

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 20th September 2010

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PORTFOLIO: Neighbourhoods and Renewal - Councillor Swindlehurst

PART I **NON-KEY DECISION**

HOUSING FUTURES - PROVISION OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICES – UPDATE REPORT

1. **Purpose of Report**

This report updates Members of the progress to date in the return of housing management services to direct provision and the winding up of the company, People 1st (Slough) Ltd. It also outlines the next stages and draft timescales anticipated to completion of the project.

2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Cabinet is requested to resolve:

- (a) That the progress to date on the Housing Futures project and in particular the successful transfer of staff and services back to the council on the 1st July 2010 be noted
- (b) That the proposed workstreams to be undertaken in the coming months to achieve the target reintegration date of December 2010 be noted, and
- (c) That the project objectives and restructuring principles outlines within paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6 be endorsed

3. **Community Strategy Priorities**

The provision of good quality, inclusive and efficient housing services are fundamental to delivering the Council's community strategy priorities and as such, ongoing, meaningful consultation with staff, tenants and stakeholders is essential in the design of structures and services that will deliver services to meet identified need.

4. **Other Implications**

(a) **Financial**

There are no financial consequences inherent within this report and the costs associated with the project are being closely monitored by the project board. To date there have been three main expenditure items; the tenant's consultation exercise, external legal advice required for company closedown and TUPE and the

ongoing communication strategy to staff and stakeholders. Some short term resourcing of additional administrative support will be necessary to complete the paperwork associated with the formal restructuring however this can be contained within existing budgets.

It is anticipated that the Housing Revenue Account will be subject to future Government funding cuts. The scale of this is not yet known. The future structure will reduce management and support costs to provide both savings and potentially more investment in front line services. Detailed costings are being prepared as part of the development of future proposals.

The need to continue to reduce future Housing Revenue Account and General Fund budgets will inevitably result in the need for future service realignments.

(b) **Risk Management**

Since initiating the review of housing management service delivery in January of this year, the project has been managed tightly using Prince II principles and documentation. The project board initially met on a fortnightly basis which increased to weekly as the transfer date approached. Post transfer the Board has reviewed its governance arrangements with the core project team meeting weekly but a wider project team including tenant and staff representatives and other specialist staff meeting monthly. This approach has minimised the time spent in meetings and allowed more time to be dedicated to achieving the end result by the agreed deadline. The project board will continue to meet throughout 2010 until such times as the final structure of the returning services has been determined and the staff assimilated into the council structure.

(c) **Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications**

The TUPE transfer of staff is now complete and has not been challenged by individual staff or trades union representatives. The due diligence process of closing down the People 1st company is now all but complete. Face to face meetings have occurred with the Department for Community and Local Government (CLG) Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) the Audit Commission (AC) and the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) to apprise them of the situation in Slough and our proposals for future service delivery to ensure that we remain in accordance with the pseudo-legislative requirements for delivering front line services.

(d) **Race Relations Amendments Act Implications**

The future determination of the delivery method for housing services will be subject to an equalities impact assessment and the results reported to members accordingly.

5. **Supporting Information**

Background

- 5.1 As members will be aware from report to the cabinet in June 2010, the council duly endorsed the decision to accelerate the return to in-house provision of housing management and allied services to end the period of uncertainty for staff and service users alike. Accordingly on the 1st of July at 9:00am the door of Airways House opened for business as the new SBC Housing Service with all the existing

staff continuing to operate in the same roles with the same reporting lines and following the strict message that it was business as usual.

- 5.2 The accelerated transfer was proposed by the project board to not only alleviate the uncertainty for staff of both People 1st and SBC but also to accelerate the change management programme through which existing services will be unified and service delivery improved.
- 5.3 In the six weeks from decision to transfer the project team co-ordinated numerous workstreams each of which was essential to the overall success and seamlessness of the transfer. Such workstreams included changes to all building signage, new ID cards for all People 1st staff, regular updates for staff and elected members, communications with subcontractors and service suppliers, the design of a staff induction session for over 80 staff. This was in addition to the statutory consultation and communication from the council to staff and trade unions regarding the TUPE transfer.
- 5.4 With the transfer now concluded and the holiday period behind us the project team is now concentrating on devising a new structure for the housing service and its indelible linkages with existing SBC housing services. This has been complicated somewhat by the council now preparing to find significant levels of revenue savings over the next three years and rather than bolting one new service to an existing static one, the project team is effectively having to coordinate parallel workstreams as all services become accustomed to operating with reduced budgets and or staffing levels.
- 5.5 While the structure has yet to be fully determined, the project team has endorsed a set of project objectives by which its success can be measured upon completion, these are;
- Improve the overall value for money of providing a housing management service for Slough tenants and leaseholders.
 - Improve customer experience and increase satisfaction levels for tenants, leaseholders and other residents
 - Raise the environmental quality and experience of living on our estates by more effectively joining up and coordinating service provision and achieving consistent standards
 - Develop a new housing function with an operating model that draws from best practice, tenant and staff consultation
 - Maximise resources for community participation whilst responding to and meeting the new TSA national and local standards
 - Maximising resources for dealing with anti-social behaviour issues, ensure more effective co-ordination of cases and complaints, avoiding duplication of effort and achieving value for money
- 5.6 To ensure delivery of those seamless, cost effective services structures will be developed which incorporate the following principles;
- Reduce senior management and overheads to provide value for money and ensure a joined up approach to service delivery. The housing management service will be incorporated into the Assistant Director Housing role for the time being. A key focus will be to respond to moves to achieve cross-council integration of regeneration, customer service and transactional services

