

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Executive – 3 March 2010

Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership

Report of Strategy Lead – Martin Daly

(This matter is the responsibility of Councillor Hazel Prior-Sankey.)

Executive Summary

Proposals for new ways of working and a new structure for the Core Council were approved on 17 February 2009.

Detailed proposals for Theme 4 (Community Services) of the Core Council Review were approved by a Special Council meeting on 9 December 2009. These detailed proposals highlighted that a report would be brought to the members specifically on Taunton Deane joining the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership (SWPSHP).

This report outlines the range of potential benefits for Taunton Deane becoming a member of this partnership, by increasing capacity, resilience, procurement, performance and management capabilities on private sector housing grants and housing enforcement standards. Within this more robust structure, it will be possible to operate these services more efficiently and reduce costs.

The proposal to join the partnership was discussed by Corporate Scrutiny on 18 February 2010.

Executive approval to join SWPSHP is now requested.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To approve the proposal that Taunton Deane Borough Council should join the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership (SWPSHP) is an existing Partnership between West Somerset and Sedgemoor Councils, set up in October 2007.
- 2.2 SWPSHP is responsible for delivering the following private sector housing services in Sedgemoor and West Somerset:
 - Grants (principally repair grants and low interest loans).

- Disabled Facilities Grants.
 - Enforcing housing standards.
 - Bringing empty properties back in to use.
 - Energy efficiency.
 - Production of strategies and policies.
- 2.3 Since SWPSHP has been operating, the performance and capacity of both councils to undertake private sector housing functions has improved, at the same time as enabling cost savings to be achieved (see Appendix A for performance improvements and Appendix B for information on cost savings). Overall, between 2007-2008 and 2008-2009, service delivery savings of 30% in Sedgemoor and 56% West Somerset were made, whilst in the same period performance improved by 68% and 87% respectively. Taunton Deane's figures have been added to Appendices A and B.
- 2.4 The successful track record of SWPSHP to both enhance performance and reduce costs should be noted at a time when Taunton Deane is also introducing new structure and new ways of working that will enable the Core Council to:
- Be fit for purpose, delivering our vision, widened roles and ways of working.
 - Delivery substantial efficiency savings.

3. Partnership Working

- 3.1 A recent review* of Taunton Deane partnership arrangements by the South West Audit Partnership provided a useful framework for evaluating future partnerships. This framework considered the operation of partnerships under the following headings:
- Governance.
 - Decision Making.
 - Standards of Conduct.
 - Risk Management.
 - Performance management.
 - Financial arrangements.

- Legal and IT arrangements.
 - Appointment of Partnership staff.
- 3.2 To properly consider the decision that Taunton Deane should join the SWPSHP, an initial evaluation against this framework has been undertaken (see Appendix C), with specific reference to the recommendations in the South West Audit Partnership review.
- 3.3 This initial evaluation suggests that, should authority be given for Taunton Deane to join the SWPSHP:
- The governance arrangements need to be scrutinised by the legal team.
 - Potential conflicts of interest and commercial transactions should be covered in a written code of conduct.
 - Financial monitoring and reporting arrangements will need to be modified.
 - ICT contractual arrangements will need to be clearly specified and set out in an appropriate document.

* Taunton Deane Borough Council Partnership Arrangement. South West Audit Partnership 9 September 2009.

Subject to the actions in 3.3 being completed, the recommendations in the South West Audit Partnership review would have been satisfied.

4. Joining the Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership

- 4.1 Doing nothing is not a option for Taunton Deane. The underlying rational of the Core Council Review is to enable the Council to operate more efficiently and effectively at a time when resources are diminishing and demands on services are increasing. This challenge requires innovation and flexibility.
- 4.2 In Somerset as a whole the Audit Commission has recently 'Red Flagged' strategic housing services under Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). In their CAA report the Audit Commission made specific reference to:
- Many homes which do not meet minimum standards.
 - Councils could do more to bring empty properties back into use.
 - It is taking too long to provide adaptations to help disabled people live safely in their homes(see later in report for Equalities Impact Assessment of the proposal to join the SWPSHP).

