

Gosport Borough Council

HRA Business Plan 2012 – 2042

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Section 1 Introduction	5
Section 2 Strategic Direction	7
Section 3 Consultation	13
Section 4 Background	14
Section 5 Assets.....	21
Section 6 Resources	23
Section 7 Equality and Diversity.....	26
Section 8 Conclusion.....	28

Executive Summary

This Business Plan is produced in order to set out the Council's overall aims and objectives for the housing service, as a landlord for over 3,000 homes. It analyses the current position of the service and the homes and sets out the actions planned to achieve the Council's objectives. It reflects the findings from consultation carried out previously with residents, Members and wider stakeholders. It provides a framework for monitoring and evaluating progress in delivering the plan. The plan forms a key part of the Council's preparation for HRA self-financing. This is a major change in national housing finance which introduces new risks and opportunities for the Council's housing service.

Section 2, Strategic Direction, sets out the issues that influence the Business Plan, at a national, regional and local level. This includes how changes in national housing finance and policy impact on the Council's priorities for its housing service. In this section, we set out how the plan will support the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities and wider housing and community objectives. The Business Plan is structured to support defined housing strategic objectives

The plan also highlights the local context in which we operate and our service delivery mechanisms.

Section 3, Consultation, sets out the Council's existing arrangements for involving tenants in decisions about the housing service and summarises the key findings from consultation carried out as part of the development of plan. Tenant involvement is now well established in the Borough, with a clearly defined participation structure and decision making process in place to ensure tenants are involved in shaping, developing and monitoring our services, in a variety of different ways.

Section 4, Background, describes the way in which the service is currently delivered. The plan is produced in the context of major changes in national housing policy, both in the form of tenancy that Councils will be able to offer their tenants in future and in the rent levels charged. This section sets out the Council's initial response to these changes, welcoming future flexibility to improve the service and the use of the housing assets.

Section 5, Assets, describes the Council's housing stock and other assets. Our housing stock is a valuable asset. As a major provider of social housing we make a significant contribution to meeting the need for affordable housing in the Borough. Generally our stock has been well maintained, with an investment strategy targeted at bringing all homes up to the Decent Homes Standard. Tenant feedback indicates a high level of satisfaction with the quality of homes.

Section 6, Resources, describes the baseline financial position for the Housing Revenue Account. It shows the impact of the increase in housing debt that will be required as part of the introduction of self-financing.

Section 7, Equality and Diversity, sets out the Council's commitment to the diverse range of customers that it provides services to.

Section 8 provides the **conclusions**.

Once the Business Plan is completed and formally adopted, an annual action plan will be developed to ensure that the commitments in the plan are delivered. The plan will be reviewed annually to reflect changing aspirations, achievements and increased knowledge. The financial model underlying the plan will be subsequently amended to ensure that it remains both robust and affordable, within a changing environment.

Section 1 Introduction

This Business Plan is produced in order to set out the Council's overall aims and objectives for the housing service, as a landlord for around 3,200 homes. It analyses the current position of the service and the homes and sets out the actions planned to achieve the Council's objectives. It reflects the findings from consultation carried out previously with residents, Members and wider stakeholders. It provides a framework for monitoring and evaluating progress in delivering the plan.

The Business Plan outlines the Council's approach to the management of its housing stock and the strategic direction for the delivery of quality services in a sustainable environment. The Plan takes into account other strategic documents including:

- Capital Strategy
- Rent Strategy
- Financial Strategy.

The Business Plan will be supported by an action plan and will also assist in the development of a Tenancy Strategy (to be completed by late 2012).

Why does the Council need a new Business Plan?

The existing Business Plan for the service was developed in 2002 and there have been many changes since that time, both externally and internally.

Externally, the Council faces changes in national housing policy that have fundamental implications for all social landlords. Council housing finance is changing from April 2012 when the Council will no longer have to pay an annual amount to Government under the housing subsidy system. Instead it will need to take on a significantly increased level of housing debt and manage this debt within a "self-financing" Business Plan. The Council will be able to make long term decisions about its services and the management of its assets. Self-financing brings new financial risks that need to be managed within the Business Plan, but also brings new opportunities for freedoms and flexibilities and for effective asset management.

How the plan has been put together

The plan has been developed with reference to the extensive consultation with residents and stakeholders that took place recently in the development of Local Offers, where all aspects of the housing service were discussed. This included consultation with the newly formed Customer Opinion Panel and wider consultation with staff, Members and other stakeholders. Through this consultation, the strategic objectives for the service have been revisited and updated.

The starting point for the plan is the current service and the condition of the homes. The Council's strategy for managing the housing assets forms a fundamental part of this plan. The future investment needs of the stock have very significant financial implications for the plan and robust information on this is essential to ensure the homes can be maintained at a standard that fits with resident's aspirations and prevents them deteriorating in future.

How the plan will be delivered

Subsequent to the adoption of the Business Plan, an action plan will be developed to deliver the Council's objectives for the housing service, with both short and medium term targets. This will fit into the Council's performance management framework and the plan's objectives feed down into individual staff Members work plans through the Council's performance review and employee development scheme.

