craven Strategy Housing Land Availability Assessment went out to consultation in August 2008, with publication expected spring 2009. Approaches do consider the information highlighted within these assessments, however a formal response has still to be developed given the considerable delays in completing the consultation on the information collected.
- 53** Some recent efforts have addressed gaps in needs information through joint working at a regional and sub regional level. This includes research on the housing needs of North Yorkshire BME and migrant workers, carried out with the assistance of community representatives. The district has also contributed to a county wide study on Gypsies and Travellers in 2008 which resulted in the approval of a sub regional action plan which focuses on addressing the issues raised at county level. The council is contributing to joint working through the Learning Disability Partnership which is helping to improve access to information to better understand local needs. Further work is needed to ensure this new information results in action at a local level.

- 54 Housing needs are not fully known for the district. A district wide housing needs assessment was completed in 2005 which incorporates focus on need and desires in relation to housing, including access to affordable housing. Housing needs information has not been updated since the survey, although Craven is contributing to a North Yorkshire Needs Assessment which is in the very early stages of development. The council makes limited use of existing information sources, such as homelessness, housing advice, housing register trends, house price and rent level data to determine what actions need to be taken. There are some gaps in the knowledge of the housing needs of particular groups, for example, the specific housing needs of disabled people, older people and young people. This means the council does not know how housing needs are changing over time and is unable to respond to them.
- 55 The council has some understanding of the condition of housing in the area, however this is dated and it does not have full information about compliance with the decent homes standard and HHSRS across all sectors. The private sector stock condition information is fairly old, based on a survey from 2004. Some initial work has taken place to contribute to a North Yorkshire stock condition survey. This does not include a full assessment against the current HHSRS system as this was carried out before the definition was finalised. It does however including assessment against the previous fitness standard. There have been no efforts made to update or maintain this information, or to supplement knowledge from other available resources such as desk top and street surveys or other sources of local data and knowledge. This limits the Council's ability to ensure that strategies, plans and resources are responsive to changing housing conditions within the housing market.
- 56 There are limited examples of using partnerships to systematically update the Council's understanding of housing needs, stock condition and the housing market. Information is collected by the Energy Partnership on energy efficiency levels, however it is not clear how the council has used available information to influence and target the action taken to address energy efficiency within Craven, or to inform the strategic approach. The Home Improvement Agency is not used to provide stock condition or needs information from the households it liaises with. Some key partners have not been consulted on the outcomes from housing market, stock condition and needs assessments. This represents a missed opportunity to achieve added value from partnership agreements.
- 57 The council does not use all the intelligence available to inform the development of its approach. The Council has access to wider contextual information through the North Yorkshire partnership including information on local wage levels and unemployment. This information is not routinely monitored or analysed by the service in terms of the impact it can have on approaches taken or to prioritise action. This information is not yet used to inform local policy and strategy.

How good is the service?

The quality of the Council's housing strategies

- 58 There is a fit for purpose housing strategy for 2007 to 2010. This has particular focus on how the need for affordable housing will be met, and clear links to the relevant corporate plans and sustainable community plan priorities. Links are clearly made to other regional strategies and plans, including targets within the North Yorkshire Local Area Agreement and the Craven Corporate Plan. This clearly sets out the action which needs to be taken to address housing issues identified from an assessment of stock condition, housing needs and housing markets available at the time. This includes detailed information of the resources available to deliver different elements of the service. This provides focus to the work of the service.
- 59 The council contributes effectively to sub regional and regional housing strategy, and approaches to work related to strategic housing. It contributes to cross authority sub regional and regional working groups including the North Yorkshire Housing Forum, North Yorkshire Rural Housing Network, North Yorkshire Homeless Steering Group and Regional Loans Steering Group. There is a range of outcomes, and a number of areas where Craven has taken the lead. The portfolio holder for housing contributes to partnership working through membership of North Yorkshire Strategic Housing Board, Leeds City Region Housing Panel and attends the Craven Housing Forum. This has resulted in contributions to a number of sub regional housing strategies, including the emerging North Yorkshire Housing Strategy.
- 60 The council has a range of related and interlinked supporting strategies, plans and policies alongside the housing strategy. This includes a county wide Homelessness Strategy, supported by a district level action plan adopted by CDC in August 2008. The Affordable Housing Guide plans delivery based on housing needs assessment and RSS information. The Private Sector Renewal Policy and Empty Homes Strategy set out plans to deliver against the priorities to improve the condition of private sector stock. These plans provide more detail the council's aims in its priority areas.
- 61 Key partners have been involved in the development of the strategic approach to homelessness and housing advice services. The homelessness forum is seen by stakeholders as inclusive and effective. Stakeholders feel that the homeless strategy was well consulted on through the homelessness forum and the housing forum. The group meets on a quarterly basis and has a role in monitoring the homelessness action plan and reviewing the homelessness strategy. There is strong ownership of the homeless strategy and stakeholders consider it reflects key issues in the district.
- 62 The council has adopted a joined up approach to respond to housing issues. This is reflected by the priority which strategic housing has in the corporate and council plan. The strategies and plans demonstrate commitment across other sections of the council including clear links with planning, economic development and the communities teams. Elected members are committed to and knowledgeable of strategic housing issues and support improvements in this area. This helps the council deliver against the strategic commitments made within the corporate plan and housing strategy.

- 63 There is limited stakeholder and resident involvement in shaping the development of strategies and policies which affect them. The exception to this was the development of the homelessness strategy. Consultation is often on a final draft of documents rather than seeking views and priorities of key stakeholders and residents to inform and shape strategies and policy at an early stage. For example, private sector landlords and home owners were not consulted on the empty property policy and grant until very late in the process. The wider community has not been consulted on the housing strategy, or in influencing the priorities included within the strategy. Priorities within the strategies and policies may not fully reflect the needs of the local communities they are aimed at.
- 64 With the exception of the homelessness strategy, there is limited stakeholder awareness of the strategic approach to housing within Craven. Some key partners are not aware of the council's housing strategic objectives, and they do not understand how their work contributes to targets and identified needs. There is no summary of the housing strategy, and no communication to the general public on the strategy. There is limited engagement with the National Park authority to inform and deliver the strategic approach. Key stakeholders and residents do not know what the council is seeking to achieve and progress it is making in delivering its strategic housing objectives.
- 65 The longer term strategic approach is not yet developed. The current strategy is relatively short term with a focus and targets only for a three-year period from 2007. It does not set out the longer term housing aspirations of the district. The latest information from the housing market assessments and land availability is still to inform strategy and to drive targeted action. The council has started to address this through the development of a sub regional strategy which will be supported by a district level action plan, incorporating the latest housing needs and assessment information. It is not clear what the longer term aspirations for housing are.
- 66 There are gaps within the housing strategy in terms of the strategic housing issues and approach for particular groups. The lack of sound information on particular needs means that the strategic approach does not set out clearly what needs to be achieved when developing housing to ensure the needs of different groups such as single people, and young families are met. The strategy does not detail older people's housing requirements and there is no separate older persons' housing strategy. The housing strategy does not fully consider the strategic response to the BME community. Action is underway to address a lack of understanding of the needs of BME communities through the sub regional jointly commissioned research on BME and Migrant Worker Housing Needs. It is not clear what the housing needs are for some groups and how they will be met.