- Some Councils do not have the skills they need to deliver improved housing services.
- 4.3 In Taunton Deane, the Audit Commission also highlighted the need for comparable improvements in private sector housing services as part of their 'critical friend' inspection last year. In particular they commented that there is no overall private sector housing strategy, stock condition information is out of date, there needs to be a written strategy for overseeing the regulation of private rented accommodation, supported by an enforcement policy; more needs to be done to deal with empty homes, a more proactive approach is needed to improving energy efficiency; and further work is required to publicise the assistance that is available to help improve private sector housing standards.
- 4.4 When the Audit Commission returns to Taunton Deane, in the autumn this year for a formal housing inspection, they will expect to see that measures have been implemented to address these 'critical friend' areas of improvement. In particular, the Audit Commission will be assessing our approach to these functions against the framework of strategic housing Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE), which assesses how well we work with other Councils to address housing challenges, and achieve outputs that contribute to sustainable outcomes.
- 4.5 The Audit Commission strategic housing KLOE will also measure Taunton Deane's ability to make efficiencies and deliver improvements by making the best possible use of its own resources, as well as partnership arrangements. Informally the Housing Inspectors who carried out the 'critical friend' inspection in Taunton Deane, and more recently the formal housing inspections in West Somerset and Sedgemoor, have cited the SWPSHP as an example of good practice.
- 4.6 In this context of the need to improve Taunton Deane's approach to private sector housing, reduce our costs, and enhance operational effectiveness in this area generally, it is worth considering the specific achievements of SWPSHP in these critical efficiency areas since it was established in October 2007 (see Appendix D Analysis of SWPSHP Efficiencies).
- 4.7 In a broader context, some consideration has also been given to the county-wide shared services agenda of the single strategic housing project, which covers private sector housing, housing strategy, affordable housing delivery and homelessness functions. At this stage of the single strategic housing project (which Taunton Deane has been involved in), a county-wide approach to private sector housing work is not regarded as realistic aim to deliver quickly, without seriously interrupting services and compromising service outputs and outcomes in each District.

5. Financial Considerations

- 5.1 Apart from the wide-ranging operational and strategic advantages of joining the SWPSHP (contained in section 4 of this report), there are also potential future cost savings to Taunton Deane if the decision is made to join the partnership.
- 5.2 The main area of potential future cost savings is in joint procurement of private sector housing services. Already SWPSHP has achieved procurement efficiencies on the commissioning of a new private sector stock conditions survey for Sedgemoor and West Somerset Councils. Further joint procurement SWPSHP savings that would benefit Taunton Deane that have been identified by the partnership so far, are:
- Re-negotiation of energy efficiency advice, support and data with the Centre for Sustainable Energy.
 - Evidence mapping and updating of private sector stock information.
 - Consolidation of software licences for private sector grants and enforcement systems.
 - Entry into a new private sector housing landlord accreditation scheme. This scheme is designed to both improve private sector housing standards and increase the supply of decent homes to let through the Homefinder Somerset choice based lettings system.
 - Employment of an Empty Homes Officer (utilising government money already available in all three Council areas) to bring more empty properties back into use through close liaison with private sector landlords, agents, enforcement and legal staff.
 - Employment of an Energy Efficiency Officer (utilising Government money already available in all three Council areas) to increase energy efficiency and thus reduce fuel poverty amongst vulnerable households.
 - Best practice development in private sector housing including membership of and participation in 'benchmarking' performance organisations and marketing good practice to other organisations.
- 5.3 At this stage, whilst it is not anticipated that there would be negative financial implications of joining the partnership, it would be prudent to highlight that a financial contingency for dealing appropriately with Human Resources issues (see below) may be required as a consequence of the ongoing consultations with staff.