This will also include the key risks that may prevent the achievement of objectives and how these will be managed. Finally it will set out how the plan will be reviewed in future to ensure it remains up to date with external and internal changes, and reflects continuously developing consultation.

Section 2 Strategic Direction

In this section we set out the issues that influence this Business Plan, at a national, regional and local level. This includes how changes in national housing finance and policy impact on the Council's priorities for its housing service. In this section we set out how the plan will support the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities and wider housing and community objectives. The plan also highlights the local context in which we operate and our service delivery mechanisms.

Government priorities

The Government, through the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is setting the agenda for decentralisation and localism to deliver the Government's vision of the Big Society, encouraging family and social responsibility.

This will partly be delivered through what is suggested will be a radical redistribution of power and funding from Government to local people, allowing them to influence significantly public services in their communities. These aims include:

- Freeing Local Government from central and regional control
- Decentralising power
- Providing greater freedom and flexibilities to Local Government so that they can genuinely lead communities and deliver essential services according to local needs
- Providing Local Authorities with strong and transparent incentives to facilitate housing growth
- Making the provision of social housing more flexible.

The Council's Financial Strategy clearly indicates the key strategic role that housing plays within Gosport and the HRA Business Plan has been produced in accordance with the overall Financial Strategy. The successful delivery of this Business Plan will contribute significantly to the Council's overall objectives.

National Housing Policy

This plan is prepared in the context of major changes in housing finance and housing policy.

From April 2012, the national housing subsidy system will end and the Council will no longer have to make annual payments to Government. In 2011/12, the Council paid approximately £3.5m to the Government, funded from tenants' rents. Instead the Council will make a one off payment to Government (currently estimated at around £57.3m) in March 2012. After that point it will be able to retain all surpluses from its landlord activity and use these to support its future Business Plan on a self-financing basis. It will continue to have to account for its landlord activity in a separate ring fenced Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

Two elements of national control of Council housing finance remain. The Council will continue to have to pay 75% of the proceeds of any right to buy sales to Government. The remaining 25% will continue to be used for the Council's broader housing objectives for affordable housing and are not included in this HRA Business Plan which only represents the landlord element of the Council's housing role. However, Government is currently

consulting on an alternative approach to Right to Buy sales which could impact on the current position.

Secondly the Government has imposed a limit on the amount of money the Council can borrow and reserves the right to re-open the settlement in the event of major changes in housing policy. The borrowing limit constrains the ability of the Council to consider major regeneration and new build projects financed from this HRA Business Plan. If the borrowing limit is relaxed, as a result of Government decisions in future spending reviews, this would increase borrowing capacity and enable a wider range of options to be considered.

The new regime will mean that for the first time the Council can set long term plans for the future of its housing stock and housing services. The change means that responsibility for long term Business Plan and debt financing moves from central to local Government and the Council will take responsibility for long term asset management. The change means that the Council faces increased risks, particularly around long term asset management, inflation and interest costs. This Business Plan is designed to manage those risks and to put the Council in a position to take advantage of the benefits offered by self-financing in order to improve its housing stock and services.

The plan supports the two key elements of the Government's housing policy; to continue to maintain its properties at the Decent Homes Standard and to set rents based on national policy, moving current rents to target by 2015/16 (rent convergence).

Supporting Council priorities

The Council's mission is:

"To work with our community to improve everyone's quality of life and deliver a sustainable future for the Borough"

The values and priorities of this Business Plan reflect the Council's corporate strategy that has been developed following community consultation. This approach has meant that the Business Plan priorities are closely aligned with the Council's corporate priorities. This means that the plan is able to deliver actions that reflect the concerns and priorities of the Council's residents. As the major provider of social housing in the area we have a key role to play in supporting the Council's strategic objectives and priorities.

The successful delivery of the plan will contribute towards the Council's following strategic objectives:

- Regenerating Gosport's town centre and Waterfront
- Responding to the challenges of Climate Change
- Promoting health and well-being
- Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour
- Strengthening Community Cohesion
- Improving social inclusion
- Delivering quality services.

More, specifically, there are two key actions within the Corporate Action Plan that will be delivered through the plan, namely:

- Review the Council's assets to ensure best value in service delivery and best use of land
- Improve provision for homeless customers in the Borough through improved reception and assessment facilities.

The plan sets out how local objectives for housing will be delivered. These local objectives have been developed through consultation with residents and Members during the development of the Local Offers and support the Council's corporate priorities

Housing Vision

The vision for the housing service is to be a landlord that is providing a quality service in well maintained stock that is recognised by our diverse community as being appropriate to its needs, backed by a robust financial plan.

Our business principles for housing services

Within the HRA Business Plan we have reflected the following business principles:

- Excellent services: ensuring the delivery of accessible, high quality housing services that provide good value for money
- Customer driven: putting the needs of individual customers at the heart of all that we do
- Local focus: making a positive difference to the quality of life in communities across Gosport Borough
- A dynamic organisation: a housing service that is innovative, forward looking and focused on results.