- The number of specialist teams which existed within the former People 1st will be reduced with a return to more generic working for housing officers on smaller patches so that they have greater powers and responsibility to resolve issues rather than just pass them on to colleagues. This will remove the confusion and complaints regularly voiced by tenants that they never know who to contact regarding their various issues
- Ensure a more robust and co-ordinated approach to anti-social behaviour issues with more complex cases being escalated to and coordinated by the council wide Community Safety and Anti-Social Behaviour team
- Area patches will be based upon existing neighbourhoods which allow for future evolution of the service should the council chose to move towards an area based approach for service delivery
- Voids and allocation teams will work closely together to reinforce the good work already undertaken in the last 12 months to dramatically reduce property turn round times and maintain the current performance which is top quartile when compared to similar organisations.
- Additional resources dedicated to leaseholder services to respond to their concerns and to ensure bills are dispatched accurately and in a timely manner to recover legitimate expenditure undertaken on their behalf. This team will also provide the management of garage rentals and the high end rent recovery actions with specialist officers dedicated to maximising income to the service.

The proposed future structure will be subject to detailed consultation scheduled to commence in October. However, it is important to highlight that the significant financial savings the Council is required to make will inevitably result in further service realignments in the foreseeable future.

- 5.7 As part of the Housing Futures project the role and function of the Community Participation team is being reviewed. This has highlighted the opportunity to widen this review and the potential to develop a council wide Community Participation team. This is currently being taken forward by a cross service project team. In addition, the role of estate services is under review to identify links with other service areas and contractors.
- 5.8 Proposals relating to the reorganisation of corporate support service staff are also shortly to be the subject of formal consultation. This will include the recently transferred former People 1st support staff who will be integrated into the new service structure.
- 5.9 Of course, establishing appropriate structures for future service delivery is only one element required for the project to be successful. At the same time team members are reviewing all processes and practices in use, primarily in housing management but across the whole housing agenda. The team will be looking to increase the level of automation and computer processing which will help to deliver the promised efficiencies from the investment in the new IT system. We will be learning from best practice employed elsewhere and generally looking to simplify outdated processes and empower staff to make decisions and resolve issues without adding unnecessary bureaucracy
- 5.10 Once policies and procedures have been clarified and the structure finalised, a comprehensive training programme will be rolled out for all staff to give them the tools to operate effectively in the new climate. To this end talks are now progressing with a housing association partner to engage them to provide accredited Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) appropriate to each tier of the

organisation. To enable greater numbers of staff to access this training we are envisaging that it will be delivered 'on site' to avoid the inefficiency of staff travelling outside the borough.

- 5.11 Tenants have continued to be updated with progress through the pages of the monthly Housing newsletter which will continue to be delivered until at least the end of this financial year.. To continue and enhance resident involvement the project board sought a volunteer or nominee from among our tenants to attend the wider project board and to act as a focal point for all future tenant engagement. At the same time the service is beginning to move on the new Tenant Services Authority (TSA) regulatory and empowerment regime. Although the new government has announced the imminent demise of the agency it is clear that tenants are interested in the future management of their homes and estates and that in many cases they have useful input to make. The project team will ensure that this work dovetails with the service design and change management programme that it is about to embark on and use it to ensure that the project delivers successfully against its original aims of creating an efficient, cost effective and comprehensive housing services which meets the needs and expectations of our tenants.

6 Comments of other Committees

- 6.1 This report will be presented to the Neighbourhood and Renewal Scrutiny Panel on the 15th September 2010 and any comments from the panel will be communicated to members.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 This report demonstrates that the project board has sustained the significant work rate associated with this proposal and has now completed the second stage of the process which was to complete the TUPE transfer of staff back to the Council. The project has become increasingly complex now that a new dimension, that of significant council wide budget pressures has been added however with the exacting project management techniques demonstrated to date the project team remains confident that progress can continue in accordance with the original timescales envisaged.

8 Background Papers

None