6. Staffing Considerations

- 6.1 With support from Human Resources staff, detailed discussions have taken place in November and December 2009 with Taunton Deane private sector housing grants and enforcement staff about the staffing implications, should Taunton Deane decide to join the partnership.
- 6.2 In essence, should Taunton Deane become a member of the partnership, the advice that has been given to Taunton Deane staff is:
- All Taunton Deane grants and enforcement staff would remain in their substantive posts, on the same Taunton Deane terms and conditions of service.
 - Any of the Taunton Deane grants and enforcement staff could, if they chose, apply for any new positions or roles in the partnership as they arise.
 - Staff work locations and working patterns will be based on work priorities and the overriding need for operational efficiencies in the partnership, and that key decisions on staff working practices would follow an extensive consultation process with staff.
 - Taunton Deane staff would be managed by the SWPSHP manager, but the Council would still retain an ongoing client arrangement with the partnership, likely to sit in the Strategy Team, to link with wider strategic housing and corporate strategy functions.
 - Taunton Deane staff would continue to receive Employment and Human Resources support under the auspices of Southwest One.
- 6.3 One of the major issues which will impact on the overall success of the partnership will be where staff are located. As stated above the partnership wish to do this after assessing work priorities and to secure operational efficiencies. The current Statement of Particulars of Employment for staff designates their place of work (Deane House) but also goes on to say that this could be 'or in any post appropriate to your scale point at such other place of employment in the Council's service as may be required'.
- 6.4 When the Principal Statement of Particulars of Employment was drafted it would have been unlikely that its intention was to include places of employment outside of Taunton Deane.
- 6.5 However since then the requirements for local authorities to operate in partnership with other authorities, other public sector bodies and even the private sector have developed considerably and to restrict the relocation of staff within Taunton Deane would appear to be restrictive

and damaging to potential success of partnership working. It is therefore recommended that the Statement of Particulars of Employment for Taunton Deane grants and enforcement staff is formally amended to include partnership working places of employment outside of Taunton Deane.

7. Provisional Timetable

7.1 Should authority be given for Taunton Deane to become a member of SWPSHP, for a sign up date of 1 April 2010, this permission would trigger a three month lead in period to Taunton Deane's membership of the partnership. This lead in time would be required to fully integrate Taunton Deane's staff, systems and procedures into the partnership.

7.2 This three month lead in period is needed to:

- Complete the extensive staff consultations (as above in 6.2) on work patterns, locations, priorities and operational efficiencies.
- Incorporate Taunton Deane's ICT systems, procedures and processes into the SWPSHP.
- Establish new performance management and governance arrangements for a wider partnership.
- Address any outstanding recommendations arising from the initial evaluation of Taunton Deane joining the partnership against the framework supplied by the South West Audit Partnership (see paragraph 3.3 and Appendix C of this report).
- Deal properly with any Employment and Human Resources issues that may emerge from the staff consultations (as above).

7.3 Subject to the above (in 7.2) actions being completed satisfactorily, and on time, Taunton Deane's active membership of the SWPSHP would commence on 1 June 2010.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment

8.1 Attached as Appendix E.

9. Union Consultation

9.1 UNISON representatives have been formally consulted about the possibility of Taunton Deane's membership of the partnership.

- 9.2 Whilst UNISON has not formally objected to Taunton Deane becoming a member of SWPSHP, it has requested clarification on staff work locations if this happens, as this is the main concern of Taunton Deane staff.
- 9.3 Taunton Deane staff have been previously advised in staff meetings and in writing that, if approval is given to join the partnership, they would be encouraged to develop their own ideas as to how work priorities and pressures would be best organised in the future.
- 9.4 UNISON has formally been advised, through the UNISON Change Forum, that this consultative approach to staff issues applied when Sedgemoor and West Somerset formed SWPSHP, and that the same approach would apply if Taunton Deane joined.
- 9.5 UNISON were also advised at Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 18 February 2010 that the detailed staff discussions (referred to Section 6) would continue, and that key decisions on staff working practices would follow an extensive consultation process with staff.
- 9.6 At UNISON's request, Taunton Deane's performance and cost information has been added to Appendix A and Appendix B.

