

Report of: Head of Oxford City Homes

To: Executive Board

Date: 3 December 2007

Item No:

Title of Report: Housing Improvement Plan – The next phase



Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report:

To update members of the progress of the Housing Improvement Plan to March 2007 and set out a position statement in terms of The Housing Revenue Account Improvement Plan that follows on from the recent Housing Quality Network review of Oxford City Homes.

Key decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Patrick Murray

Scrutiny Responsibility: Housing Scrutiny Committee

Ward(s) affected: All

Report Approved by: Councillor Patrick Murray
Jeremy King (Legal)
Dave Higgins (Finance)

Policy Framework:

Recommendation(s): That Members note the progress made against the key targets set out in the Housing Improvement Plan December 2005 and endorse the contents of the Housing Revenue Account Improvement Plan shown in the appendix to this report, as a working framework for Oxford City Homes following the Housing Quality network review.

Background

1. The Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate laid down recommendations for improvement for the Housing Service in December 2005, when the service was awarded a one star rating, with promising prospects for improvement. These recommendations formed the basis for the Housing Improvement Plan that was approved by the Housing Advisory Board on 6th April 2006 and endorsed by Housing Scrutiny Committee on 12th April 2006.

2. The Audit Commission carries out inspections at regular intervals and it was agreed as prudent to carry out a 'self assessment' with Housing Quality Network to check improvement against changing performance measures and Audit Commission expectations, prior to the formal inspection. Housing Quality Network is an organisation that provides specialist advice in regard to policy issues such as performance and inspection. The review was carried out in May 2007. This report outlines the key findings from the review and the development of the Improvement Plan from the priority recommendations.

The Housing Improvement Plan 2005

3. The Housing Improvement Plan has been monitored through monthly meetings of the Housing Improvement Team. The team consists of officers of Oxford City Homes Senior Management Team and representatives from Oxford Tenants Panel.
4. There were 4 principal recommendations set out in this Plan that were subdivided into 36 key elements and further division into key tasks that have target dates against them. Progress against the targets has been reported to the Housing Improvement Team and the Head of Oxford City Homes. Responsibility for the key elements was assigned to the Senior Management Team.
5. The Improvement Plan was updated and amended as a result of the work undertaken and is now to all intents and purposes complete. The Housing Quality Network review has identified those tasks that remained as work in progress and included them in the new Improvement Plan.

Progress Summary

The following summarises the outcomes for the 10 key elements of the 2005 Improvement Plan;

6. *Increase the number of appointments made and kept for responsive repairs to 95% by 31st March 2007.*
This indicator measures the number of appointments made as a percentage of all appointable jobs received through the Contact Centre. In 2005 the Housing Inspectors set the target of 95% to be achieved by March 2007. The last quarter's results have shown an increase from around 80% in previous quarters, to achieving 95.6%.
7. *Develop and open an HRA Services Customer Contact Centre by September 2006.*
The expanded Contact Centre went live on 18th September 2006, enabling tenants to call one, free-phone number for assistance with all their tenancy related issues. 6203 calls were made to the Contact Centre in March 2007 and 99% of callers who responded to the repairs satisfaction survey have said that the Contact Centre Staff were helpful when dealing with their query.
8. *Improve the delivery of Tenancy Services to achieve a more efficient and adequately resourced approach to customer contact.*
The review of Tenancy Services began in September 2005 and tied in with the restructure of the HRA Services Business Unit to form Oxford City Homes, which has been located to the Horspath Road site since October 2006. The Estate

Management function has been reviewed and the Estate Managers are now responsible for a more proactive approach to working with tenants. Surgeries are still offered in the local offices on a rota basis, which ensures that tenants know when and where they can see an Estate Manager face to face if they so wish. Initial telephone enquiries are now made to the Contact Centre on the free-phone number. This has enabled the staff to better plan their workloads and deliver the service, whilst ensuring that tenants have improved accessibility to advice through the Contact Centre.

9. *Reduce the void period to no more than 4 weeks on average during 2006/2007.*

The current average void time has been reduced to around 33 calendar days. This reflects a period of change, consolidation and streamlining of the voids service. There have been significant changes in the processes and procedures for void property management and lettings. A recent pilot scheme to rationalise the types of work carried out in void properties impacted positively on the length of time taken to re-let a property.

The roll out of the pilot scheme for all voids from April 2007 should enable further reduction in the re-let times to bring the period to within the desired target.
10. *Reduce the proportion of repairs categorised as emergencies to 10% by April 2007 (BV211b).*

Improvements in the classification of repairs and to the appointments system has now helped to reduce the proportion of repairs categorised as emergencies to a little under 10%.
11. *Complete an accurate and detailed tenant database by 31st March 2007.*

Information has been collected through home visit and mail out and at 31st March 2007 data was obtained for 87.55 % of households, a total of 7012 There is a continuing programme of home visits by Estate Managers to ensure the completion of this work by the end of the summer 2007.
12. *Increase the number of tenants involved in monitoring and shaping the service.*

The Tenant Participation Team has drawn up a detailed action plan for encouraging and enabling increased tenant participation. Tenant Participation Officers have been involved in outreach work within the community.

A restructure of tenant involvement has been carried out, which allows tenants to participate in decision-making processes on a less formal basis. This change, which is effective from the AGM in May 2007 will enable tenants to focus their activities in areas that they are particularly interested in. The Tenant Compact is being rewritten to include the structural changes and incorporates issues such as the Government's Respect Agenda. The new compact will be ready for publication in the Autumn 2007.
13. The Tenant Resource Centre has seen regular use by the Housing Advisory Board and Oxford Tenants Panel meetings. In addition working groups with tenant representation make use of the facilities there. Tenant representatives can use office space for general administration purposes, pre meetings, training events and development of tenant participation activities. Drop in sessions are available for council residents enquiries about getting involved and making use of the resources twice weekly.