Regional context – the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH)

PUSH is a partnership of the unitary authorities of Portsmouth and Southampton, Hampshire County Council and the District Authorities of Eastleigh, East Hampshire, Fareham, Gosport, Havant, Test Valley and Winchester.

PUSH is committed to ensuring that over the next 20 years, South Hampshire will gain renown as an area offering sustainable prosperity and a high quality of life for residents, as a location of choice for growing businesses, as a major centre of excellence in innovation and technology enabling smarter and more sustainable growth and as a place where the benefits of growth are shared by all sectors and communities. This brighter future will be based on raising the performance of the PUSH partnerships economies..

This is a vision shared by the Members of PUSH, together with other public agencies and partners from all sectors working with them. Their collective view of key objectives can be summarised as follows:

- Promoting economic success by seeking to create a diverse economy where business, enterprise and individuals can flourish, underpinned by modern skills
- Providing the homes they need in sustainable communities

- Building more cohesive communities and reducing inequalities, closing the gap between deprived areas and the economic performance of PUSH sub-region
- Investing in infrastructure and sustainable solutions
- Promoting a better quality of life by safeguarding and promoting social and environmental wellbeing across the sub region and
- Tackling climate change by reducing carbon emissions and securing increased renewable and low carbon energy supply.

PUSH is working closely with the Homes and Communities Agency, raising partnership initiatives and issues on behalf of its member local authorities in a collaborative environment. This has led to the development of a Local Investment Plan (LIP), which will provide added focus and direction to the medium to long term investment strategy, enhancing the chances of securing future Government funding to deliver on PUSH's strategic and priority development sites.

Local context

Gosport Borough Council's housing stock comprises of 3,191 rented homes¹, with a further 285 leasehold properties. The housing service also owns and manages 705 garages.

A summary of the housing services properties is set out in the table below:

Type of Property	Total number
Houses	1316
Bungalows	440
Flats	1196
Maisonettes	193
Bedsits	46
Total number of properties as at 31st March 2011	3191

Future demand and supply of housing

The Council updated its Housing Needs Survey from 2003 in 2007, reflecting the changes within the local housing market and to provide the Council with a forecasting tool for the following decade.

The survey showed that there was:

- An out migration of younger economically active households
- An ageing population with increasing care and support needs

¹ As at 31.3.2011

- An average 23% increase in house prices between 2003 and 2006 which has excluded many first time buyers from the owner occupied market
- 53% of all households with less than £5,000 in savings
- 33.6% of all households in receipt of financial support of which 39.1% received Housing Benefit
- 89.4% of concealed households (those living with family and friends who desired their own household) had an annual income of below £27,500, with 44.2% below £15,000
- Income levels of around 39% of new households are below the necessary level to be able to buy and 36% of these households are also unable to access the private rented sector.

On the supply side, the following were identified:

- The total level of outstanding affordable need was 852 units per annum
- There was a requirement for smaller units across the stock to create a better balance
- More specialist accommodation for older people in both the affordable and private sector was required
- There was a need for around 85 units of extra-care accommodation for elderly people although 50 units have subsequently been delivered
- There was a need for 167 units of independent accommodation with external support over the next three years

Since that data was collected, the affordable housing completions have been as follows:

Year	Completions
2007/08	63
2008/09	97
2009/10	201
2010/11	24

Although the housing needs data was collected in 2007, our experience and the amount of activity that has taken place since, indicates that a similar level of need remains except where increased provision has been indicated above.

Housing Register and Homeless Demand

In 2011/12, the Council witnessed an increase in general demand in homelessness. Within this environment, the Council has strived to achieve a range of flexible and sustainable responses to provide an efficient fit for purpose service.

Gosport is currently in the top 5% of English Council's for homelessness prevention and has undertaken the following to ensure that it remains there:

- Maintained the Council's stake in the private rented sector, investing nearly £1 million in a family centre which will double the current number of units available during 2012, reducing the need for expensive bed and breakfast placements
- Delivered a private rented accommodation scheme which is attractive to private landlords and that enhances the condition of many properties accepted onto the scheme
- Worked in partnership with local estate agents to deliver more private rented properties to households threatened with homelessness (at a time when many Councils are struggling to access the private rented sector).

Section 3 Consultation

Introduction

Gosport Borough Council is a listening organisation that values customer and public opinion and strives to deliver value for money services putting customers at the heart of all it does. In providing services, we value:

- Meeting the needs of our diverse community
- The professionalism of our staff
- Feedback on our services
- Our approachability.

Existing consultation arrangements

The Council has recently changed its approach to resident consultation as the previous structures, the Tenant and Leaseholder Consultation Framework, was finding it difficult to attract and retain interest.

The introduction of Local Offers and Scrutiny was used as a catalyst to stimulate involvement and to revise how the Council works with its tenants and leaseholders. Working with the remaining members of the existing structure, and with additional volunteers from the involvement database, the Council created a new platform for involvement. This is now known as the Customer Opinion Panel (COP) and began to take shape in early 2011, with Local Offers being developed on resident involvement and repairs.