10. Stakeholder Accountability

- 10.1 If Taunton Deane joins the SWPSHP governance and decision making will be covered by an appropriate governing instrument to ensure effective accountability to members, senior officers and other stakeholders. As referred to in Appendix C of this report, this governing instrument will cover, amongst other things, delegation and decision-making, monitoring, dispute resolution, complaints and leaving the partnership.
- 10.2 Accountability on SWPSHP performance, costs and services provided will be the primary function of the SWPSHP Board, which consists of the relevant Council Portfolio Holders and Client Officers. It is proposed that, should authority be given for Taunton Deane to join the partnership, the Housing Portfolio Holder should sit on the SWPSHP Board.
- 10.3 In addition, reports on SWPSHP activities, outputs and outcomes will be regularly reported to the appropriate Taunton Deane Member and Officer forums.

11. Scrutiny

- 11.1 The proposal to join SWPSHP was discussed at Corporate Scrutiny Committee on 18 February 2010.
- 11.2 The following resolutions were approved at this meeting.

11.2.1 the proposal for Taunton Deane to join SWPSHP from 1 April 2010.

11.2.2 that, subject to the conclusion of staff consultation, Taunton Deane grants and enforcement staff to work in other areas covered by SWPSHP.

11.2.3 the Housing Portfolio Holder should sit on the SWPSHP Board.

12. Relationship with new Home Improvement Agency and Wessex Reinvestment Trust

12.1 Taunton Deane, irrespective of SWPSHP membership, will need to work very closely with the new provider of Home Improvement Agency (HIA) services in Somerset, to ensure that these services enable people in Taunton Deane to maintain their health, well-being and independence. If anything, Taunton Deane's membership of SWPSHP, which already has an established track record of effective liaison with the existing HIA, will enhance our credibility with the new HIA, and our ability to scrutinise what it does in Taunton Deane.

12.2 Similarly, Taunton Deane will continue to utilise low interest loans for home improvements, through the Wessex Reinvestment Trust, a not for-profit organisation SWPSHP already works with to improve private sector housing conditions.

13. Conclusions/Recommendations

13.1 Taunton Deane's membership of SWPSHP offers a wide range of potential cost, capacity and performance benefits on private sector housing grants and enforcement work that could not be achieved by remaining as we are.

13.2 It is therefore **Recommended** that Executive approves the proposal for Taunton Deane to join the SWPSHP with effect from 1 April 2010.

13.3 It is also requested that the Executive gives consent for Taunton Deane grants and enforcement staff to work in other Council areas covered by SWPSHP, once staff consultation has been concluded.

13.4 It is further **Recommended** that Executive gives authority for the Housing Portfolio Holder to sit on the SWPSHP Board.

**Appendix A
Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership (SWPSHP) Performance**

	Sedgemoor Council		West Somerset Council		Taunton Deane Council	
	2007/08	2008/09	2007/08	2008/09	2007/08	2008/09
Decent Homes Grants	60	90	21	23	32	50
Disabled Facilities Grants	57	66	37	66	78	102
Investigation of formal complaints about private sector housing conditions	16	40	26	62	116	141
Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's)	6	13	6	6	9 (Pre April 2007 53 properties licensed)	2
Inspections of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's)	10	45	4	0 *All HMOs licensed	75	95
Immigration visits	3	8	1	2	5	8
Provision of generic advice on Private Sector Housing	40	60	1	21	36	24

+/- 07/08 – 08/09 Performance	+68%	+87%	+20%
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Appendix B

Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership (SWPSHP)

Cost Of Delivery

	Cost of Delivery 2007-08			Cost of delivery 2008-09		
	SDC	WSDC	TDBC	SDC	WSDC	TDBC
Decision Making	£30k	£20k	£8k	£20k	£10k	£8k
Grants and Low Interest Loans	£80k	£28k	£38k	£60k	£0k	£39k
Housing Standards and Enforcement	£13k	£20k	£79k	£6k	£20k	£83k
Total	£123k	£68k	£125k	£86k	£30k	£130k

+/- 07/08 – 08/09 Costs	Sedgemoor	- 30%
	West Somerset	- 56%
	Taunton Deane	+ 4%

Appendix C

Initial Evaluation of Taunton Deane Joining Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership (SWPSHP) Against Framework/Recommendations From South West Audit Partnership (SWAP)

