

**Report of:** Strategic Director, Housing, Health and Communities

**To:** Executive Board

**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> October 2006

**Item No:**

**Title of Report :** Proposals for the structure of the Community Housing Business Unit



### Summary and Recommendations



**Purpose of report:** To outline the proposals for restructuring the Community Housing Business Unit to include the functions carried out within the Affordable Housing Development Team (currently located in the Neighbourhood Renewal Business Unit).



**Key decision:** Yes

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Patrick Murray (Improving Housing)



**Scrutiny Responsibility:** Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee

**Ward(s) affected:** All

#### Report Approved by



**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Patrick Murray (Improving Housing)

**Legal:** Jeremy King (Lead Lawyer)



**Finance:** Andy Collett (Group Accountant)

**Strategic Director:** Michael Lawrence (Housing, Health & Communities)



**Policy Framework:**



**Recommendation(s):** That the Board support the reorganisation proposals, and recommends approval of the transfer of budgets to full Council.



## Background

1. The Community Housing Business Unit came into being on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2006, following a Council decision to combine elements of the old Housing Services B.U. with Oxford Building Solutions to create a single Housing Revenue Account Service, to be known as Oxford City Homes. The remaining elements of the Housing Services B.U. were re-named as Community Housing as part of the same Council decision. The Business Unit currently includes the Allocations Team, Housing Options Team, Temporary Accommodation Management Team, and the Elderly Services Team, together with a small number of ancillary staff.
2. The initial changes outlined in the previous paragraph were intended to be the first phase in a more general reorganisation of housing related functions carried out by the Authority, with Landlord functions residing in the new Oxford City Homes Business Unit, and with the more strategic and enabling functions being taken up by Community Housing.
3. As an initial step towards this more general re-focusing of the strategic housing role within the Unit, the responsibility for the production of housing strategy documents, including the main Housing Strategy, the Homelessness Strategy, and subsidiary, specialist strategies has been transferred from the Strategy & Review Business Unit. This transfer of responsibilities was made simple by the departure of the then Housing Advisor, and the relatively small budgetary provision for this function. Permission has been sought and obtained from the Senior Management Board for the creation of a new post of Service Development Manager, who will have, among other duties, overall responsibility for the creation of the Council's housing strategy documents, and for ensuring that the recommendations of such documents are delivered.
4. The new Business Unit is intended to provide a unified and focused service, dealing with the major aspects of housing need in the city. For this to be successful, it will be necessary to draw together those staff and posts currently located in other Business Units who play leading roles in this part of the Council's business. The various elements of the Housing Development Team, currently located within the Neighbourhood Renewal Business Unit have a very close fit with the proposed role of the new Unit.
5. The Housing Development Team (HDT) comprises the following posts:
  - Housing Development Manager
  - Housing Development Co-ordinator
  - Special Projects Officer ( Supporting People)
  - Rough Sleeping Co-ordinator
  - Partnership Support Officer
  - Development Assistant

The Team functions are :

- delivery of affordable housing services to meet housing need;
  - delivery of the Council's strategies on Supporting People and Single Homelessness;
  - delivery of the Council's strategy on Rough Sleeping and Street Culture and meeting Govt. Best Value targets for Rough Sleeping.
6. Officers believe that there are significant advantages in relocating the various functions of the Housing Development Team within Community Housing.

i) Affordable Housing Delivery

The Affordable Housing team, (Development Manager, Development Co-ordinator, and Development Assistant) have a number of functions which would benefit from relocation within Community Housing.

- Strategic working with County Council, District Councils, Department for Communities and Local Government (latterly the ODPM), and the Housing Corporation – the new Unit will provide Oxford City Council's representation on all strategic housing bodies in the city and county, including OMAHG, SHIG, SHOP, Senior Officers Housing Group, private Sector Working Group etc, and the Business Manager and Development Manager would be ideally placed to influence those groups, and bring forward development issues in the city and beyond. The Unit also has close links with Social & Health Care, YOT, DAAT and the PCT in relation to housing for young people, ex-offenders etc., which will be of benefit in helping to plan for future needs in terms of supported housing, move-on provision and other housing related initiatives for vulnerable groups.
- Partnership development with RSLs to deliver housing and related services – the Unit will be a single point of contact for RSLs, already having close links with locally operating associations through our work in temporary accommodation provision, allocation of RSL properties, alarm monitoring and mobile warden services. There is real advantage to be gained from closer links between the allocations and homelessness work of the unit and the work of the Development Team, in terms of detailed profiling of current and future need, and the creation of balanced communities through the use of local lettings plans.
- Direct development projects, from option appraisals to land disposal and contract control – the Unit will be closely linked to the HRA Business Unit, and will have a strategic role to play in influencing and delivering the HRA Asset Management Plan. The experience of the officers involved in developing affordable housing will be invaluable in this respect. It is also our intention that the team will continue to develop its current role in encouraging effective use of Council land for affordable housing

development, through links with the planning department and through work with elected members and senior management.