There was also a greater focus and emphasis brought to the database of information that the Council had developed on its residents that wanted to be involved. It has been possible to refine the levels of activity and involvement that tenants and residents make and to reduce the commitment burden that had previously deterred some individual involvement, allowing them to become involved at a level that is appropriate for them.

Consultation to develop the Business Plan

It is intended to continue to develop the Business Plan through the structures that have been recently adopted and which are set out above. Rather than focusing on the plan as a whole, consultation will continue to be based on the areas that customers tell us, matter to them most. The findings of the consultation and the policy changes that are derived from that consultation will be fed into the plan and the financial framework that enables it to happen.

Section 4 Background

Housing Services

The housing service provides management and maintenance to 3,191 tenanted homes, as well as some 700 garages and sites.

There are 82 (full time equivalent) staff employed in the delivery of the service.

The Housing Services Unit contains 3 main service areas: Operational Services, Housing Options and Financial and Business Support Services. These together discharge the statutory and contractual housing duties of the Council.

Housing Operational Services

This service is primarily involves the delivery of General Funded activity and is divided in to five teams; Tenancy Management, Technical Services, Asset [and Contract] Management, Income Recovery and Older Persons Services.

The collection of rent remains one of the unit's primary activities, but in addition, Operational Services provides the key services to Council tenants and leaseholders outlined below:

- Dealing with rent enquiries, rent arrears and court action
- Dealing with neighbour disputes between Council tenants
- Environmental improvements on housing land
- General management of communal housing areas and estates
- Mobile caretaking services to various communal areas on housing estates (includes rubbish removal and general cleanliness)
- Cleaning services for communal areas in flats and sheltered schemes
- Management of sheltered schemes and Careline community support for the elderly, both activities being Supporting People funded
- Management of the Council's planned maintenance and improvements programme (including disabled aids and adaptations)
- Agreeing disabled adaptations to Council owned dwellings
- Turnaround of empty Council-owned dwellings
- The Resident Involvement Team is responsible for the comprehensive consultation processes the service undertakes with residents.

Financial and Business Support Service

- Financial management of HRA and (specific) General Fund activity
- Financial Benchmarking
- Right to Buy administration
- Management of services to leaseholders.

The Housing Options Service

Primarily involves the delivery of General Funded activity.

- Dealing with homeless applications
- Management of the joint housing register and Choice Based Letting Scheme (Gosport Choice)

- Housing advice aimed at helping people to find accommodation and/or to retain their existing accommodation
- Management of homeless persons hostel accommodation
- Management of the RAPS Scheme (Rented Accommodation in the Private Sector)
- Management of Bed and Breakfast/Hostel/Lodgings/Contractual Tenancies (Council general needs stock allocated on a temporary basis) and associated rent accounts
- Damage deposit/rent in advance scheme
- Supporting the Citizens Advice Bureau Fast Track Debt Service
- Fareport Fund-a-Home (assists non-priority homeless customers secure private rented accommodation)
- 'Supporting People' Services. The Homeless Support Officers provide support and resettlement services to our homeless customers.

Tenants can access the service by telephone, email and letter. The Council's website includes facilities for reporting repairs, paying rent and making complaints. Our housing service standards reflect the Tenant Service Authority's national standards on:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
- Home
- Tenancy
- Neighbourhood and Community
- Value for Money.

Our Annual Report to tenants sets out what these standards mean to tenants and how well the service performs in delivering them.

Developing service delivery

The delivery of the service on a day to day basis has been heavily influenced by our residents. The work carried out last year on the development of the Local Offers is continuing to shape how we deliver services and communicate with residents.

In 2011, we published our commitment to residents in the shape of our Housing Annual Report. As well as using this to feedback to residents, the changes that we have made in response to their responses to us, we also set out our plans to improve the services we provide in the future, detailing commitments under Local Offers such as:

- Introducing new ways of consulting residents
- Developing a Tenant Information Network
- Introducing mystery shopping to check our customer care
- Including Resident Inspectors as part of the empty property process
- Publishing the results of surveys and performance of our contractors
- Introduce more formal Estate Walkabouts throughout the Borough and advertise them in At Your Service newsletter.

These and other continuing service improvements have been generated following consultation with residents. Each of these has been costed to ensure that the future Business Plan is able to deliver the plans that we have in place.

Gosport Choice; Choice based Lettings Scheme

Gosport Choice is a housing service provided by Gosport Borough Council on behalf of the Gosport Housing Partnership*. The scheme provides an easy way for applicants for rehousing to view and nominate themselves for a new home.