SWAP Framework	SWAP Recommendations	Initial SWPSHP Evaluation
Governance	<p>Partnerships are governed by an appropriate instrument to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegation and decision making. • Monitoring of governance. • Dispute resolution protocols. • Conflict of interests. • Procurement arrangements. • Complaints. • Arrangements for concluding or leaving the partnership. 	<p>There is an existing terms of reference document called an 'Agreement' for the SWPSHP, which covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The function of the partnership. • Management responsibilities. • Reporting arrangements. • Standards of conduct. • Dispute resolution. • Duration and termination. • Variations to the partnership. <p>Should the decision be made for Taunton Deane to join the SWPSHP, the existing SWPSHP 'Agreement' should be thoroughly scrutinised by the legal team to ensure it is an appropriate governing instrument.</p>

SWAP Framework	SWAP Recommendations	Initial SWPSHP Evaluation
Decision Making	Partnerships should take account of the role that stakeholders have and this should be considered when making and communicating decisions about the partnership	There are reasonably clear expectations within SWPSHP about information sharing with stakeholders, who should be kept informed, what is required in respect of staff, and how decisions and activities/actions in SWPSHP are communicated. This is codified in the 'Agreement' (see above)
Standards of Conduct	There should be a written code of conduct for partnerships to include guidance for members and officers on standing orders, financial regulation and reporting, identifying and recording conflicts of interest and a protocol for commercial transactions.	The code of conduct in the 'Agreement' refers to compliance with the respective Councils statutory requirements, codes of conduct, national, local and other guidance, as well as standing orders, schemes of delegation and financial procedures. There does not appear to be any specific guidance in the 'Agreement' on conflicts of interest or commercial transactions.
Risk Management	No specific recommendations from SWAP in review on risk management.	SWPSHP has a detailed and robust risk register (regularly monitored and updated), which assesses operational, financial and reputation risks and agreed mitigating actions. The risk register is reported to the SWPSHP board.

SWAP Framework	SWAP Recommendations	Initial SWPSHP Evaluation
Performance Management	<p>Partnerships must have clear objectives which are supported by clear and measurable targets that can demonstrate that the objectives are being achieved. Partnerships should clearly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report achievements. • Report impacts. • Report issues. • Keep stakeholders informed. • Assess service users' needs. 	<p>The SWPSHP has the clear objective of providing a private sector housing partnership which is resilient and achieves improved outcomes for service users. Underlying these objectives are the supporting aims of increasing efficiencies, lowering costs and enhancing effectiveness. Performance against these aims and objectives for SWPSHP and their impact on private sector housing conditions, are regularly reported to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SWPSHP Board (which consists of a client manager and portfolio holder from each Council). • Government office for the South West (GoSW) in statistical returns and liaison meetings. • Wider stakeholders in both Council areas, through SWPSHP newsletters, and reports to staff and members. • Both Councils formally through year end reporting.

SWAP Framework	SWAP Recommendations	Initial SWPSHP Evaluation
Financial Arrangements	<p>Financial monitoring and reporting arrangements need to be clearly set out and agreed for all partnerships. These should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A calculation of the full costs of the partnership. • An assessment of the direct and indirect inputs of each partner. • A value for money judgment in relation to the overall cost and benefits of the partnership against outcomes for the community. 	<p>The existing financial and reporting arrangements in SWPSHP concentrate on assessments against:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency improvements. • Service costs and outcomes for customers. • Value for money against comparators for the service. <p>These arrangements were established to meet the needs of the existing Councils in the SWPSHP, to assess and report their ongoing financial performance against key objectives for the partnership.</p> <p>However, should authority be given for Taunton Deane to join the SWPSHP, these financial monitoring and reporting arrangements will need to be modified, to ensure compliance against the SWAP recommendations (see SWAP financial arrangements recommendations column).</p>

SWAP Framework	SWAP Recommendations	Initial SWPSHP Evaluation
Legal and IT Arrangements	The legal status of a partnership needs to be understood and documented and an appropriate service level agreement, or contract, should be in place at the start of the agreement (which should include clearly specified ICT contractual arrangements).	<p>The existing SWPSHP 'Agreement' sets out the legal status of the partnership (for managing private sector housing partnership services in Sedgemoor and West Somerset Councils, pursuant to their powers and duties as Local Housing Authorities).</p> <p>ICT contractual arrangements will need to be clearly specified and documented, either in a service level agreement or in a contract, if Taunton Deane joins the SWPSHP.</p>
Partnership Staff	Where applicable, partnerships should clearly set out the protocol for appointing staff.	<p>Should Taunton Deane Decide to become a member of SWPSHP, the intended protocols for appointing staff in the SWPSHP are :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing staff can remain in substantive posts and will not have to apply for their positions. • Existing staff can apply for any new posts in an enlarged SWPSHP.

