

AFFORDABLE HOMES BRIEFING NOTE

To: Scrutiny & Overview Committee

Date: 21 March 2013

SHELTERED HOUSING

March 2013 (6 month review)

Background

- Scrutiny Task & Finish group recommendations accepted by Cabinet 2011
- New structure put in place with effect from August 2012
- Required budget savings achieved

Successes

- Restructuring completed with no failures of service
- Redundancies achieved through voluntary pool
- 3 new staff recruited
- The support team are recording fantastic outcomes from their support to individuals – the main difference is that individuals receive quantity and quality time from their support officer, rather than the hello, how are you approach that was happening when everyone received visits.
- Clearer service charging process now in place and overall reductions for most residents as promised.

Matters still to address

- There have been no substantive complaints about the new service but not having one officer on duty at a scheme will take time for people to adjust to.
- A survey is currently underway to identify what sort of extra services people would be willing to buy in if they had the option. The survey is being carried out with all those who currently have a community alarm with the Council – they are therefore a cross tenure group and not restricted to those living on sheltered schemes.
- The operational hubs in the district are still being established.
- Further work is being undertaken to review the use and potential of the communal rooms.
- The County Council have signalled that the sheltered housing tender process will begin late summer 2013 with a new contract due to commence from 1 Jan 2014.

MEARS – RESPONSIVE REPAIRS CONTRACT

March 2013 (12 month review)

Background

- Mears won contract tender in 2011 and contract went live on 1 April 2012.
- Former DLO staff TUPEd across apart from two who took voluntary redundancy or chose to retire at that point.
- New base at Cottenham and initial transition went very well – no service failures as a result of the handover

Successes

- Most TUPEd staff still with Mears
- Performance stats by November 2012 looking good overall - exceeding targets in all but one area (13 PIs)
- Regular Board meetings managing process (includes members, tenants, Mears and officers).
- Initial problems with invoicing now largely resolved

Matters still to address

- Formal complaints remain low and reported tenants satisfaction remains high (373 (43%) return on jobs completed with over 96% rating service as good or excellent) however there are a number of low level complaints and we are working with Mears to deal with these.
- Specialist audit completed on IT system in Feb 2012 to assist with addressing final IT issues
- Waiting for audit inspection (end of Feb) report – 2nd inspections to identify further improvements to procedures needed. Report likely to focus on establishing agreed way of comparing figures to track performance particularly in regard to voids performance.

NEW BUILD STRATEGY UPDATE

March 2013 (4 month review)

Background

- Council agreed an HRA Business Plan commencing April 2012 which allowed for the establishment of an investment surplus from which to build new homes.
- The Council's New Build Strategy was adopted in November 2012.

Successes

- Since that time we have made good progress in starting to deliver the actions contained within the Strategy:
- First new houses will be built in Linton. There will be 4 one bed houses which will be able to accommodate 2 people (couples). The scheme received full planning permission in January 2013, and detailed scheme drawings are now being drafted. We hope to be able to tender the build contract by the end of March, with a view to starting on site this summer. The scheme will take around 10-12 months to build out subject to the weather.
- We have appointed a firm of legal experts to help us in establishing our development company South Cambs Ltd. They will also provide advice on securing land, procurement issues, planning permissions and the S106 process/obligations.
- We have now reached the final stage of the recruitment process for our design team. The tenders are currently being assessed and those that are shortlisted will be invited to interview within the next couple of weeks. The outcome of this will be known by end of March. The design team will lead on the review of current land holdings by SCDC, to ascertain what can be achieved on any land we currently own, they will also explore other potential site options where we have been offered land. The design team will prepare our in house design specification to ensure that we develop all our homes to exactly the same high standard.

Matters still to address

- The company structure required to meet all of the Councils objectives has not yet been finalised. More work is needed to explore the options and decisions will be brought before Members in the usual way.
- Opportunities for acquiring or developing properties at Northstowe and Waterbeach are being actively pursued.
- Work is also underway to use some of the money to bring back empty homes into use.

VALUE FOR MONEY

March 2013 (12 month review)

Background

- Recommendations of the Scrutiny Task & Finish group were adopted by Cabinet in 2011
- Delivery of the VFM action plan was adopted in the Affordable Homes service plan for 2012/13
- VFM became a key theme of the housing regulator (Homes & Communities Agency) in 2012 and various new good practice guidance reports were published throughout the year.

Successes

- Of the 4 themes listed in the action plan:
 - **Set Targets** – the VFM theme has been used to review asset management performance, and the setting of KPIs during the year.
 - Future target setting for VFM now mainstreamed into the AH processes
 - **Monitor** – close detailed working with Housemark will allow Council to monitor and compare VFM performance against the sector from now on
 - **Manage** – close working between accountancy and housing budget holders during the year to ensure spending is managed and directed to right target areas
 - Future VFM management will be enhanced by monitoring data arising from Housemark
 - **Communications** – VFM work being used in conjunction with development of tenant led scrutiny project
- Good progress has therefore been made across all of the action plan

Matters still to address

- More work now needed to develop a more sophisticated target setting process alongside the work with tenants.
- Further development of the communications activities are required to ensure that the VFM focus is fully embedded in the culture of the department.
- A refresh of the VFM Strategy and a revised action plan is being prepared to address these issues and to take account of recent good practice guidance and regulatory requirements.