

Partnership Review Committee 22 January 2015

Housing Services

Introduction

Partnerships are key to the delivery of housing services both operational and strategic. Examples include:

- The fitting of 2,000 council homes with solar panels in partnership with Savills Solar.
- Homelessness prevention achieved in partnership with King Street Housing and the CAB
- New affordable homes on rural exception sites achieved with Cambridgeshire ACRE and partner housing associations
- Housing fraud intuitive achieved in partnership with Huntingdonshire DC and the Home Office.

Much of the partnership working is overseen by the Cambridge sub Regional Housing Board (CRHB). This group meets once a month and has representatives from all of the Cambridgeshire district council as well as two from west Suffolk. The County Council and partner housing associations are also represented. CRHB acts as the 'parent body' for other groups including Homelink and Cambs HIA.

Each year CRHB agrees an action plan for the forthcoming 12 months which is monitored by the group. A copy of the 2014 action plan is attached for your information. This provides an indication of the type and range of issues engaged with as part of the partnership working within strategic housing.

Homelink partnership – delivering the Council's Choice Based Lettings function

- This partnership has been running since 2008. It is a shared service between all of the five Cambridgeshire local authorities as well as the two West Suffolk councils. Around 30 housing associations are partners in the service.
- The partnership funds a manager and an administrator both posts managed by South Cambridgeshire and based at Cambourne. The Homelink management board is chaired by the Director of Housing at South Cambs.
- Since 2008 Homelink has successfully allocated over 20,700 homes.
- Most customers access the service online (90%) and special arrangements are in place to assist those who cannot do this for whatever reason.
- There are no operational concerns at present but procurement rules require the partnership to re tender for the IT service that underpins the

operation. The current suppliers Locata are likely to bid again and we are anticipating bids from at least two other companies who also provide this service nationwide.

- The procurement process is expected to be completed in March 2015 and if there is a new supplier the 'go live' date for the new contractor will be April 2016.

Mears partnering contract – providing a responsive repairs service to council tenants

- This contract was awarded in 2011 and went live in April 2012. It is a five year contract (up to March 2017) with an option to extend for up to a further five years.
- Mears carry out repairs to the value of around £3m per year making it one of the biggest of the Council's contracts and at the heart of the housing management service.
- Operational performance management of the contract includes a quarterly board meeting which includes elected members, members of the TPG as well as officers.
- A full review for the contract was started during 2014. This includes an in depth examination of the tenant experience being carried out by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel. A report to the Housing Portfolio Holder detailing the findings of this review is scheduled for March 2015.

Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (Cambs HIA) – project manages repairs, improvements and adaptations to enable people of all ages to continue to live independently. Customers are guided to access Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and Home Repairs Assistance discretionary grants or loans from their local council. Home Improvement Agency services vary across the country and can include a range of related services.

- DFG money is provided by central Government (and local authorities also contribute) to pay for necessary disabled adaptations to the homes of people with disabilities. This is a mandatory statutory function. The current local arrangements are to retain one officer responsible for signing off the grant payments. A full description of the Cambs HIA service is available on their website www.cambshia.org
- The Cambs HIA is a shared service which went live in April 2012. It provides the Home Improvement Agency Service as specified in the terms of the partnership agreement for Cambridge City, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire. The staff team of 14 have their main office based at Cambourne, with IT support from Huntingdonshire and managed by Cambridge City (as the lead council in the partnership)

- Cambs HIA provides general advice to members of the public, their family carers or other representatives about ensuring their home is safe and suitable for their needs. People may consider moving as well as works to their current home. They work with private sector and housing association tenants but not council tenants as they have separate arrangements. All DFG cases currently require receipt of a referral from an Occupational Therapist. The team will then help the customer with the DFG application process, project manage the works preparing the schedule of works, obtaining quotes and inspecting the works on completion.
- Grant work to the value of around £3.3 m is carried out each year. In 2013/14 nearly 500 households were assisted.
- The introduction of the shared service has reduced the overall operating costs improved the resilience of the service, and improved the consistency of the service received across the three districts while retaining local discretion on grant policy.
- The Care Act 2014 places new statutory duty upon local authorities to link together the work on social care, health and housing. The Cambs HIA is a good working example of how that duty can be met. Foundations (the National Body for HIAs and Handyperson services) regard CHIA as a model of good practice. For example, Hertfordshire and Warwickshire have been seeking information from us to inform their reviews of their own arrangements.
- Two of the current priorities identified for Cambs HIA are::
 1. To monitor and the length of time it takes from the point of referral to the completion of the works for typical jobs. It is important that people with disabilities do not have to wait unduly for adaptations to their home to be made. The Council funding available each year is, however, cash limited so a service that went too quickly would simply mean that the Council would run out of money and delay help to those that apply later in the year. This performance is monitored through a series of key performance indicators approved by the CHIA Board covering.
 2. To investigate the possibility of East Cambridgeshire District Council joining the partnership. The Housing Portfolio Holder has given permission for a full business case to be prepared and it is anticipated that this will come back for a Cabinet decision around July 2015

Stephen Hills- Director of Housing