

Appendix B – Audit Commission Summary and Scoring

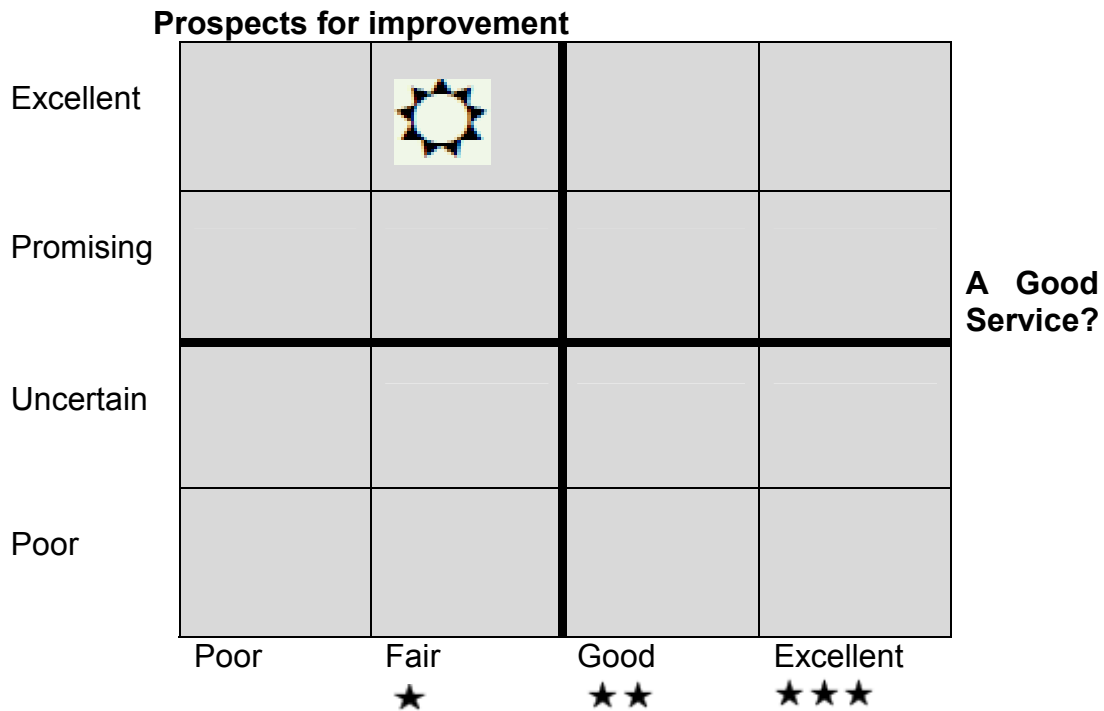
Summary

- 1** Haringey Council provides 'fair' allocations, lettings and homelessness services, which have excellent prospects for improvement. The services were inspected in 2007 and found to be 'poor', with promising prospects for improvement. This re-inspection found that services have improved in a number of areas.
- 2** There is now a comprehensive approach to preventing homelessness and offering housing options, which has contributed to a steady reduction in the use of temporary accommodation. Targets to limit the use of bed and breakfast accommodation have been met, and the standard of temporary accommodation is generally satisfactory. However, Haringey still has a very high number of households in temporary accommodation and the speed of homelessness decision-making is slow.
- 3** Services are generally easy to access and a good range of information is available, although the speed of telephone access is not meeting targets. Frontline staff provide a good level of customer care, and appointments are made efficiently and in appropriate timescales. There is also a sound approach to dealing with complaints. However, service standards are not comprehensive and the approach to obtaining customer feedback is patchy.
- 4** There is an effective approach to assessing and meeting the needs of vulnerable adults, and a strong multi-agency approach to providing advice and support to people experiencing domestic violence. There are arrangements to make services accessible to all customers, and a range of surgeries and activities take place to reach out to different groups. However, the approach to monitoring diversity to ensure fair and equal access across all services is not consistent or comprehensive and has produced limited outcomes.
- 5** The present lettings policy is not sufficiently transparent, registrations are not carried out promptly and the register has not been reviewed for several years, although the Council has plans to address these issues.
- 6** The Council has reduced the cost of providing temporary accommodation, while maintaining standards, but there is also a lack of comprehensive benchmarking and comparative data to enable the service to be sure it is delivering value for money.
- 7** The prospects for improvement are considered to be 'excellent' because appropriate plans and strategies are in place, with actions that will improve services for customers. There is a strong track record of improvement over recent years, including good progress against the recommendations of the 2007 inspection. Performance monitoring and reporting is generally robust and there has been strong leadership of the inspected services. There is the financial and staffing capacity to deliver further improvement and capacity is strengthened through external funding and partnership working.