How good is the service?

Making the best use of existing housing - housing advice, homelessness prevention and options services

- 67** This is an area where strengths and weaknesses are in balance. The council has a clear strategic approach to homelessness, and uses partnership working effectively to deliver its strategic objectives. There is an effective approach to housing advice and homelessness prevention with a dramatic decline in the numbers presenting as homeless. Local arrangements help facilitate the move on of homeless people. There is a strong focus on responding to and preventing youth homelessness and the management of homeless cases and housing applications is effective. The temporary accommodation available is basic and there is limited access to emergency accommodation. There are a number of weaknesses in the allocation policy. Homeless people spend too long in temporary accommodation.
- 68** The council has a clear strategic approach to homelessness. The council works to the North Yorkshire Homelessness Strategy, supported by an action plan at the district level setting out the key priorities, including prevention initiatives, youth homelessness, emergency accommodation and floating support. This is monitored on a quarterly basis by the homelessness forum. This helps to ensure the service remains focused on the areas which matter most.
- 69** The council is using partnership working well to deliver its strategic objectives. The council is viewed as accessible, informative and effective at facilitating discussions on homeless issues by partners. Examples of partnership working include a mental health joint referrals panel which meets on a six weekly basis to review clients and their issues. This resulted in 16 people being re-housed in 2007/08 and 12 in 2008/09. There is also a care leavers and young persons' accommodation panel which seeks to integrate services for young people, particularly those coming out of the care system. A number of joint protocols are in place for information sharing. This helps to meet the needs of homeless or potential homeless people within the district.
- 70** There are some historical weaknesses in the management of the contract for the delivery of the housing options service with recent action taken to address this. The homelessness service has been reconfigured as an integrated housing options service aligning a strong focus on prevention with the processing of housing applications. An independent review of the service carried out in 2007/08 resulted in a revised agreement for delivery of the service by Craven Housing. Recent improvements include the development of a new performance management framework to ensure it is clear to Craven Housing what the Council's expectations are. This enables the Council to take quicker action on any areas of under performance.

- 71** Partnership working is used effectively to help prevent homelessness. A range of support is available for people in danger of losing their home as a result of the economic downturn. For example, the council funds a support agency to provide an enhanced court desk service for home owners facing repossession. Other mechanisms including funding the CAB to provide specialist debt advice and mortgage rescue, a range of support services from Foundation Housing and from Craven Housing for those in temporary accommodation, and access to mediation. The housing options team will negotiate with private landlords on individual cases to help prevent homelessness. This has resulted in positive performance in preventing homelessness, with an estimate of 104 cases in 2008/09 resulting in performance of 4 per 1000 households compared to a target of 27 cases (1 per 1000 households).¹²
- 72** There are adequate arrangements to facilitate the move on of homeless people. The temporary accommodation team uses the Supporting People support-planning framework to ensure effective support for vulnerable clients and to help tenancy sustainment. The rent bond scheme is well established and works well. Over 100 people are benefiting, and it enables homeless people to access private sector housing more easily. These are effective tools in preventing and responding to homelessness.
- 73** There is a strong focus on addressing the issue of youth homelessness. HomeStreetHome is a collection of initiatives focused on preventing and addressing youth homelessness. There is a specialist support worker, and the service offers support, low level mediation, referral into other services such as YMCA and tenancy training. Two units of hostel accommodation have been freed up for 'time out'. Additional support services are delivered by Foundations Housing. There is supported accommodation, with 18 units for 16/17 year olds and 22 for young singles. Sixteen and 17 year olds are not excluded from applying for housing. Work with schools and colleges helps raise the profile of housing and homeless issues. This enables young people to make a planned move towards supported accommodation or to return to the family home.
- 74** Homeless cases are handled well. There were no appeals on homeless decisions over the last year. Audit arrangements are robust, with 25 per cent audited by Craven Housing and 25 per cent by the council. There are few households in temporary accommodation with only two in the first nine months of 2008/09, exceeding the 2010 target. This indicates housing option work is helping meet the needs of homeless people.
- 75** The management of allocations is effective. The register has been refreshed and all applicants re-pointed to reflect the new policy. The waiting list is appropriately maintained with a six monthly refresh and applicants kept informed of their position on the waiting list. The nomination system works effectively and is supported by a positive relationship with RSLs and an increase in new social rented accommodation. This helps to improve access to affordable housing for those most in need.

¹² Figure still to be verified to ensure clients who have received assistance from multiple agencies have not been double counted, and figures outstanding for one agency.

How good is the service?

- 76** The temporary accommodation available for homeless people is basic and lacks modern facilities. The Craven Housing hostel is the only temporary accommodation available other than B&B. All but one of the rooms has shared facilities for bathing and, despite drawing up plans, the council has not yet invested in modernising the hostel by turning it into self contained units. There is no out of hours or on-site support available. There are no self-referral options, which is a particular problem when the service is dealing with vulnerable males, for example with drug, alcohol or mental health issues. There is little temporary accommodation for homeless families with the removal of the dispersed accommodation scheme to make cost savings, and the hostel does not offer appropriate accommodation for families.
- 77** Emergency accommodation and direct access provision is limited. Direct access provision is outside the district and not always accessible for Craven customers. There is no refuge accommodation within the district for victims of domestic violence. If the Making Safe scheme is not appropriate, the only alternatives are for women/families to go into the hostel or to go to outside the district into a refuge. The needs of vulnerable individuals may not always be met.
- 78** People stay too long in temporary accommodation. There is a target to move on within 17 weeks, however this has not been met with the average time in hostels of 23.68 weeks in 2008/09. Homeless applicants are allowed to wait up to three months for their area of preference which contributes to the length of time spent in temporary accommodation. This is not best or most efficient use of temporary accommodation.
- 79** The council does not understand why there are much lower levels of homeless presentations and acceptances this year. The range of presentations dropped from 134 in 2003/04 to 31 in 2008/09, with acceptances dropping from 42 to 4 in the same period. While a range of prevention mechanisms have been put in place, it is difficult to see if the reduction is down to effective prevention. Anecdotal information suggests that the reasons may relate to the services now delivered to 16 and 17 year olds by Foundation Housing. There has also been an increase in the level of affordable housing, but there is no evidence to confirm if this is having an impact on levels of homeless presentations. The levels of homelessness and homeless prevention may therefore be understated.
- 80** There are weaknesses in the housing allocation policy. A traditional points based system is in place, and a choice based letting system is not planned until 2010/11. From the perspective of allocations staff, this is not working well as they are unable to confirm points allocations through home visits. This means some people may gain unfair access to social housing. While additional points are allocated to homeless people to improve access to re-housing, the local connection criteria acts as a barrier to some homeless people accessing move on accommodation within the locality. There is a mismatch between the homeless criteria and the allocations criteria which means an individual may be classed as statutory homeless in priority need but then not rehoused as they do not meet the allocations criteria. The number of lettings made by Craven Housing to homeless households is extremely low at 2.85 per cent (2 households) for the first six months of 2007/08.