Appendix D
Efficiencies Achieved by Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership (SWPSHP) since October 2007

Service Area	Efficiency Improvement	Evidence
Decision making and Management Capability	<p>When SWPSHP was formed, the inherited management structure (in two Councils areas) was reduced from three managers to one Manager (the SWPSHP Manager). This:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduced the time needed for management decisions. • facilitated more consistent management actions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial savings reported to SWPSHP Board and Councils in the partnership (see Appendix B) • Greater outputs per member of SWPSHP staff. • Clearer reporting lines and accountabilities. • Reduction in number management meetings.
Strategies and Policies	<p>Prior to SWPSHP, each Council developed its own private sector housing strategies and policies using its very limited capacity and resources to do so. This caused some practical difficulties in each Council, and gave cause for concern amongst partner organisations, the Audit Commission and GoSW about the robustness of private sector strategies in both areas. Since SWPSHP has been set up, these fears have been allayed.</p>	<p>Development of joint strategies and policies on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel Poverty/Energy Efficiency/Affordable Warmth. • Private Sector Housing Renewal. • Enforcement against Housing Standards. • Houses in Multiple Occupation. • Disabled Adaptations. • Decent Homes.

Service Area	Efficiency Improvement	Evidence
Finance and Performance	<p>Before SWPSHP was established, the profiling, setting and monitoring of private sector housing budgets was not very well co-ordinated and was undertaken by a number of different managers. All of these functions are now overseen and managed by one SWPSHP Manager.</p> <p>Since SWPSHP was set up, performance against key private sector housing indicators is monitored by the SWPSHP Manager, and reported to the SWPSHP Board, using a single performance management tool (Covalent).</p> <p>Performance of individual members of SWPSHP staff against key work functions and measuring of outcomes is also monitored by the SWPSHP Manager regularly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly monitoring of SWPSHP financial performance against budgets by SWPSHP Manager and quarterly reporting of this performance to SWPSHP Board and to the Councils in the partnership. • Use of private sector housing performance management system (Covalent) to produce performance reports for SWPSHP Board and monitoring information for SWPSHP staff. • Measurable reductions in time taken to process housing grants and housing loans payments. • Use of other management tools to monitor staff effectiveness on grants and enforcement work.
Housing Grants and Low Interest Loans	<p>Rationalisation of all application forms and procedures, resulting in one clear set of eligibility criteria and payment conditions applying.</p> <p>Information only has to be input once and this streamlining makes it easier for grant and low interest loan applicants to understand these systems and access payments from them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application processes and packages simplified. • Forms and procedures can be accessed from respective Council websites. • Improved customer satisfaction levels with private sector housing services in both Council areas.

Service Area	Efficiency Improvement	Evidence
<p>Housing Standards and Enforcement</p>	<p>Under SWPSHP, there is greater capacity, through more flexible use of Housing Standards Officers in both Council areas, to improve private sector housing conditions by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertaking an increased number of inspections (and licensing) of Houses in Multiple Occupation. • Providing a higher volume of professional advice to and/or taking enforcement action against private sector landlords on infringements of housing standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of Licensed Houses in Multiple Occupation. • Increased number of Houses in Multiple Occupation inspections completed. • Increased number of formal complaints about private sector housing conditions investigated. • Increased number of general housing conditions complaints investigated.