14. *Ensure that 77% of Council homes meet the Decent Homes Standard by 31st March 2007.*

The Decent Homes programme has achieved 77.52% of properties meeting the standard in March 2007, marginally exceeding the 77% decency target for 2006/7. This means that the overall aim of 100% of homes meeting the standard by 2010 remains on target.

15. *Develop the use of benchmarking and customer feedback in order to monitor the value for money of the service.*

A Benchmarking Club was joined and a full set of results has now been received from HouseMark. This information is used to compare our results with similar organisations nationally and set local targets and performance plans.

Customers are asked to complete a repair satisfaction survey when a repair has been ordered. The results from the survey are published to staff in the monthly newsletter and to tenants through the performance posters and to the Tenant Representatives meetings.

16. *Make all information comprehensive and accessible to enable tenants to make more informed decisions.*

Performance information has been available to tenants through a series of posters that are shown monthly in local services shops and Council reception areas from October 2006. Information is also made available to tenants through the quarterly tenant newsletter. The format is agreed with tenants representatives prior to publication.

17. Tenant 'Choice' Schemes are being developed for void works and Capital Works programmes. Working groups have been established and tenants involved in the budget setting process have been included in the 'choice' schemes discussions (the impact of any 'choice' has a budget implication).

Housing Quality Network Assessment

18. Oxford City Homes engaged Housing Quality Network (HQN) to undertake a review of progress since the Housing Inspection. The purpose of the assessment was to identify the gaps that need to be bridged in order for Oxford City Homes to achieve a 2 star status in the next Housing Inspection.

19. The feedback from HQN was received in May 2007 and also indicated where there had been improvements to the service in the last year and indicated where further improvements should be made. The report takes into account the changing performance expectations from the Audit Commission, with the key themes being;

- Understanding the customer
- Tailoring the service
- Leadership

And key changes;

- New questions on corporate culture and governance
- Equality impact assessments
- Increased standards for service user involvement
- Partnerships
- Harassment

(some criteria that were previously 'excellent' are now only 'fair' as a consequence of the revised criteria)

- New legislation on disability discrimination

20. The prospects for improvement are assessed by establishing significant improvements since the inspection in 2005, including progress with Audit Commission Housing Inspection recommendations, and weaknesses for each Key Line of Enquiry (KLOE). The table below shows the KLOE's and how Oxford City Homes are likely to score against them under a formal inspection. Oxford City Homes has been assessed as a 'good' one star service, with promising prospects for improvement.

| Service Areas | 2007 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Access & customer care | ★ |
| Diversity | ★ |
| Stock investment and asset management | ★ |
| Income management | ★★ |
| Estate & tenancy management | ★ |
| Resident involvement | ★ |
| Value for money | ★ |
| OVERALL | A good ★ |
| Prospects for Improvement | Promising |

21. The assessment has identified the following positive aspects;

- A very good repairs service;
- Excellent performance in gas servicing;
- Improved accessibility for customers through the single contact centre;
- BME, diversity and equalities strategies and action plans developed;
- Mapped out Decent Homes plus programme to 2010 and beyond;
- Income management improvements in recovery of rechargeable repairs and former tenant rent arrears;
- Establishment of new Tenant Participation and Involvement structures, with work underway to improve tenant choice;
- Completion and implementation of tenancy services review and programme of tenant visits set for 95% in 2007/2008;
- Planned net savings for 2007/2008 with potential for future years and increased profile of value for money issues.

22. The assessment also highlighted a number of areas where the delivery of services needs to be strengthened including;

- Embedding diversity, cultural and disability awareness across the service;
- Variable quality of performance with responsive and pre-termination inspections;
- Further roll out of the performance information management culture is required;
- Tenants and residents not always involved at the start or early stages of projects and lack of publicity of opportunities available.

- More focus required to meet the Respect Agenda;
- Efficiencies in the provision of the aids and adaptations scheme and discretionary services.

23. The feedback from Housing Quality Network sets out a series of priority recommendations that identify specific areas for improvement that continue and build upon those set out by the Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate. The following recommendations form the basis for the 2007/2008 Housing Revenue Account Improvement Plan that is attached as an appendix.

- Continue to improve customer focus and diversity;
- Strengthen and further develop resident involvement;
- Further increase efficiency and value for money
- Improve service planning and performance management

24. Whilst acknowledging the significant progress made in improving housing services over the previous 18 months the assessment emphasises the need to drive forward these recommendations, employing current good practice, setting challenging BVPI targets for future years and preparing an improvement plan for the whole service that can be translated into team plans.

25. The Improvement Plan effective from July 2007, has been discussed and agreed by officers and customer representatives (tenants and leaseholders).

26. This Housing Revenue Account Improvement Group is made up of officers from the Oxford City Homes Senior Management Team and representatives from CRIMP. The group is responsible for steering and monitoring the progress of the plan, including the allocation of projects to sub working groups and teams. The group will meet monthly and progress will be reported quarterly to Housing Advisory panel and Housing Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation

27. That Members note the progress made against the key targets set out in the Housing Improvement Plan December 2005 and endorse the contents of the Housing Revenue Account Improvement Plan shown in the appendix to this report, as a working framework for Oxford City Homes following the Housing Quality network review

Appendices

Housing Revenue Account Improvement Plan 2007/2008.

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Background papers: HQN Assessment May 2007