- 81 There are barriers to accessing the homeless prevention fund. The fund has not been devolved to the housing options service. Despite an agreement that this would happen on 1 April 2008, it has not yet taken place. Staff describe a cumbersome, long-winded and restrictive application process to get funding from this source. This means that they are unable to respond effectively and in a timely manner to a specific set of individual circumstances.

Making the best use of existing housing - private sector housing

- 82 There is a balance of strengths and weaknesses in this area. There is a comprehensive private sector renewal policy, supported by the empty homes strategy. The council engages effectively with partners to improve the quality of private sector stock to enable people to remain in their own homes. The council has been effective in bringing empty homes back into use as affordable housing. Some use has been made of RRO¹³ powers to improve stock condition. Effective relationships have been developed with private landlords to improve private rented conditions. The condition of HMOs has been assessed, however there are some weaknesses in obtaining regular and systematic information on HMOs. Grants and action is not targeted to those areas or people which need it most. The council takes no action to help people in the private sector move to homes more suitable to their needs.
- 83 A comprehensive private sector renewal policy supports delivery of the corporate plan priorities. It is based on the results of the 2004 private sector stock condition survey and sets out the council's response to the RRO. The focus is on helping private sector properties meet the decency standard, to reduce empty homes and to improve energy efficiency, with particular support aimed at more vulnerable households. A range of support is offered including repairs assistance grant, empty homes grant assistance, energy efficiency grant assistance and home appreciation loans. Delivery of the policy will help enable people to remain in their own homes and improve private sector housing conditions.
- 84 The council effectively engages in partnerships to improve the quality of the private sector stock. This includes partnerships with the Home Improvement Agency, the Energy Partnership, and with North Yorkshire County Council to deliver Telecare and DFGs. However partnership working with the PCT is under-developed and not effective. Partners find the council has an openness in trialling new initiatives. Through this work there has been a net increase in the percentage of private sector homes meeting the decent homes standard of 2.17 per cent by quarter 3 of 2007/08 compared to the year-end target of 1.5 per cent.

¹³ Regulatory Reform Order 2002

How good is the service?

- 85** The council is improving the condition of private sector stock for vulnerable households. The main vehicle for this is the Home Improvement Agency. A detailed SLA sets out clearly the expected level of service, along with detailed service principles. This includes a range of performance indicators and targets which are reported quarterly to CDC. The agency delivers a comprehensive improvement service and individual properties have energy efficiency improvements identified at the same time as completion of a DFG or repairs assistance scheme (RAS) assessment. A handyman service is also offered for minor repairs. Formal monitoring arrangements have only recently been introduced and are not embedded. Fortnightly meetings are held between CDC and Anchor, with six to eight weekly meetings held with NYCC Adult and Community Services to discuss issues with individual cases to ensure progress. This enables the provision of suitable accommodation for those people who wish to remain in their own home. In current financial year Anchor have completed a total of 903 jobs to support people to remain in their own homes.
- 86** The council has been effective in helping people stay in their own homes through the provision of energy efficiency improvements. The council is making use of Warmfront measures (316 cases year to date) and council Energy Efficiency Grants (61 cases year to date). Energy efficiency works go beyond minimum expected standard. For example, grants are awarded to put the maximum level of insulation in properties rather than just meeting the minimum requirement, and there is a focus to complete other energy efficiency work at the same time to enable the service to be delivered through one visit, including the provision of central heating. This has helped to increase the number of vulnerable households who are living in decent homes.
- 87** The council has been proactive in taking action to bring empty homes back into use. A comprehensive empty homes strategy focuses on properties vacant for more than six months, and using empty homes to increase affordable housing provision. An action plan supports delivery of the empty homes strategy. The empty homes strategy has a target of bringing five properties per year back into use. An empty homes grant is available to improve properties and return them to use for affordable rent for Craven Housing applicants. This was initially set at £20k per unit, but has been increased to £35k per unit following low take up. Seven properties have been returned to use as affordable housing in 2008/09 with another nine cases in progress for 2009/10.
- 88** The Council uses some of its powers to deal with poor quality private sector housing. The enforcement policy highlights a range of ways in which the council plans to take action ranging from warning letters to issuing licences and serving statutory notices. This includes a clear scheme of delegation setting out responsibilities. In 2008/09, 29 notices were issued. Follow up inspections ensure action has been taken to improve the condition.

- 89** The council has developed effective relationships with some landlords. There is a well attended landlord forum, chaired by the National Landlord Association. This includes representation from RSLs operating locally. Information is provided by mailshots to those landlords who do not attend the meetings, including a regular informative landlord update. This has improved landlord understanding of services provided by the council, including resolving benefit issues to help prevent the eviction of tenants, the services offered by Foundations and in accessing the different support available to help landlords improve the quality of their homes. These relationships help make the best use of existing housing..
- 90** The council deals effectively with homes in multiple occupation (HMOs). A detailed HMO policy sets out the licence agreements, fees charged and standards of accommodation. A programme of 130 HMO inspections is almost complete. This was comprehensive and covered LACORS¹⁴ fire and safety and HHSRS¹⁵. Three officers are trained to complete HHSRS assessments. This has informed the development of a HMO register which includes a future inspection programme of HMOs based on a risk assessment carried out at the time of the original inspection.
- 91** There are some weaknesses in the approach to dealing with HMOs. The HMO policy does not set out how CDC will work in partnership with other agencies to identify and deal with HMO issues. There is no ongoing system to access council tax and electoral information to identify HMOs or empty properties throughout the year. The current reliance on an annual snapshot means the information held by the team is out of date. This makes it difficult to move towards a more proactive role in addressing HMOs and empty properties.
- 92** There are inconsistencies in the targets set in relation to bringing empty homes back into use. Due to the Council's misinterpretation of 'affordable' housing the housing strategy includes an unrealistic target of bringing 35 units back into use as affordable housing each year through implementation of the Empty Homes strategy. However, the Empty Homes Strategy action plan only has a target of bringing eight properties back into use through the Empty Homes grant for each year from 2008/09 to 2010/11.
- 93** Progress in improving the condition of private sector stock has been limited in some areas. There is limited take up of the repairs assistance scheme with only seven cases in 2008/09. There has been take up of the home appreciation loan in 2008/09. This acts as a barrier to improving decency standards in private sector housing.
- 94** The council has not considered the sustainability of the housing stock in its strategic approach. The affordable warmth strategy is out of date and there is no fuel poverty strategy. There is an North Yorkshire Affordable Warmth partnership but no outcomes can be demonstrated for Craven. The housing strategy and its supporting strategies and policies do not make reference to the long term sustainability of stock or the housing market.

¹⁴ The Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services is the local government central body responsible for overseeing local authority regulatory and related services in the UK

¹⁵ Housing Health and Safety Rating System

How good is the service?