Available properties (and garages) are advertised each week and applicants can bid in any of the following ways:

- **On-line at:** www.gosport.gov.uk/gosportchoice
- **By calling the telephone bidding line**
- **In person at the Town Hall**

The scheme dealt with approximately 21,100 'bids' or expressions of interest in properties during the financial year 2010/11. It successfully let 193 Gosport Borough properties in 2010/11 and 170 properties within local Housing Association stock (363 in total). The property type breakdown for those 363 let properties was as follows;

155	1 beds
95	2 beds
67	3 beds
7	4 beds
39	Sheltered

The total number of lets within Gosport Borough stock (193 properties) was to the following applicant categories;

Waiting List = 53%

Transfer List = 36%

Homeless = 11%.

* First Wessex , Guinness Hermitage, Home Group, A2 Dominion, Affinity Sutton, Radian, Hanover, Southern Housing, Raglan Housing, The Thorngate Almhouse Trust as well as Gosport Borough Council

Tenure policy

Currently all new tenants receive an introductory tenancy. The tenancy agreement sets out the rights and responsibilities of tenants and the Council. The Council provides support and assistance to tenants who need it to sustain their tenancy. The tenancy agreement includes ground for possession in the case of breach of tenancy. Eviction through a court order is used as a last resort in the case of continuous tenancy breach.

The Council is committed to developing a Tenancy Strategy, minded to the likely strategies that will be adopted by its RSL partners in the area. This will be completed by September 2012 and the impacts and outcomes included within next year's review of the Business Plan.

Rent policy

The Business Plan reflects the Council's current rent policy. This reflects national social rent policy to move Council rents to a target rent based on property value and local earnings. The aim of this policy is that rents charged by all social landlords (whether Council or Housing Association) converge. This Business Plan assumes convergence by 2015/16. Up until convergence, rents move gradually to target over 4 years, with maximum increases limited to inflation (RPI) + 0.5% + £2. After convergence, rents increase by inflation (RPI) + 0.5%. The financial viability of the Business Plan is dependent on annual rent increases being agreed in line with this policy. Any divergence from this policy will impact on Business Plan resources and on the deliverability of actions in this plan.

Affordable rents

The Localism Bill provides a further flexibility on rents. This would allow the Council to charge higher rents on new build properties and a proportion of relets, in order to fund new development. This would mean the Council could charge up to 80% of market rent on these properties. The proceeds would be used to fund new development and cannot be used to increase Business Plan resources generally.

Performance Management

Effective performance management arrangements integrate planning, review, financial management and improvement strategies to enable managers to make informed decisions and improve services.

Housing Services believes that the integration of service and financial planning is the key to ensuring that performance management results in actual improvement. Effective performance management encourages housing managers to deploy resources to achieve priorities within a flexible budget environment.

Effective performance management is critical to the success of the service, by:

- Achieving the goals of the organisation and the community
- Prioritising what gets done and making sure there are enough resources to do it
- Ensuring that value for money is delivered
- Motivating and managing staff
- Providing satisfaction for users and communities.

The Housing Service has a systematic approach to performance management that includes:

- Setting objectives
- Using relevant performance indicators and other measures
- Regularly monitoring and appraising individuals and teams to identify achievements
- Identifying training and development needs using the knowledge gained to modify plans.

To achieve this, officers:

- Know and understand what is expected of them
- Have the skills and ability to deliver on these expectations

- Are supported by the organisation in developing the capacity to meet these expectations
- Are given feedback on performance
- Have the opportunity to discuss and contribute to individual and team aims and objectives.

Benchmarking and Value for Money

The primary purpose of our benchmarking is as an internal performance management and self-assessment tool for managers seeking to understand current levels of performance and costs in order to improve the quality and value for money (VFM) of services delivered to tenants.

Benchmarking has other benefits. In particular, at a time of increased pressure on revenues, analysis enables service areas to be identified where costs can be reduced with minimum impact on service delivery standards.

Gosport Borough Council belongs to the Housing Quality Network (HQN) Benchmarking Club. The benchmarking analysis provided by HQN is structured around the Tenant Services Authority's national standards and provides cost and performance data for 5 out of the 6 standards (it excludes Governance).

The data, which is collected to a standard methodology and has been independently validated, provides an assurance Gosport's decisions are being based on reliable and transparent information. The data provided within the annual benchmarking exercise compares Gosport to 51 local authorities in England.

Repairs service

Gosport has a highly successful track record in delivering its repairs service and capital programmes through a series of partnering contracts. From the window replacement trial in 1998, the programme was built up until the end of 2006, 90% of capital and revenue repairs spend was through partnering arrangements. This provided tangible improvements to service delivery and over the longer term, genuine financial savings.

It naturally followed that the latest Housing Service contractor selection exercise (commenced in April 2010) should engender modern procurement principles, such as:

- Tenders evaluated on a 60% quality/40% cost ratio:
- Contract let for a maximum of 15 years (10+5) with 6 month determination for non-performance clauses
- 'Open book' model (providing access to contractor's costs with a breakdown of labour, material, overhead and profit while maintaining a fixed cost process)
- Costs managed through annualized target cost and incentives.

The well established and respected Kier Services Plc was successful in its bid for both the Housing Services contracts;

- Asset Management Services to all Housing Service owned housing and buildings with an approximate annual value of £5.60M

- Gas installations, servicing and breakdowns and electrical surveys and re-wires with an approximate annual value of £1.05M.