Scoring the service

8 We have assessed London Borough of Haringey as providing a ‘fair’, one-star service that has excellent prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

‘a fair service that has excellent prospects for improvement’



Source: Audit Commission

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

- an effective approach to preventing homelessness and using the private rented sector has significantly reduced the level of temporary accommodation used;
- the housing and support needs of vulnerable adults are being addressed;
- targets for limiting the use of bed and breakfast accommodation have been met;
- good quality information and an informative website are available for service users;
- there is effective working with housing associations and other partners in the allocation of homes and prevention of homelessness;
- the multi-agency Hearthstone service is providing effective one-stop help to people facing domestic abuse;
- there is effective procurement of temporary accommodation, which has reduced unit costs while maintaining standards; and
- there is a sound approach to dealing with complaints.

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

- the current allocations policy is not sufficiently transparent and needs updating;
- housing registrations are not carried out promptly;
- there are lengthy average relet times for empty council homes;
- the speed of homelessness decision-making is not meeting targets;
- diversity monitoring is not comprehensive and has not been systematically used to improve service delivery;
- the service does not have a clear understanding of the value for money of the inspected services and how this compares with other organisations;
- telephone calls are not answered within target times; and
- service standards are not yet comprehensive, and there are weaknesses in monitoring and reporting of performance against the standards.

11 The service has excellent prospects for improvement because:

- there is a strong track record of improvement over recent years, including progress against the recommendations of the 2007 inspection;
- appropriate plans and strategies are in place, with actions that will improve services for customers;
- performance monitoring and reporting is generally robust;
- there has been strong leadership of the inspected services which has supported improvement; and
- there is the financial and staffing capacity to deliver further improvement and capacity is strengthened through external funding and partnership working.

12 However, there are barriers to improvement. These include:

- progress has been slow in some areas, such as a failure to review the housing register; and
- there has not been a sufficiently strong focus on learning from other organisations or from customer feedback.

Audit Commission recommendations

Recommendation

R1 The Council should improve access and its customer focus by:

- ensuring that service standards are comprehensive and that performance against them is regularly monitored and reported;
- ensuring that telephone answering is accurately monitored and meets target timescales;
- ensuring that support is available to people bidding for properties at all Customer Service Centres;
- ensuring that the diversity of service users is monitored and that this information is used to shape service delivery and to ensure fair and equal access to services;
- completing equality impact assessments of all key service areas; and
- ensuring that customer feedback on the inspected services is regularly collected, reviewed and acted upon.

Recommendation

R2 The Council should improve its approach to allocating vacant social rented homes by:

- reviewing the present allocation policy, in consultation with stakeholders, to ensure that it provides customers with a clear understanding of how homes are allocated;
- ensuring that new housing applications are registered promptly;
- regularly reviewing the housing register to ensure that it records current housing need; and
- ensuring that the allocation element of property relet times is minimised.

Recommendation

R3 The Council should improve its approach to preventing and addressing homelessness by:

- developing an effective private sector deposit guarantee scheme for 'non-priority' homeless people;
- ensuring that landlords of Home Finder Scheme properties are either accredited, or meet accreditation standards before being accepted onto the scheme;
- ensuring that homelessness decisions are taken as promptly as is reasonably possible;
- considering the provision of a specialist mediation service, particularly for young people leaving home; and
- ensuring that all reports of disrepair in temporary accommodation are responded to in line with the agreed procedures and timescales.

Recommendation

R4 The Council should take action to improve its approach to providing value for money by assessing the unit costs and outcomes of its services and initiatives and comparing these with other organisations, including high performers.