- 95 Grants and loans are not targeted to geographical areas, or groups of residents who are in greatest need. The current approach is based on responding to whatever requests the council receives. For example, the council has access to information from the HECA¹⁶ home energy survey and the private sector stock condition survey but the work on affordable warmth and energy efficiency has not been targeted to those areas. There is no prioritisation system for delivery of DFGs to ensure those most in need have their needs met more quickly. Demand for empty property grants now exceeds availability, however there is no approved policy on how applications will be prioritised or the basis on which grants will be awarded. This impacts on the ability of the council to make transparent decisions.
- 96 The council takes no action to help people in the private sector move to homes more suitable to their needs. The council has not considered approaches, the use of legislation or innovative approaches, which provide incentives for people to move to more suitable accommodation which better meets their needs. This acts as a barrier to making best use of the housing stock to meet the needs of the local community.

Enabling the provision of more housing to meet needs

- 97 This is an area where strengths outweigh weaknesses. The Council maximises the amount of development of affordable housing through partnership working and its own resources, supported by effective policies and procedures and strong relationships with developers and partner RSLs. The council has enabled housing developments that meet needs and are located in the most appropriate places. Housing works effectively with planning to increase levels of affordable housing development. Despite positive performance, the LAA stretch targets for affordable housing have not been achieved. The long term sustainability of new housing has not been considered.
- 98 The Council has maximised the amount of affordable housing provided through all means including the use of its own resources, the National Affordable Housing Programme and planning gain. There are positive outcomes in 2008/09. Housing completions are 292 against an annual target of 250. Fifty seven affordable homes have been delivered (17.64 per cent of all new homes developed) with 37 affordable rented homes, and 20 as a form of low cost home ownership (grant free affordable home completions). There were seven conversions to affordable housing from existing properties. Affordable housing is achieved on 76 per cent of sites in excess of the threshold size, but no provision on sites below the threshold size. The council has made use of S106 agreements. The number of homes achieved through S106 improved dramatically from six in 2007/08 to 24 in 2008/09. The council no longer routinely accepts commuted sums. The last one was some years ago. While it would not rule out commuted sums if there was a clear case for it, it would only be in extenuating circumstances. This is helping to improve access to affordable housing.

¹⁶ Home Energy Conservation Association

- 99** The council has effective policies and procedures to enable the development of affordable housing. This includes effective arrangements for rural housing (where relevant). The rural housing enabler has worked well with Parish Councils on rural exceptions sites to deliver affordable homes. Rural exception sites have been used resulting in nine homes in 2006/07, eight in 2007/08 and development commencing in August 2008 for a further 22 homes and planning permission secured for a further 58 homes.
- 100** The council works effectively with others to support delivery of the affordable housing programme. Members are strongly supportive of affordable housing. Developers are positive about their relationship with the Council, which includes clear lines of communication which helps ensure developers have a good understanding of the Council's expectations. The Council proactively talks to developers who are sitting on planning permissions to encourage development. There is some evidence of matching developers and RSLs to help deal with 'difficult to sell' flats resulting from changes in the economic climate.
- 101** The Council has effective relationships with the HCA and housing associations. A partnering agreement supports the provision of improved quality of housing and increases the level of affordable housing, enabling a small number of RSLs to benefit directly in opportunities provided by the council by means of planning policy or the council's land disposals initiatives. These are effective in maximising resources. For example, four council owned sites were gifted to RSLs for development to yield 85 new affordable homes and to deliver on promises made when the housing stock transferred. Quarterly meetings are held with partner RSLs on developments to maintain momentum. Work is in progress to increase the number of RSL partners and to link with the Harrogate Partnership. This has improved council capacity to deliver affordable housing priorities.
- 102** The Council's planning services are high quality and used to drive affordable housing. There is a productive and effective working relationship between planning and housing and respective roles and responsibilities are understood. Housing takes the lead on negotiations with developers which commence in advance of planning applications. Delivery of affordable housing is monitored from pre-application through to completion. This is a well embedded and systematic approach.
- 103** The council enables housing developments that meet needs, located in the most appropriate places. The local plan, draft core strategy and affordable housing guide set out the framework for the type, tenure, density and affordability of local housing. In the interim, the affordable housing guide provides clear direction for developers and helps them understand what criteria they need to meet in putting forward schemes. The guide sets out indicative targets for each ward. The guide is useful in engaging members on the issue of affordable housing and raising awareness of what is meant by affordable housing and why it is important to the district's development. This has led to the planning committee being increasingly positive towards developments which include the requisite affordable housing element. As a result, Craven led on the development of a housing negotiation protocol for North Yorkshire.

How good is the service?

- 104** The council has a basic idea of the type of housing it wishes to see developed. It does not have a well developed plan to support this however. Progress on developing the LDF has been held up for a number of internal and external reasons. There are currently no site specific allocations for affordable homes and the blanket 40 per cent is applied. The council's plans do not demonstrate how affordable housing targets will be met. For example, it is not clear how the mismatch between the supply of larger family houses and the demand (around 30 homes on the housing waiting list) will be addressed. More demanding targets for affordable homes cannot be set until the Local Development Framework is put in place and until then the Council is restricted to working in accordance with PPS3¹⁷. Despite positive action in this area, the council has had minimal impact on balancing the housing market.
- 105** Despite positive performance in affordable housing, the LAA stretch targets have not been achieved. An original LAA stretch target aimed for 278 affordable homes between 2007/08 and 2010/11. However in 2007/08 only 14 homes were delivered against a target of 70, and in 2008/09 57 delivered against a target of 85. This brings a total shortfall of 84 homes, meaning the Council needs to achieve 204 units over the remaining two years.
- 106** New affordable housing is developed to Housing Corporation design standards, however efforts have not been made to enhance the sustainability of new homes. In 2007/08, no new homes were classed as secure by design, and no homes built with eco-excellent ratings or low energy features above the current HCA requirements. The Council seeks to achieve sustainability of new affordable housing with the requirement that all new homes meet the Code for Sustainable Homes, but this was not embedded at the time of the inspection. This means affordable housing provided may not meet the future needs of the community.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 107** Weaknesses significantly outweigh strengths in this area. The strategic approach to value for money is under-developed. The cost of the delivery of the strategic housing service is not known. There is little accurate information on costs and services, impacting on the ability of the council to benchmark. There is limited action to date to embed a value for money culture, and staff lack awareness of VFM issues. VFM of the strategic housing service and its partnership relationships cannot be demonstrated. There is no a robust modern procurement strategy. However, the council has been effective at securing additional funds to improve capacity to deliver the service.

¹⁷ Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) underpins the delivery of the Government's strategic housing policy objectives and the goal to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent home, which they can afford in a community where they want to live.

How do costs compare?