**Appendix E
Impact Assessment Form and Action Table**

<p>What are you completing this impact assessment for? E.g. policy, service area.</p>	<p>Somerset West Private Sector Housing Partnership proposal</p>
<p>Section One – Aims and objectives of the proposal</p>	
<p>Aim</p> <p>To improve Private Sector Housing Services by working in partnership with the two other Local Authorities of West Somerset and Sedgemoor.</p> <p>Objective</p> <p>Increase and improve the capacity, resilience, procurement, performance and management efficiency of Private Sector Housing Grants and Enforcement standards.</p>	
<p>Section two – Groups that the proposal is targeted at</p>	
<p>Private Sector Housing Staff Team. Landlords, tenants and owner occupiers.</p>	
<p>Section three – Groups that the service is delivered by</p>	
<p>Private Sector Staff Team and Contractors. The Staff team will initiate actions and the contractors will carry out the work required.</p>	

Section four – Evidence and Data used for assessment

Data collected in the establishment of the proposal are as follows:

- Performance data.
- Cost/budget analysis data.
- Analysis against the South West Audit Partnership recommendations for partnership working.
- Evidence of efficiencies already achieved through the partnership.

Section Five - Conclusions drawn about the impact of service/policy/function on different groups highlighting negative impact or unequal outcomes

Generally

There are limited resources available across the partnership to enable service delivery. We need to be aware that some groups or communities of people may be disadvantaged due to lack of resources. Resource may eventually be allocated according to information gathered from our data mapping exercise. This will give us a area to target resources due to identified need. This process may lead to other disadvantaged areas, or groups being overlooked.

Does the inspection procedure for HMOs look sufficiently at the vulnerability of the individuals living in the property. Are staff sufficiently trained to be able to identify where a person is vulnerable?

We need to ensure that we are continually measuring potential equalities issues through customer satisfaction surveys. These will need to be considered and implemented across the partnership.

Ensure early multi-agency referral systems and communication channels are in place if staff identify a customers with additional needs.

Disability

Investigations will need to be conducted into how accessible and approachable to process for the application facilitation of disabled facilities grants is and identify any improvements needed.

Will need to ensure that staff teams are sufficiently trained in aspects of disability discrimination and what it means to be considered to have a disability. A person may appear physically fine, so we need to ensure staff do not judge.

And Age – ensure carers are considered if they exist. They may be able to make a process easier, or give more detailed information.

Race

It will be important to be culturally sensitive when selecting contractors within a procurement process. The cheapest may not always be the most appropriate. Staff training will need to identify this issues and ensure it is considered within the procurement process.

Our Statutory responsibility to inspect Housing in Multiple Occupation's could inadvertently discriminate against certain ethnic/minority groups. It is important that staff and managers understand how the agreed process could disadvantage groups. It may be necessary to do an EqIA on the current procedure to identify potential problems and identify possible adjustments.

Religion or Belief

We need to be mindful of cultural differences and practices and ensure they are considered within the inspection and others services within Private sector housing.

Gender

Traditionally many of the skills and knowledge needed for private sector housing work would be associated with male orientated professions. We need to be sure that within recruitment of positions for this work judgments on these based this do not come into play. Equally we need to ensure that, through this assumption we are not disregarding other skills which may be useful to the work.

We need to ensure that inspection and enforcement officers are sufficiently trained to be able to deal with any discrimination they may face from customers.

Sexual Orientation

Ensure staff are sufficiently trained around awareness of and issues relating to sexual orientation.

Age

Ensure staff are trained to avoid preconceived ideas about the needs of different age groups.

There is a danger of seeing symptoms as being directly as a result of lifestyle and not housing conditions and help may be rejected. Need to ensure staff are sufficiently trained to avoid this.

Need to ensure that information on for example, disabled facilities grants, is targeted at those groups who could really benefit. For example, young carers

Income/Socio Economic Status

This may also be a gender issue – need to ensure services are accessible regardless of income and work patterns. For example, do we allow for appointments outside of office hours?

Means tested grants are often not available to those just outside the threshold. Need to ensure that staff have information on other sources of funding which may be available to the customer and details on how to apply.

Staff need to have a good understanding of worklessness and what this means. Discrimination needs to be avoided.