Kier Services successfully mobilised for the contract start date of 1 April 2011 and this new partnering arrangement continues to deliver:

- Improved Communication
- Co-ordinated asset management strategy
- Increased flexibility in specifications/working practices
- Better working environment
- Better customer relationships
- Effective day to day operating systems.

The Business Plan reflects the financial benefits that come from the open book approach, namely:

- Greater cost certainty
- A better understanding of the cost base
- Benchmarking of cost and productivity
- Establishing cost saving strategies and eliminating waste
- Improved cash flow for contractors and suppliers.

Income maximisation

The Income Recovery Section is responsible for a wider range of housing income/debt recovery processes. It includes:

- HRA dwellings and garages both current and former accounts,
- Community alarm charges
- Recharges to tenants and former tenants for void repair works and for minor repair which are tenants' liability
- General Fund charges for rent in advance/damage bond project
- Rent arrears on former temporary accommodation and charges for private sector licences.

In 2010/11 the service maintained a top quartile, top 10 position (compared to other districts) for a fifth year, with an income recovery collection rate of 99.57%. Average rent arrears debt per tenant as at end of that year, was just £55.83 and total current rent debt (secure tenancies) stood at £172,119, the lowest reported figure since 2006/07. Void loss as a % of rent debit of stood at 1.30% for the same period.

The introduction of a swipe card payment system from October 2010 was just one of a number of initiatives developed and delivered by the team as it prepared for the potential impact of welfare reform.

However, the impact of single universal credit is considered a high risk to income recovery performance; in particular direct payments. The Government is clear that only vulnerable people will get direct payments. At present within 55% of Gosport tenants on benefits, it is anticipated that a maximum of 30% of these will get payments direct. This could have a

major impact on income collection rates and therefore the Business Plan. The target collection rate has been reduced to 99% (from 99.5%) for 2012/13.

This will impact on our ability to continue to reach previous high levels of collection. In line with our risk management approach, we have increased the allowance for bad debt provision to 1% of the gross rental income.

The Income Recovery Team is committed in 2012/13 to researching and estimating likely impact on income recovery rates, debt levels and implications for staffing levels. A review is also underway of processes – with more emphasis on targeting action at high risk groups.

Section 5 Assets

Introduction

Our housing stock is a valuable asset. As a major provider of social housing we make a significant contribution to meeting the need for affordable housing in the Borough. Generally our stock has been well maintained, with an investment strategy targeted at bringing all homes up to the Decent Homes Standard. Tenant feedback indicates a high level of satisfaction with the quality of homes. Demand for homes is high across the stock.

Traditionally, we have been very effective at ensuring that available investment was targeted at achieving the Decent Homes Standards and programme delivery has consistently been achieved. However, the requirements for Local Authority Asset Management Strategies have been strengthened under the self-financing proposals. Long term planning is essential to manage the risks of a self-financed Business Plan and to take maximum advantage of the opportunities for effective asset management that now exist.

The new regime will require a different mindset, with the emphasis on future planning and enhanced expectations.

Asset Management

We have adopted the National Housing Federation definition of asset management (which focuses on Registered Providers (Housing Associations and other affordable housing providers) but has become more relevant to local authorities under self-financing):

The principal assets of a Social Landlord are the homes it owns and manages. Asset Management in this context will therefore consist of a range of activities undertaken so that our housing stock meets needs and standards now and in the future, including the development, retention, investment in and sale of homes (Strategies for Asset Management, NHF).

Our aim is to ensure that the homes which the Council provides in the future are of a standard that our customers want to live in and which we are proud of.

Stock condition information

The information which the Council currently holds on its stock has been sufficient to enable it to manage its investment programmes on an annual basis. The updating of the stock information since the last comprehensive Stock Condition Survey in 2002 has been carried out, but the lack of suitable asset management software has prevented the comprehensive position being adopted that will be necessary for future planning.

This does not cause any problems for the delivery of the 2012/13 programme where the investment is, to a large extent, already determined by previous plans and commitments. However, by September 2012, we will have undertaken a comprehensive review of the asset management information available, as preparation for future years. This will include:

- Implementing of the new software system (IBS/Capita Asset Management Module)
- Reviewing the information currently held to identify any gaps

- Carrying out surveys/studies as necessary to ensure that these gaps are removed
- Reviewing all forecasting information for future investment including unit costs and life cycles
- Assessing future investment need of different assets.

Additional investment needs

The ability to plan into the future has meant that we are able to take a more pro-active view about potential future costs that have traditionally had to be met in a more reactive manner.

Although we do not have a detailed asbestos survey at present, we have been carrying out asbestos management works in conjunction with other works taking place. We will develop an Asbestos Management Policy over the next year and have taken advice on what a suitable provision would be for this work. We have included £1,000 per unit over three years starting 2012/13 to fund the policy once adopted.