- 108** The costs of the strategic housing service are not known, other than the overall service cost. Efforts were made in 2007 to understand the high level service costs and how they compare to the nearest neighbours using the Audit Commission VFM toolkit. However while this identified the comparative position it identified the need to carry out more analysis to help understand the low and high costs. Costs of individual elements of the service were only known for the homelessness service. Cost information was not linked to service quality or performance information. The Council cannot demonstrate that the service or particular elements of the service are delivering value for money.
- 109** The latest comparative cost information used by the council is from 2007/08 which shows that £6.81 per head of population is spent on housing, placing it as the fifth lowest cost organisation compared to the sixteen nearest neighbours. Homeless services cost £2.70 per head of population making this the eighth lowest cost compared to the sixteen nearest neighbours. However it is thought the homeless figures could be inaccurate due to an accounting error at the time. The council does not understand the reasons for differences in the costs of services and does not use them consistently to review cost effectiveness.
- 110** There is little accurate information on costs and services. The Council recognises the need to improve its financial returns, and action is now underway to review the processes for completion of the financial and statistical returns, including CIPFA returns. The lack of robust information impacts on the validity of benchmarking data.

How is value for money managed?

- 111** There is limited action to embed a VFM culture within the council. There is currently no strategic approach to VFM within the authority. Work was carried out with managers in 2007 to identify how they could improve VFM within their service area. There is no evidence of outcomes for this in relation to strategic housing. Recent staff and member briefings have focused on the current financial position and the need to make efficiencies. Staff can put forward savings they identify on the intranet. An internal staff group is looking for efficiencies and is involved in carrying out service reviews. Recent corporate commitment to value for money has improved with the new Council Plan and the medium term financial plan focusing on VFM. However a VFM culture is not yet embedded at all levels of the organisation.
- 112** Officers do not demonstrate an awareness of value for money or efficiencies. Staff have not received any training or awareness raising on value for money. Training is limited to a senior managers' away day in April 2007 based on the Use of Resources assessment. The council's approach to value for money focuses on cheapest cost. There is a lack of understanding of how efficiencies can be achieved, with the service reporting efficiency savings resulting from unplanned staff vacancies. There has been no assessment of staff understanding of VFM. This acts as a barrier to understanding if services are delivering value for money and in identifying where value for money could be further improved, or efficiencies identified.

How good is the service?

- 113** The council cannot demonstrate whether the strategic housing service delivers value for money. There is no evidence of action to improve VFM within the strategic housing service. The service review completed in 2008 did not challenge how delivery of individual elements of the service could be changed to deliver improved value for money or efficiencies. Efficiency savings identified are limited and there are no non-cashable savings in relation to the strategic housing service.
- 114** The council cannot demonstrate that the different partnerships to deliver strategic objectives are the most cost-effective and beneficial available. The Council has not undertaken an appraisal to assess the most effective and efficient means of delivering the housing options service. The council has been effective in using partnerships to attract external funding, for example the partnership with the Energy Efficiency Partnership. However, there are no efforts to assess or improve the value for money delivered through partnership agreements.
- 115** There is no robust modern procurement strategy. The current procurement strategy is out of date (ending 2007) and work is in progress to develop an approach through the regional consortium. There is limited focus on how quality will be assessed alongside cost, or in ensuring procurement secures additional benefits. There is no evidence of involving residents or service users in procurement, and little understanding of the role of residents and service users in the selection and monitoring of contracts and partnership agreements. Service area compliance against the current framework is not monitored. This means the council is not applying best practice in achieving improvement value for money through procurement and partnerships.
- 116** In recent years the council has been effective at securing and maximising external funding to support delivery of local service priorities. This includes an allocation of £450k of Regional Housing Board money to support delivery of decent homes in the private sector, and £3.7 million Supporting People funding to deliver commissioned services over three years. Funding to support affordable housing plans is secured through S106 committed sums, developer contributions in lieu of affordable housing and AHP from the Housing Corporation. This has improved outcomes in some key areas including increasing affordable housing provision, addressing empty properties, and improving the condition of private sector stock.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 117** Strengths outweigh weaknesses in this area. Craven responded positively to Audit Commission work on Affordable Housing in 2006. This has helped to improve the service from one where the Council was not fully meeting its strategic role (and stated objective) to provide affordable housing or meeting local housing needs to one which is making progress in a number of areas including delivering the affordable housing agenda, improving the quality of private sector housing, returning empty homes back into use and in homelessness prevention. There is some progress in achieving efficiency targets. However, there are a number of key areas where the council has not improved services to meet the expected standard.
- 118** Craven DC has implemented changes derived from the Audit Commission's work on North Yorkshire Affordable Housing in 2006. Most of the recommendations are delivered with resulting outcomes, and some still in the process of being delivered. One of the key improvements was to address the Council's limited strategic housing capacity through the restructure of the team and appointment of additional resources. Time has been spent to improve the leadership capacity of members in terms of their understanding of strategic housing and the need to deliver affordable housing. This was partly achieved through member involvement on the Housing Improvement Team which was responsible for driving forward the improvements. There need for the Council to fully understand its responsibilities in private sector housing and its role in enabling the provision of decent affordable housing has been addressed by the implementation of a full suite of strategies and policies including the development of a fit for purpose housing strategy. This has resulted in a range of service improvements, demonstrated by the improvements in performance highlighted below.
- 119** Strong progress in delivering the affordable housing agenda can be demonstrated. In 2006 the council had a poor track record in maximising provision of new affordable housing. Improvements included the development and approval of an Interim Planning Policy which focuses on affordable housing provision, and awareness raising activity with members to reduce the reluctance to grant permission for affordable housing developments. There is evidence of significant progress in the provision of affordable homes, however this does not meet the target set. The provision of units has increased, with 14 in 2005/06, 17 in 2006/07, 14 in 2007/08, and 57 in 2008/09 against a target of 65. A further 52 are expected in 2009/10 against the target of 100. The targets were set prior to the changes in the economy, however the council has been effective in making progress and overcoming challenges where it can.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 120** The Council has made improvements which contribute to improving the quality of private sector housing, one of the key aims for the service. This can be attributed to action resulting from introduction of the Energy Efficiency Grant in 2007 which has benefited 176 households to date. In 2006 there were limited relations between the council and private landlords. This has been addressed through the quarterly landlord forum and regular communication to help them understand their responsibilities and to target improvements to the quality of private rented homes. However, take up of the repairs assistance scheme has not been as successful as expected. In 2008/09 £75k was allocated from the regional housing board, however only £42k of this is expected to be spent in the year with a further £16k approved in 2008/09 but committed from the 2009/10 budget. The percentage of vulnerable households living in decent homes is gradually increasing from 70.5 per cent in 2004 to 74.3 per cent in quarter three 2008/09, and the council is making good progress towards achievement of the 75 per cent target by 2010.
- 121** After some initial delays there is steady improvement in the way the council deals with empty homes. The number of vacant dwellings returned to occupation or demolished (BVPI 64) has improved from 0 in 2004/05 and 2005/06 to 26 in 2007/08, and 31 properties for 2008/09 at 31 December 2008. Empty homes grants were used for the first time in 2008, resulting in seven empty homes being improved and made available as affordable housing.
- 122** There is steady improvement in the performance of homelessness services. Voluntary agencies recognise improvement since the new arrangements were implemented. The impact of homelessness prevention work through advice and proactive intervention is improving from 1.38 cases per 1000 households in 2005/06 to 4.59 per 1000 households for 2008/09. The number of homeless decisions has reduced considerably from 134 in 2003/04 to 102 in 2007/08 and then to 31 for 2008/09. Priority homeless acceptances have fallen from 42 in 2003/04 to 20 in 2007/08 to 4 in 2008/09. The number in temporary accommodation (NI156) has therefore also reduced from 13 in 2003/04 to 4 in 2007/08, to 5 in 2008/09. However it is not clear how this reduction has been achieved and the Council is undertaking further work to investigate the reasons for this.
- 123** Efficiency targets between 2004/05 and 2007/08 have been exceeded. The council was targeted to make efficiencies of £505k, with final savings of £790k achieved, of which 83 per cent were classed as cashable. However there is some concern over the definition of savings used, with staff cost savings resulting from vacancies classed as an efficiency saving. This level of savings helps to address the current financial difficulties faced by the council.
- 124** There are some delays in implementing improvements following on from advice and assistance work carried out by the Audit Commission in September 2008. Only a few actions have been fully delivered including improvements in the provision of information on the full range of strategic housing services, and the development of budget heads for the service. There are some areas where action is in progress, and some where improvement activity has not commenced. This is partly due to the short timescale (six months) since the improvement work, and the need for the council to focus on other priority areas. Further work is needed for the recommendations to result in service improvements for Craven residents.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