Geographical Location

Targeting areas, for example, for installation measures, by data mapping exercises will inevitably discriminate against areas where there has not been an overwhelming need identified, but pockets exist.

Access to information, advice and assistance for people in rural, or isolated areas could be an issue. Will need to ensure this has been considered when looking at accessibility to services.

Section six – Examples of best practise

Generally

This Partnership and the work conducted by the private sector housing team will enable and facilitate people to live more independent lives, as well as enabling them to maintain and protect their health and security.

The data mapping procedure will enable the partnership to clearly evidence targeted priorities. All people are treated equally in this process and the reasons for resource targeting in a particular area is transparent.

Equalities and diversity monitoring and awareness is key to any staff recruitment throughout the partnership.

Disability

The Partnership will improve co-ordination and delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants. It will also highlight and improve performance for access to grants to vulnerable people and/or those living in inadequate housing.

Race

Properties are inspected against Statutory requirements. This and enforcement standards ensure all people are treated equally. Issues may be around the quality of information provided, which is highlighted above.

Gender

Staff and working practices throughout the partnership do not differ from one gender to another, although it has been identified that staff training may be necessary.

Age

Private sector housing staff are able to intervene and facilitate support in private sector standards to reduce factors that can lead to deprivation, or poor educational achievement in children and Young people.

Geographical Location

The partnership will ensure the same service and response wherever a person lives.

Signed: Person/Manager completed by		Signed: Group Manager/Director	
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Impact Assessment Issues and Actions table						
Service area				Date		
Identified issue drawn from your conclusions	Groups affected	Actions needed – how will your service or policy be amended	Who is responsible	By when	Is a monitoring system required	Expected outcomes from carrying out actions
Knowing our Communities, engagement and satisfaction						
Ensure staff are trained in equalities issues	All disadvantaged Groups	Commit to and support a 3 yearly training programme for staff	Christian Trevelyan	June 2010	Yes, by the PSH governance board.	Ensure staff are sensitive to and aware of equalities issues and of how their actions could disadvantage individuals or groups.
Targeting information at groups who could really benefit	All disadvantaged Groups	Will need to identify who groups are and where they can be accessed to ensure information is getting through.	Christian Trevelyan	June 2010	Yes, by the PSH governance board.	Improved access to grant facilities for those in most need.
Responsive services and customer care						
Ensure accessibility of Disable PSH Grants	All disadvantaged Groups	EqIA of grants procedure and materials used to give information, as well as application forms.	Christian Trevelyan	April 2010	Yes, by the PSH governance board.	Identify improvements if needed and implement as soon as possible. Advertise improvements.

Ensure inspection procedure for HMO's take account of cultural differences.	Race, religion and belief	EqIA of the service should identify any issues. If possible under the agreed procedure Improvements will need to be made.	Christian Trevelyan	April 2010	Yes, by the PSH governance board.	Identify and implement any improvements identified that are possible within the statutory requirements.
Managers need to have a good understanding of the inspection procedure in order to identify staff training needs.	All disadvantaged Groups	Investigate current procedures	PSH governance board.	April 2010	Yes, by the PSH governance board.	Form an understanding and highlight training needs, if any exist.
Implementation of customer satisfaction surveys	All disadvantaged Groups	Investigate to best process for this and implement across the partnership.	PSH governance board.	April 2010	Yes, by the PSH governance board.	The creation of a meaningful and useful customer satisfaction survey.
Multi-agency referral systems and clear channels of communication need to be in place.	All disadvantaged Groups	Investigate how this already works in other services and agencies and follow best practice.	Christian Trevelyan	June 2010	Yes, by the PSH governance board.	Implementation following information on best practice

Place shaping, leadership and partnerships						
<p>Need to ensure that EqIA's are carried out through the different stages of partnership implementation.</p> <p>Also that every Strategy produced by the partnership is subjected to an assessment.</p>	All disadvantaged Groups	Update the EqIA at appropriate stages in the progression of the partnership and ensure EqIA's are conducted for each Strategy.	PSH governance board.	June 2010	Yes, by the PSH governance board.	The completion of comprehensive impact assessments and evidence that actions associated have been completed.
A modern and diverse workforce						