

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Chief Executive

Council: 25 April 2007

Subject: Communities Scotland Inspection of Housing Management Services

1. Purpose

1.1 This report seeks approval of the remedial plan for housing management services (Appendix A) which was required by Scottish Ministers under Section 74 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

2. Background

2.1 The report to the Council meeting of 17 January 2007 on the Communities Scotland Inspection of Housing Management Services provided information on the requirement for a remedial plan to address specific issues identified by Communities Scotland and in particular the need to tackle void housing at both a strategic and operational level.

2.2 The Council at that meeting agreed to advise Communities Scotland that it was willing to prepare a remedial plan in a voluntary arrangement with them and request that the formal notice under Section 74 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, be withdrawn.

2.3 A report was submitted to Council on 28 February 2007 and Members agreed:-

- (1) to approve the outline remedial plan as shown at Appendix 1 of the report and the provisional project plan shown at Appendix 2 of the report;
- (2) to approve the following work to be undertaken by consultants in 2007/08, in accordance with Standing Orders:-
 - a supply and demand study;
 - a study of current processes relating to empty homes;
 - the production of an Asset Management Plan for the Council's housing stock;
 - a stock condition survey; and
- (3) to instruct the Chief Executive to present the remedial plan for approval to a Special Council Meeting of Council for submission to Communities Scotland by 10 April 2007.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** Following a meeting with the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive and Acting Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services (Housing and Regeneration Services) on 20 March 2007, the Minister for Communities decided that a formal notice in terms of the legislation was not required at this time, and accepted the Council's request that the plan be submitted on a voluntary basis. The original draft notice remains in place for a further period of time to encourage further progress. Communities Scotland will remain in discussion with the Council and liaise with Audit Scotland so that a considered view of progress can be established during the summer. The outcome changes the indicative timetable set out in Communities Scotland's letter of 18 December 2006 to submit the remedial plan by 10 April 2007.
- 3.2** If approved by Council the remedial plan will be submitted to Communities Scotland and the Minister for Communities can decide to accept or reject it. The indicative timescale for this decision is 4 weeks, however due to the Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government elections taking place on 3 May 2007, it is anticipated that a decision will follow the elections.
- 3.3** The remedial plan follows the requirements of Communities Scotland and includes a timetable for undertaking the main elements of the plan. Work has started on commissioning the following:
- Housing Needs and Demand Study
 - Evaluation of Void House Process
 - Asset Management Plan
- 3.4** On completion of this work, the department will prepare a strategy for addressing the level of empty homes strategically and operationally, and this will be reported to Council in early 2008.
- 3.5** The remedial plan was submitted to the Member/Officer Working Group on 16 April 2007.
- 3.6** The Minister has indicated that it is intended to review progress in July 2007 and at that point Communities Scotland reserved the opportunity to serve a formal notice on the Council requiring remedial improvements should in their view this be required.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** The officers who will implement the remedial plan are shown at page 4 of the plan.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** The Council, at its meeting held on 28 February 2007, approved funds to commission the studies stated at 3.3 above. Reports on the financial implications arising from the development of the remedial plan will be submitted to the appropriate Committee or Council meeting as necessary.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** The most significant risk is that if the Council does not implement a remedial plan satisfactorily, Scottish Ministers may appoint a manager to exercise housing and related functions.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1** The Minister for Communities has recognised the Council's commitment to fully engage in all processes required by Communities Scotland and has agreed to a remedial plan being submitted on a voluntary basis at this time.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1** **The Council is asked to approve the submission of the Remedial Plan for Housing Management Services as shown at Appendix A of this report to Communities Scotland.**

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David McMillan
Chief Executive
Date: 18 April 2007

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Appendix A: Remedial Plan

Background Papers: Council 17 January 2007; Communities Scotland
Inspection of Housing Management Services

Council 28 February 2007; Communities Scotland
Inspection of Housing Management Services

Wards Affected: All