125 There are key areas where delays have been experienced in the delivery of improvements. For example, the council has made slow progress in equality impact assessments and does not yet have a comprehensive routine EIA approach. Improvements in service monitoring and the use of customer feedback have been delayed. Value for money assessments of the council's delivery of the strategic housing service, and its partnership arrangements have still to be undertaken. There continues to be a lack of robust and comparable cost information. The council's performance in some areas has not improved.

How well does the service manage performance?

126 Strengths and weaknesses are in balance in this area. The Council has clear vision of what it wants to achieve in relation to strategic housing and a strong focus within the Strategic Housing service to deliver service objectives and improvements. Arrangements are in place for the Directorate and Executive Members to scrutinise performance. Corporate initiatives are underway which will address some of the weaknesses highlighted during the inspection. Improvement plans and strategies for the Strategic Housing service are not fully integrated. A performance management culture is not fully embedded within the council and the service. Learning is not systematic and the service could do more to learn from other organisations, its own experience and customers. There is limited information reported to members of the public

127 The Council has clear vision of what it wants to achieve in strategic housing. Housing is a key priority and this is reflected in the existing Corporate Plan, the new Council Plan, the Craven Sustainable Community Strategy, the North Yorkshire Sustainable Community Strategy and the LAA. This includes identification of key actions to work towards achievement of the priorities and targets set, brought together in the Housing Strategy. In 2009 the number of corporate goals has been streamlined from 70 to 26, with a continued focus on strategic housing as a key priority. This reflects the results of the Place Survey which identified decent affordable housing as the 5th priority to be improved with 32 per cent of respondents selecting this as a priority. This helps to ensure strategic housing remains a focus for the Council.