Similarly, there is a greater emphasis on achieving a proactive risk management approach to Health and Safety considerations. Here we have adopted £100 per unit per annum until a full health and safety risk audit can be completed to inform a more accurate consideration.

Future standards

There is also evidence of a desire for an investment standard that delivers more than basic decent home, with a focus on energy efficiency and sustainability, as well as environmental improvements. This will involve determining a future standard that we will achieve which will ensure that we do not have properties in the future that are hard to let or where no one wants to live. This will include a consultation process with residents.

Linking Asset Management and Business Planning

Once the review is completed, then the information will be used for several purposes:

- Informing the requirements of the Business Plan
- Annual programming
- Long term investment decision making
- Identification of non-performing assets for option appraisal
- Identification of assets under the Council's Disposal Policy (once adopted).

Section 6 Resources

This Business Plan is prepared in the context of major changes in housing finance with the introduction of self-financing from April 2012.

Existing housing subsidy system

The current housing subsidy system has been in operation for many years and is generally accepted to be both unfair and overly complicated. The Government has announced that it will completely change the way Council housing is funded.

Under the housing subsidy system the Government makes an assumption on how much each Council needs to spend on its housing services over the next year. It then calculates the amount that it thinks each Council will receive from rents assuming that the 'guideline rent increase' has been applied. If the result is a surplus, as is the case for Gosport, then the Government requires payment from the Council. Conversely if the result is a deficit the Government makes a payment to the Council. For 2011/12 the Council will pay approximately £3.5m to the Government, funded from tenants' rents.

Housing finance reform

The Government has stated that, from April 2012, it will introduce a new funding system called 'self-financing'. Under this new system, the Government has assessed how much financial support each Council needs to run its housing service over the next 30 years; this is the difference between the assumed cost of running the housing service and the expected income from rents.

The Government has also taken into account how much housing debt each Council has accrued in the past. The debts are due to funding for major repairs and improvements or to fund new Council house building.

For Gosport, the Government has assessed that there will be a surplus of income from tenants rents over the next 30 years, after taking into account the assumed running costs of the housing service. In addition the Council does have a small amount of current housing debt. Therefore the Government has assessed that this Council must make a payment of around £54M in April 2012.

In order to control public sector borrowing, current Government policy is that HRA borrowing for Gosport will be limited at the opening debt settlement of £63.3m over the life of the 30 year Business Plan. This position may be reviewed in future spending review rounds.

The valuation assumes a level of Right to Buy sales of 4 per year in the early years, with numbers reducing in later years. The valuation reflects income lost from these sales. However the Council will continue to have to pay 75% of the proceeds from each Right to Buy sale to Government. The Business Plan assumes the retained 25% is used by the Council to assist in the delivery of its wider capital programme.

The assumptions used to estimate future cost allowances are higher than the assumptions used in the subsidy system, representing an uplift in allowances of 17%. This means that the Council should be better off under self-financing than under the current subsidy system.

Baseline financial position for Gosport

In order to consider the impact of these proposals on the Council it is necessary to replace the indicative Business Plan based on DCLG's valuation assumptions, with actual costs and income estimated for Gosport over the next 30 years, in a new Business Plan financial model that can be used to project future income and expenditure, debt financing and stock changes over time.

Actual costs and income are based on the Council's 2011/12 budgets making the following assumptions:

- It is balanced to the 2011/12 HRA budget and the 2011/12 to 2014/15 Capital Programme
- Rents converge with formula and limit rents in 2015/16 (with no individual property by property adjustment for caps and limits) and increasing at inflation + 0.5% thereafter
- Average rents are currently £66.89, compared to guideline rent of £69.63 and formula rent of £74.43. In 2015/16 all will need to be at £87.07 to achieve convergence
- General inflation (RPI) has been set at 2.5%
- Right To Buy properties of 4 per annum to start then decreasing by 1 every 5 years.
- Long term interest rates averaging around 4% from Public Works Loan Board, based on a mixed portfolio
- Retention of a minimum balance of £1M
- Non-dwelling income (predominantly garages) increase by inflation only from April 2013
- The void rate is set at 1.5%, increasing to 2%
- The bad debt rate increases from the current position of 0.4% to 1.0% to account for the potential impact of Welfare Benefit reform. This will be reviewed at the end of this year following the work being carried out by the Income Recovery Team
- Day to day maintenance costs increase in line with inflation and do not vary with small stock losses from Right to Buy.
- Management costs increase by inflation. Any further unforeseeable cost increases such as increases to employer pension contributions, pay awards and supplies and services increasing above general inflation plus 0.5% would have to be met by efficiency savings
- Supporting People grant reduces by a real 30% a year from 2013 and is withdrawn completely after 3 years. No reduction in related expenditure is made in the plan
- Major repair costs increase by inflation only and are based on the Council's internally generated figure. Costs are assumed to vary with stock loss over time
- Professional fees for major repair works are included within capital costs or management costs – no additional allowance is included
- Tenant's service charge income and costs increase in line with inflation but staggered to reflect review dates.

