



Report to:

Northwards Housing Board

12 October 2006

Item No:

10c

Title:	Charter Mark		
Date:	2 nd October 2006		
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Confidential:	No		
For: (Please tick action required)	NOTING	DISCUSSION	APPROVAL √

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide the Board with further details of the process for achieving Charter Mark. To ask the Board to approve that an application be made on the basis of the timetable set out in the report.

RECOMMENDATION

The Board are asked to note the contents of this report; and approve that a Charter Mark application be made on the basis of the timetable set out in the report.

IMPLICATIONS

Equality & Diversity:	Yes – One of the Charter Mark criteria is to be 'Be fair and accessible to everyone and promote choice'; and we should expect the process of applying for the award to improve our performance in this regard.
Financial:	Yes – There is a one-off cost of c£4000 associated with achieving Charter Mark; followed by an annual cost of c£700. This is affordable and is considered justifiable given the potential benefits.
Staffing:	Yes – Existing staff resources will be used when making the application; but this is considered justifiable given the potential benefits.
Decency Target:	None Directly.
Governance:	None Directly.
Risk Assessment:	No new risk created or primary risk affected.

Equality & Diversity Implications (Please tick where relevant):

BME	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Elderly	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Single Parents	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Young	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Domestic Violence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alcohol / Drug Mis-users	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Consultation/Consideration:

	Yes, No or N/A:	Name:	Date:
Sub-Committee:	Yes	Performance and Quality Services	22 September 2006
Area Panel:	No		
Task Groups:	No		
Ward Councillors:	N/A		

Note: Earlier report considered by Performance and Quality Services Sub-Committee 31 March 2006 and Northwards Housing Board 11 April 2006.

1. Background

- 1.1 Charter Mark is the Government's national standard for excellence in customer service in the public sector.
- 1.2 Charter Mark is a powerful, easy to use tool, intended to help everyone in the organisation focus on and improve their customer service and delivery to service users. It encourages organisations to strive for excellence and continuous improvement.
- 1.3 The City Council's Housing Services already has the Charter Mark award for its estate management services, but this cannot be transferred to Northwards Housing. If the company wishes to pursue accreditation it needs to make an application in its own right.
- 1.4 In April 2006 the Northwards Housing Board gave in principle approval to Northwards Housing making an application for Charter Mark; subject to a further report in October 2006 setting out the timetable, costs and process in more detail. This report provides that detail.

2. Criteria

- 2.1 To achieve Charter Mark there are six set criteria on which applicants are assessed:
 - 1. Set standards and perform well
 - 2. Actively engage with customers, partners and staff
 - 3. Be fair and accessible to everyone and promote choice

4. Continuously develop and improve
5. Use resources effectively and imaginatively
6. Contribute to improving opportunities and quality of life in the communities served.

2.2 There is a self assessment toolkit which Charter Mark issue to organisations to prepare for the assessment. There are also a number of good practice benchmarking and other relevant resources available to applicants.

2.3 The assessment is carried out by one of four organisations accredited by the Cabinet Office for this purpose. The appointed body assists in formatting the evidence required and gives guidance throughout the application process.

3. The Process

3.1 The following process is proposed:

Establish a steering group of lead officers from all areas of the organisation.	October 2006
Register with the assessment body (CMAS)	October 2006
Steering group to agree with the assessment body a detailed action plan for taking the application forward.	October 2006
Lead officers collate evidence around their area of work. Evidence is collated and co-ordinated via Quality and Customer Care Manager. The application is done on line but paper based evidence is needed for the assessment visit.	November 2006 – January 2007
Assessment body carries out pre-assessment (1 day visit).	January 2007
Feedback from pre-assessment, identifying any gaps and where improvement plans are needed.	February 2007 – March 2007
Actual application is submitted for Charter Mark. The assessment body will send a timetable for their visit, which will include site visits, meeting tenants and residents, and seeking feedback from partner organisations. The assessment covers the whole organisation.	March/April 2007

3.2 The following points should be noted:

- The timetable and costs are indicative and subject to agreement with the assessment body.
- It is anticipated that the steering group would meet monthly; with regular updates being provided to the Performance and Quality Services Sub-Committee, Area Panels and Housing Management Services Task Group.

- CMAS (Charter Mark Assessment Services) is one of the bodies accredited by the Cabinet Office for the purpose of undertaking Charter Mark assessments. CMAS was selected by the Council via a competitive tendering process; and in 2005 carried out the assessment of the Council's Housing Management Service. They are therefore very familiar with the local context and the work we do; including familiarity with many of our policies and procedures. There is no requirement for Northwards Housing to undertake a further tendering process, and it is considered that registering with CMAS makes sense and represents good value.
- A decision on whether to award Charter Mark is normally made within 15 days of the assessment visit.
- Assuming we are successful in achieving Charter Mark, a further annual check is carried out to ensure that we continue to meet the criteria. This generally involves a half-day or one-day visit, and costs £700.

4. Costs

- 4.1 The costs will be based on the size of the organisation and also the number of days required for the assessment. It is recommended that a pre-assessment is carried out, as this will help to identify any areas in need of improvement. The assessment costs approx £3000, and the pre-assessment costs approx £1000.

5. Benefits

- 5.1 Apart from being a nationally recognised award which demonstrates excellence in customer service. Northwards Housing will be able to promote the award in all its publicity. Achieving the award would also be expected to help in:
- Increasing customer focus
 - Improving consultation with users
 - Improving staff morale
 - Developing better internal processes and more effective service deliver
 - Improving complaints handling
 - Delivering more cost effective services
 - Making Northwards Housing more attractive to potential employees.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 The Board are asked to note the contents of this report; and approve that a Charter Mark application be made on the basis of the timetable set out in the report.