128 There is a strong focus within the Strategic Housing service to deliver service objectives and improvements. There is ownership within the team to continue to deliver against the service improvement plan, and staff have aspirations for future improvements. Delivery of the housing strategy through the CDC Performance monitoring framework, Craven District Housing Forum and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are monitored. The delivery of affordable housing is monitored including all potential sites from identification/pre-application enquiry through to completion. These arrangements and the expectations on the role of the developer, strategic housing and planning are clearly set out in the Affordable Housing Guide. This results in improved outcomes for local residents in the provision of affordable housing and improved housing conditions.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 129** There is a comprehensive performance management framework with a strong focus on the delivery of corporate goals. This includes integrated monitoring arrangements for the Local Area Agreement, Corporate Plan, Service Improvement Plans and the Craven Pride Action Plan. Plans are in place to strengthen this further in 2009 in line with the new Council Plan and to incorporate actions from other strategies. This is supported by the corporate performance management system which has continued to embed a performance management culture at head of service level, and assist in the streamlining of progress reporting against actions within the top level plans. This is supported by dedicated resources at the corporate centre. The Council is clear on how well it is delivering against corporate goals and objectives.
- 130** Arrangements are in place for the Directorate and Executive Members to scrutinise the performance of the council in delivery of its strategic goals identified within the corporate plan. This includes quarterly reporting at directorate level, six monthly reporting to specific Corporate Priority Groups and relevant scrutiny and policy committees. This is likely to be strengthened further through the streamlining of arrangement. Individual performance clinics look at performance in more detail on identified issues, and this has included one on temporary accommodation figures. Elected Members feel they are presented with the relevant information for them to be able to challenge delivery of improvements.
- 131** There is effective management of the service to ensure staff focus on relevant areas. Individual work plans for the Strategic Housing Team show individuals the areas of work they should prioritise, however these do not include performance targets. Progress in delivery of the work plans is monitored through one to ones. Working relationships between officers are effective in ensuring joint delivery of actions. Staff are aware how their work relates to the strategic objectives of the council, and to the delivery of the housing strategy, and service plan.
- 132** Corporate initiatives and improvement plans incorporate actions, which will address some of the weaknesses highlighted during this inspection, particularly in the cross cutting areas. For example, a new community engagement strategy is under development which sets out how the council can engage with all groups of the local population, particularly older and younger people. A draft approach for the routine completion of EIAs is due to be implemented in 2009/10. The workforce strategy includes a number of actions around training on the cross cutting areas. The new Council plan focuses heavily on addressing value for money issues over the next 12 months. A new VFM framework identifies the council's approach to VFM including procurement, performance management, and service reviews. The Council is focused on improving the 'right' areas.
- 133** Appropriate arrangements test the quality of data submitted in performance indicators. This includes internal challenge through the corporate performance officer, internal audit arrangements with an appropriate outcome rating from an external audit. A data quality action plan is in place to further improve this area. This ensures that figures reported are accurate.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 134** There has been limited influence of the wider public and key stakeholders in the development of the Council Plan. Members were actively engaged and heavily influenced the development of the new plan. The plan did reflect public priorities based on the Place Survey results and an exercise carried out with the public in 2004. However wider public involvement was limited to members and officers ensuring residents' priorities based on day to day discussions and area forums were incorporated. There was no formal mechanism for residents to influence the council plan other than commenting on a draft version of the plan made available in a range of ways, but this only warranted 45 responses which were mainly from stakeholders rather than individual residents. The aims of the plan may not fully reflect local residents' aspirations now and for the future.
- 135** The community strategy or service improvement plans goals do not make clear what all the outcomes or targets are, with repeated use of words such 'increase' and 'improve'. Information on indicators for the goals is included on the online performance management system, but clear links between these and the goals are not incorporated into the reports presented to the management team and members. Those monitoring the delivery of the strategy and service improvement plans do not have all the necessary information to enable them to effectively challenge delivery of the actions.
- 136** Improvement plans and strategies for the Strategic Housing service are not fully integrated. There are a number of improvement plans for the service area, and some priority actions which are not reflected within the Strategic Housing Service Plan. The annual service plan only focuses on the corporate plan goals. Some key areas of activity which are resource intensive, such as joint working across the region and sub region, review of the service and the homelessness contract and addressing gaps in needs and stock condition information, are not reflected. This makes it difficult to assess if the team has the capacity to deliver against all actions plans, and it is not clear what actions are being prioritised for delivery.
- 137** Performance monitoring does not give the organisation and members a full picture of how well the service is delivering against corporate and service objectives, improvement plans, the national agenda and local indicators and targets. There is no one report which provides an overview of the performance for the whole strategic housing service. Different elements of the service are reported in different corporate level reports. It is not easy to understand how well the service is performing and what are the priority areas for action to drive forward improvement.
- 138** A performance management culture is not fully embedded within the council or the service. There is limited awareness raising within the council on performance management. This is currently limited to induction training and some information on performance management as part of line management training. Roadshows with staff on performance management were carried out in 2007. This is recognised as a gap and actions are in place in the workforce strategy to address this in 2009/10. The overall performance of the service is not clearly understood or challenged.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 139** There are some examples where CDC has learnt from other organisations and its own experience. For example the Making Safe scheme for victims of domestic violence was adapted from the Scarborough model. Changes were made to information on out of hours services in relation to homeless support after an example where a service user presented and the service did not have the information on out of hours services they could refer to. The council is working closely with Harrogate on the provision of affordable housing. This has resulted in some service improvements.
- 140** However, learning is not systematic and the service could do more to learn from others. The self assessment completed as part of the inspection was not used to inform improvement plans within the service and corporately. There is limited internal challenge when completing processes such as service reviews and equality impact assessments. The corporate approach to benchmarking, and benchmarking within the strategic housing service is weak. It cannot be demonstrated that benchmarking has led to service improvement. Opportunities to share learning and benchmarking are not always taken up due to capacity within the team. For example, the team is not represented at the Northern Adaptations Group or the Foundations stakeholder meetings. There are no examples of learning from customers for example through consultation, satisfaction feedback or complaints. Opportunities for improvement are not routinely identified or taken forward.
- 141** There has been limited wider staff engagement in the development of the new council plan and service improvement plans. The current arrangements follow a top - down arrangement. Development of the council plan was limited to senior management level and above with a reliance on individual service heads to engage with their staff on corporate and service improvement planning. The only formal method of involvement was through an email to all staff to allow them to comment on the draft Council plan. There is no formal mechanism to ensure staff are able to influence development of their service plan.
- 142** There is limited information reported to the public in relation to the performance of the council overall and in delivering strategic housing services. An annual performance plan is produced, however the plan for the end of 2007/08 was not presented in a user friendly format and had limited information on strategic housing. The public do have access to performance reports for Committees via the website, however these are not easily accessible and not presented in an easy to interpret format. There is no formal mechanism for key stakeholders or residents to monitor and challenge performance other than by attending Council meetings. This seriously limits the opportunities service users and the public have to influence the performance of the service.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 143** Weaknesses significantly outweigh strengths in this area. The council are facing significant financial pressures and there is concern over the future financial capacity of the council to deliver its objectives. Business and service planning is not currently aligned to financial planning and financial management is weak. Training and development opportunities are very limited. The workforce of the Council is not representative of the local community. It is not clear if there is financial capacity to meet the future increases in demand for services. There are challenges in delivering against the LAA targets for affordable housing for 2009/10 resulting from the current economic climate and land availability. Action has been taken to ensure the service had the appropriate capacity to deliver and improve the service. Elected members demonstrate an awareness and understanding of strategic housing issues. There is appropriate human resources frameworks and practices. ICT is being used to support service delivery and improvements. Partnership working is used to help increase the capacity of the service.
- 144** The council faces significant financial pressures and there is concern over the future financial capacity of the council to deliver its objectives. The council is required to make savings of £2.5 million over the next two years and these are detailed in a two-year financial strategy. £1.7 million of savings are identified to date, with a prioritised programme of savings to be realised. Due to the current financial uncertainty and the need to address the current urgent situation there is no financial planning beyond 2011. The council is not in a position to predict beyond the next two years as a result of the amount of savings which need to be made. It cannot show it has the ongoing capacity to maintain investment in the service, or increase investment to meet changing needs. There is a considerable drop in the budget allocation of £146k from a revenue budget of £926,860 for 2008/09 to £790,937 in 2009/10. £86k of savings are expected through changes to central administrative recharges. However it is not clear how the remaining reduction will be absorbed by the team and impact on service delivery.
- 145** There are historical weaknesses in corporate budget setting and financial management with some recent action to address the issues. The council has only received a level 1 score on the Use of Resources assessment. Action is now in place to address the issues, supported by the appointment of an interim finance director, and supporting agency staff, and a section 151 officer from North Yorkshire County Council (until 1 April 2009). An accurate budget for 2008/09 was only set and approved nine months into the financial year, and accounts for 2007/08 only recently closed. Budget monitoring arrangements have only recently commenced, with budget managers now getting staffing information and budget information, and support from the central finance team. A review of the financial services function has been completed, the outcomes of which are awaiting policy approval. This considers a range of options for future service delivery focused on addressing the historic weaknesses and increasing capacity to deliver in this area. Future training on financial management is included within the workforce strategy and action plan for 2009/10. However this new approach is not embedded and is yet to have an impact.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 146** Financial management within the service is weak. There are a number of areas where budgets for 2008/09 have been fully spent, and considerable amounts committed from 2009/10 budgets prior to commencement of the new financial year. The council cannot demonstrate it has made best use of the resources available.
- 147** Business and service planning is not aligned to financial planning. Historically corporate plans and service plans were not resourced or aligned to budgets to ensure budgets reflect the priorities of the organisation. Targeted investment was only made for a small number of high level improvement areas. The current strategic housing service plan does not identify resources (financial and staff) required to deliver actions. This will be addressed through the introduction of a new streamlined council plan for 2009/10, and with new financial planning arrangements which seek to align resources to business and service plans. However it is currently difficult to assess if the council has the capacity to deliver against the different plans in place.
- 148** Training and development opportunities are very limited. The overall training budget has been reduced by 15 per cent and corporate training has been put on hold to help the council in achieving cost savings. There is limited training on cross cutting areas with one off VFM training was limited to heads of service in 2007. People First customer care training sessions were held in 2007 however only three members of the strategic housing service attended the sessions. There is no programme of ongoing training and development opportunities. Training for staff to date has focused on the use of the IT systems within the team, with limited training on specific strategic housing issues. There are currently restrictions on attending training and conferences. Staff knowledge updates are limited to attending the North Yorkshire joint working groups, and access to the IDeA website. This acts as a barrier to the team updating and improving their knowledge base, and accessing good practice examples and learning from other authorities.
- 149** CDC have not benefited from awareness raising or training available from key partners to inform the approach the council takes in relation to strategic housing. For example, there is no evidence of take up of Energy Partnership training on energy efficiency. The only example provided is of staff and customer ability to access domestic abuse awareness raising theatre presentations. This represents a missed opportunity and acts as a barrier to staff increasing their awareness on relevant areas.
- 150** The council cannot demonstrate how satisfied staff are. The last staff satisfaction survey carried out was in 2006. A staff survey was completed in March 2007 but this focused on stress and well being, which demonstrated average performance on five of the six strands, and above average performance in one strand. Staff satisfaction issues are not considered as part of the workforce strategy. Action cannot be targeted to address staff satisfaction which acts as a barrier to maintaining the workforce.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 151** The Council's workforce is not representative of the local community. 1.6 per cent of the workforce is from the BME population, compared to 4.4 per cent BME population within the district.¹⁸ The top 5 per cent of earners does not include any BME staff. Only 3.2 per cent of the workforce are classed as disabled compared to 11.67 per cent of Craven's economically active population having a long term limiting disability. The percentage of the workforce in the 40-49 age group at 33.9 per cent is considerably higher than the local economic active population figure of 24.4 per cent, and the proportions of the workforce under 40 is less than the local population. There is low representation of women in higher paid jobs with twice as many men as women in principal officer and above grades, and only 30.7 per cent of women in the top 5 per cent of earners in 2007/08. There is limited action taken to address these issues, including signing up to the Positive about Disability Standard, and a Graduate Placement Scheme. The Workforce Strategy recognises the issues in relation to workforce diversity but this is not included within the priorities up to March 2011, and clear actions are not in place to address the specific issues. This acts as a barrier to improving representation in the future.
- 152** It is not clear if there is financial capacity to meet the future increases in demand for services. Increased demand is expected for the Telecare service and for disabled facilities grants due to an increasing aging population and increases in the level of disability. However potential future demand and the resources needed to meet this have not been mapped or included within action plans. It is not clear if funding can sustain the current level of service as take up increases.
- 153** Resources to deliver empty homes grants do not match current demand. There are currently 20 cases which are being considered for an empty property grant. However the overall budget of £250k has been set within the regional housing board allocation for 2009/10. In 2008/09 £600k was spent on empty home grants using the £210k regional housing board grant allocation, £254k of regional housing board grant carried forward from 2007/08 and through the commitment of £111k from the 2009/10 allocation. This means there is only £138k left to allocate within 2009/10 prior to the financial year commencing. It is expected this will result in 9 properties being brought back into use in 2009/10.
- 154** There are challenges in delivering against the LAA targets for affordable housing for 2009/10 resulting from the current economic climate and land availability. The Council does not have access to further pockets of land to offer up for affordable housing once the four schemes in progress are completed. There is uncertainty over HCA funding for 2009/10 and 2010/11, and the potential for developers to mothball sites until the housing market starts to recover. The district and the county council recognise this, but were unable to renegotiate the targets during the LAA March 2009 refresh because of restrictions by central government. This means that there is limited availability of development opportunities, and reduced ability to deliver new affordable housing developments.

