

Agenda Item 20

Strategic Housing Services
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Report

Report Subject: Response to a Consultation Paper on “A Respect Standard for Housing Management” from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Report to: The Cabinet

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Cabinet Member for Community & Housing: Councillor John Cole-Morgan

1. Report Summary:

As part of its wider “Respect” agenda, the Government has produced a Consultation Paper on “**A Respect Standard for Housing Management**” on which it has invited comments by 21st June 2006. The paper can be viewed online at the web address <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1165273>

2. Background:

- Arising from awareness of the public perception that there has been a decline in standards of conduct of behaviour by a significant minority in society, the Government is promoting a Respect Agenda to create sustainable communities in which people feel safe, secure and happy. As part of this policy, the Government wishes to see strong housing management tackling anti-social behaviour where it occurs.
- The Consultation Paper proposes a new **Respect Standard** for housing management, against which Councils and Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) are to benchmark their service, and to which they are expected to commit themselves in order to tackle individuals who fail to take their responsibilities to other people seriously.
- To meet the Respect Standard councils must ensure certain “Building Blocks “ are in place in terms of the landlord’s policies and procedures for dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).
- Social landlords will apply to sign up to the Standard when they feel that their policies for dealing with ASB meet the Respect Standard in ten key areas.
- Rather than have a bureaucratic accreditation of the Standard, the Government will monitor the service to ensure that there is delivery against the Respect Standard through the Housing Inspectorate, which is part of the Audit Commission.



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3. The Consultation Paper:

The consultation paper asks 4 specific questions to which replies are invited:

(a) **Does the standard as drafted properly reflect the core components of delivering effective services in tackling anti-social behaviour and delivering respect?**

The consultation paper is well thought out and coherent in what it is seeking to achieve. The proposed Respect Standard is part of the wider context of other measures to increase the accountability of agencies to local people, and promote the idea of neighbourhoods having the right to a “Neighborhood Charter”. It refers to the need to create a “virtuous circle of engagement that builds trust and sustains shared values.”

The consultation paper rightly recognizes that the areas in which Councils operate are of mixed tenure, therefore requiring co-operation between Councils, Housing Associations, private owners and landlords, along with multi-agency working involving the Police and other relevant organisations. Anti-social behaviour affects everyone and is not confined to any one sector of society. The paper also recognizes the diversity of communities that necessitates solutions tailored to the local situation. While there are already many charters, standards and policies, the proposed Respect Standard is useful bench-marking tool. For those Councils that sign up to the Respect Standard, it provides a clear statement of intent to promote sustainable communities and makes a commitment to provide a high level of service. Residents who see that an organization has signed up to the Respect Standard will feel reassured that if they have a problem they are dealing with an organisation that takes ASB seriously and aims to meet high standards of service. The building blocks approach to the ten areas of operation is a useful checklist to ensure that these are in place.

(b) **Is the Standard as drafted suitable for adoption by all social landlords (ie tailorable to a diverse range of contexts)? For example is it likely to be applicable to smaller landlords.**

The drafting seems suitable for all types and sizes of landlords.

(c) **Does the level of detail provided in the draft Standard provide landlords and residents with enough information on what is required in meeting it?**

The extensive lists of building blocks supplied with each of the commitments offer a good range of detail to assist landlords.

(d) **Do you have any other comments about the proposal, including any practical implications you think it might have? For example, how can we best ensure we minimize any additional bureaucracy?**

The proposed method of applying to sign up to the standard by an emailed expression of intent seems a good one in terms of minimizing bureaucracy.

The standard needs to apply to all social housing, ie Councils, ALMOs and Housing Associations, whose growing housing stock, particularly with stock transfers, gives them an important role in tackling ASB. Attention needs to be paid to the trend towards concentrating a minority of very anti-social tenants in the private rented sector, individuals or families who have been evicted for nuisance by social landlords. Ironically strong housing management, by Councils and Associations that evict tenants causing nuisance, can shift the burden posed by these people onto other agencies that do not have the range of measures that have been made available to social landlords in dealing with their own tenants. Recognition also needs to be given to the fact that owner-occupiers can also be responsible for anti-social behaviour.

4. Salisbury District Council's policies:

The council has already produced its own policy for dealing with ASB, which was approved by Cabinet on 15/12/2004 (min 446). Due the extensive work undertaken over the years in dealing with ASB in Salisbury, and in drawing up the policy, housing staff are confident that the council already meets the Respect Standard as proposed in the Consultation Paper.

5. Recommendations:

It is recommended that the council write to express its support for the proposed Respect Standard, and the letter should include the responses given in section 3 above.

6. Background Papers:

ODPM "Consultation Paper – A Respect Standard for Housing Management."
Salisbury District Council's Statement of Policy regarding Anti-social Behaviour.

7. Implications:

- **Financial:** An application to meet the Respect Standard does not have any additional cost attached. If anti-social behaviour is tackled effectively, there will be reduced costs in repairing vandal damage and removing graffiti.
- **Legal:** The council already meets its legal obligations in tackling ASB.
- **Human Rights:** Dealing with ASB means a careful balance of considering the needs and rights of the community it affects and those creating the nuisance.
- **Personnel:** None
- **Community Safety:** Contained in the report. The Respect Standard will help strengthen the commitment to uphold community safety.
- **Environmental Impact:** Effective measures to tackle ASB can limit damage to the built environment by reducing vandalism and graffiti.
- **Council's Core Values:** Support for Disadvantaged; Excellent Service.
- **Ward(s) Affected:** All wards.

Consultation Undertaken: Consultation has been undertaken with Legal, Personnel, and Financial Services and the Community Initiatives Unit.