- Work with private developers – our intention is to see the affordable housing function adequately funded, to allow the team to operate in a more strategic way, forging relationships with private developers and landowners, helping develop innovative methods of funding for the delivery of greater numbers of affordable dwellings in the city, and to ensure that the Unit has a major input into significant development projects such as the West End.
- Liaison with funding bodies – it will be advantageous to concentrate the relationships with those bodies which provide external funding for housing related functions (notably the Homelessness Inspectorate and Housing Corporation/Regional Housing Board) in a single unit that is responsible for all aspects of housing and homelessness policy, and much of the delivery of those policies, in the city as a whole. This will allow for greater co-ordination of bids and projects.

#### ii) Rough Sleeping & Street Culture, and Single Homelessness Strategy

Work on these issues has an extremely close fit with the ongoing work of the Housing Needs Team, and these functions will benefit from integration into a single delivery team dealing with all aspects of homelessness in the city, and from the integration of single homelessness strategy work with the remaining body of housing related strategies. The new Business Unit will offer a single point of contact on all matters relating to homelessness in the city, both operational and strategic, and will take the lead on delivering against the full range of targets in this challenging area of work.

There are obvious advantages from closer links between the officers working on the Rough Sleeping agenda and single homelessness, and those who deal with the allocation of properties, Home Choice Scheme, temporary accommodation, and statutory homelessness, and these links can be made without any loss to the existing linkages within the Housing Development Team, provided that the team is incorporated into the Unit in its entirety. Prevention of homelessness is the key deliverable for the Council in this area of work, and integration of the rough sleeping function with the Unit will allow for better co-ordination of the Council's efforts in this respect.

#### iii) Supporting People

Similar considerations apply to the work carried out in relation to the Council's involvement in the Supporting People programme. Supporting People provides funding for housing related support for vulnerable individuals and households, and such support on a residential or floating basis is a mainstay of tenancy sustainment across all tenures for many categories of vulnerable people, including those who are potentially at risk of homelessness and the elderly and disabled residents who access the

services provided by the Elderly Services Team. There is a strong argument for maintaining the links between the Affordable Housing Team and the officers responsible for the Council's involvement in the administering partnership of Supporting People in the county in terms of possible future developments of supported housing, and additional benefit from involvement of those officers with the Council services which are at least partly funded by Supporting People (the Elderly Services Team and Temporary Accommodation Management). For these reasons we believe it is important that the Housing Development Team as a whole continues to be located within a single Business Unit, and that Community Housing is the appropriate location.

6. A review of the affordable housing development function was carried out by the Housing Quality Network in 2005. The HQN review of Oxford City Council's internal affordable housing enabling function advocated moving the HDT to a location that will:
  - a) Allow it to focus on enabling affordable housing;
  - b) Ensure it is linked to relevant strategic groups internally and externally;
  - c) Reflect the importance and role of the team in enabling affordable housing, and
  - d) Ensure the team is performing; targets should be agreed and monitored.
7. Moving the team to Community Housing, and placing the disparate elements into appropriate locations within the unit, will enable all of these recommendations to be moved forward quickly. Housing Services was noted as a potential location for the team, but caution was urged in light of "the focus of the service on delivering decent homes and developing the landlord function". The formation of the new Community Housing Business Unit, and the separation of that unit from the HRA and landlord function, overcomes that objection and leaves the management team free to concentrate on the more strategic and enabling aspects of housing in the city, particularly in regard to developing overarching strategies for dealing with sites as they become available, and developing effective relationships and processes with the Planning Services Business Unit.

#### Proposed Structure

8. A diagram of the proposed structure of the Business Unit can be found at Appendix A. The Affordable Housing Delivery team becomes a stand-alone team with the Development Manager becoming part of the third tier management structure of the Business Unit. The officers dealing with Rough Sleeping & Street Culture become part of the Housing Needs Team, and the Special Projects Officer sits in the proposed Service Development Team, which will have responsibility for much of the strategy, policy, and performance development for the Business Unit.
9. There will be some changes to responsibilities for individual officers. Currently, the Development Manager has line management responsibility

for both the Special Projects Officer and the Street Homeless Co-ordinator. These officers (together with the Partnership Support Officer) will no longer form part of the development team, and will be line managed by the Service Development Manager and the Housing Needs Manager respectively.

10. Additionally, it is considered opportune to concentrate work relating to homelessness within the Housing Needs Team, and to this end it is proposed to transfer the responsibility for co-ordinating the work of the Single Homeless Strategy Group from the Special projects Officer to the Street Homeless Co-ordinator, with support provided by the Partnership Support Officer. Some revision of job descriptions will be required, and this will be progressed in the interim period between the writing of this report and its presentation to Executive Board and Council. Responsibility for production of the Single Homelessness Strategy will ultimately rest with the Service Development Team, but it is anticipated that the Street Homeless Co-ordinator and the Special Projects Officer will have significant input into the production process.
11. Consultation with staff affected by the proposed changes has been undertaken, and the team have been very helpful in providing ideas and suggestions for future development of the service.

#### Financial matters

9. Appendix B contains details of the budget headings which relate to the Housing Development Team, and which will be vired into the Community Housing budget if approval for the restructure is granted. The KV02 budget head has been revised to reflect the recent regrading of one of the officers concerned.

#### Recommendations

10. That the Board support the reorganisation proposals, and recommends approval of the transfer of budgets to full Council.

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**Background papers:** None.