¹⁸ 2006 ONS Population estimates

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 155** Some action has been taken to ensure the service has the appropriate capacity to deliver and improve the service. The strategic housing team has been restructured and consolidated into a single team focusing on strategic housing and housing enforcement. Additional resources have been invested to support delivery of affordable housing with the appointment of an affordable housing development manager and locating a sub regional rural housing enabler within the team. An additional member of staff has been appointed to focus on private sector housing improvement. One of the outcomes from this include improved joint working with partners, with partners experiencing good support and communication from the team.
- 156** Elected members demonstrate an awareness and understanding of strategic housing issues. A members' seminar was held in December 2008 covering affordable housing needs, policies and mechanisms. Elected members are involved in a number of housing related partnerships. This helps ensure political support in driving the service forward and enabling targets, particularly around affordable housing to be met.
- 157** There are appropriate human resource frameworks and practices. There is a range of HR policies and procedures including a workforce strategy and implementation plan which focus on recruiting, retaining and developing the right skills, attitudes, behaviour and attitudes to support improvement of the Council's performance. This includes action to address areas of weakness, for example, workforce and succession planning. The Council has achieved Investors in People accreditation. An effective annual performance appraisal process is embedded which includes a six monthly review. This includes the identification of training and development needs aligned to the service priorities for the year. This helps to ensure the council continues to have the capacity to deliver services and annual priorities.
- 158** ICT is used to support service delivery and improvements. Investment has been made on a strategic housing software system which covers all private sector housing enforcement and grant and loan applications. Officers have been trained, and one officer trained in querying the system to support the production of performance management reports. There are clear plans to develop new efficiency initiatives such as document management, mobile and flexible working, virtual desk top and improved telephony linked to the new office moves. This helps to improve efficiencies in service delivery through easier access to information and improved monitoring.
- 159** There are arrangements to ensure staff are kept up to date with council plans and initiatives. A corporate induction day provides an introduction to the corporate plan, complaints, and different services delivered by the council. Regular team meetings are held where the corporate core brief is cascaded ensuring staff are up to date on corporate issues. Intranet based training sessions are used for some areas including diversity and safeguarding which check the knowledge of the participant. A comprehensive intranet is in place which is used to share knowledge. Staff demonstrate awareness of how their work fits within the wider council context.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

- 160 Partnership working is used to help increase the capacity of the service to deliver against its objectives. For example, Craven DC is working closely with Harrogate Borough Council on a number of projects including a homelessness 'sounding board' arrangement and sharing of information. Harrogate provided officer support during a period of staff absence. The council has helped to address gaps in existing knowledge of local communities through partnership working with North Yorkshire resulting in the production of neighbourhood profiles.

Appendix 1 – Performance indicators

Performance indicator	All England top quartile 2007/08	Craven DC 2005/06	Craven DC 2006/07	Craven DC 2007/08
BVPI 64 Vacant private homes returned to use or demolished	112.5	0.00	13	26
BVPI 183a Average length of stay in B&B in weeks	-	0.00	1.29	0.71 ¹⁹
BVPI 183b Average length of stay in hostels in weeks	0.0	29.08	27.73	26.93
BVPI 202 Number of people sleeping rough	0.0	3	3	1
BVPI 203 Reduction in number of families placed in temporary accommodation	-	-3.23	3.33	-6.45 ²⁰

¹⁹ Ex-BVPI retained by the Council as a local indicator. The reported figure is not audited.

²⁰ Ex-BVPI retained by the Council as a local indicator. The reported figure is not audited.

Appendix 2 – Reality checks undertaken

- 1 When we went on-site we carried out a number of different checks, building on the work described above, in order to get a full picture of how good the service is. These on-site reality checks were designed to gather evidence about what it is like to use the service and to see how well it works. Our reality checks included:
 - focus groups with staff and customers;
 - interviews with staff, Councillors, partners and key stakeholders;
 - reviews of documents and supporting evidence;
 - review of Council's website and leaflets; and
 - mystery shopping.

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