Formatted: Highlight

Current Council HRA debt, as measured by the Housing Capital Finance Requirement (HCFR) is £5.9m. The actual debt is higher than the amount assumed in the subsidy

calculation where the Subsidy Capital Financing Requirement (SCFR) is zero. When additional debt of £57.3m is added to the existing debt, this gives the Council an opening self-financing debt of approximately £63.3m in line with the debt cap.

The Business Plan model assumes that debt is repaid in line with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy. The model ensures that the capital programme is fully funded by available revenue surpluses from the HRA, while maintaining a minimum balance. If additional borrowing is required, the model allows for this, up to the designated debt cap. Any capital shortfalls are carried over to the following year and inflated. If capital expenditure can be fully funded, any remaining balances above the £1M minimum HRA balance is used to repay debt to a base level of £20M.

In reality, the Council will be able to review the plan regularly and make decisions about the use of surpluses, balancing repayment of debt and additional investment. This gives the Council a much greater level of flexibility in its long term planning than has been possible under the existing subsidy system.

The graph below represents the projected in-year cash flows for the HRA and closing balances under self-financing in £'000s;

Sensitivities

In preparation awaiting final confirmation from CLG

Graphs

In preparation awaiting final confirmation from CLG

Section 7 Equality and Diversity

Gosport Borough Council is committed to the equal treatment of everyone and eradication of discrimination. The Council has general duties to promote race, disability and gender equality. In summary the Council has:

- A general duty to eliminate discrimination and harassment on the grounds of race, disability and gender
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination based on a physical, sensory or mental impairment
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote good relations between people from different groups
- Take steps to account for disabilities even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably.

Since 2009, the Housing Service has been part of the Council's Equality Monitoring Framework (EMF) to ensure statutory requirements are met for service monitoring against equality target groups and setting equality objectives.

Equality Impact Assessments are a statutory mechanism for all public bodies to track progress in achieving those objectives. The Housing Service completes these for all planned and existing policies, strategies, services and functions in order to identify any potential disadvantages to certain groups. These are completed at least every 3 years.

The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is therefore an effective tool to ensure that Council policies, strategies and functions are carried out fairly and benefit all members of the community [and employees] equally. Most of the work the Housing Service does involves people, whether they are members of the public who live, work or visit Gosport or staff. The EIA process helps us to understand how our policies, strategies, functions and procurement affects different groups and highlights any possible inequalities. An EIA is therefore the tool to ensure services and practices are fair and inclusive.

The five stages to this process are:

- Assessment: Assess carefully who will be affected by our policy and whether it will have an affect on different communities
- Consultation: Review past consultation or plan future consultation
- Monitoring: Detail monitoring arrangements
- Communication: Communicate progress with staff and stakeholders
- Training: Identify any further training.

In recognition of the diversity of its customers, the Housing Services Unit provides information in a range of formats and provides free access for customers to a translation service. For those customers with caring responsibilities or with personal mobility problems, the Housing Service will undertake home visits to take the service to the customer.

Existing methods of assessment and monitoring are:

- Annual Status/Star Survey [formerly NI 160] age, gender, ethnic origin and disability information

- Customer surveys collecting age, gender, ethnic origin and disability information;
- Individual resident/user satisfaction surveys collecting age, gender and ethnic origin and disability information
- Benchmarking with other housing providers
- Partner agency feedback
- Programme of EIA's for key policies
- Formal customer inspection reviews and feedback.
- Housing Services (revised) Consultation Framework
- Supporting People Outcomes Framework monitoring (sheltered housing)
- Individual complaints under the Complaints procedure and review of the same.

Section 8 Conclusion

Significant progress has been made over the last 12 months with the aims and priorities contained in the Housing Strategy and Improvement plans with many new initiatives being developed and targets achieved, not least:

- **Partnering** – selecting a partnering contractor to carry out response, planned & cyclical repairs to Council homes has been completed.
- **Decent homes** – the Decent Homes target was met in 2010.
- **RAPS scheme** – there are now over 200 houses and flats in the Council's Rented Accommodation in the Private Sector scheme (RAPS). These properties are invaluable in providing good quality temporary accommodation for homeless households while minimising financial liabilities
- **Extra Care Housing** - we worked with Social Services, the PCT, Health and one of our specialist Housing Association partners to put together a bid for Extra Care Funding for a scheme in Gosport. That extra care scheme was delivered in 2010.
- **Stock Options Appraisal** - we have completed the Stock Option Appraisal process in 2004 and received confirmation from GOSE that we retain the Council housing stock
- **Rent Collection** - performance on rent collection remains high and in 2010/11 we have achieved the lowest [current] debt since 2006/07
- **Agnew Family Centre** – we are due to complete the conversion of a (surplus to requirements) in to a high specification family centre to assist in the delivery of our homeless objectives.
- **Rent Convergence** – we have made good progress and are on target with rent restructuring by 2014/15.
- **Localism Act** - We are on target to develop our responses to the Housing elements of the localism agenda including the requirement for a tenancy strategy.