

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Overview & Scrutiny Committee      **DATE:** 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2010

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**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I** **FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION**

#### **HOUSING FUTURES - PROVISION OF HOUSING SERVICES UPDATE**

##### **1. Purpose of Report**

This report updates Members of the progress to date in developing the new Housing Service by combining the former People 1<sup>st</sup> Housing Management teams with their former SBC strategic housing counterparts and also outlines the next stages and draft timescales anticipated to completion of the project.

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

The Committee is requested to note the progress to date on the Housing Futures project and the proposed workstreams to be undertaken in the coming months to achieve the target go-live date of April 2011

##### **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. The proposed structure, having taken account of the 'Planning for the Future' programme will release staff who have chosen to opt for voluntary redundancy or early retirement and deliver savings to both the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account. The exact level of savings will not be established until the process of recruitment and redeployment have been completed and the costs of any additional compulsory redundancies become known. Members will be aware that at the outset of the project a commitment was given to tenants that any efficiency

savings generated by the return to direct service provision would be reinvested to improve front line services.

#### (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 agreed deadlines. The project board will continue to meet throughout 2010 and into 2011 until such times as the final method of service delivery has been determined and the staff assimilated into the new 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 1<sup>st</sup> company is now complete and was achieved without any significant issues. Face to face meetings were arranged early in the process with the Department for Community and Local Government (CLG) Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) the Audit Commission (AC) and we have now established an ongoing dialogue with the Tenant Services Authority (TSA) to appraise 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 has been subject to Equalities Impact Assessments for both staff and service users and these have been shared with Trade Union representatives.

### **5. Supporting Information**

#### Background

- 5.1 Since the last report in September the scale of transformation within the newly combined Housing Service has increased considerably. While the plans to date had concentrated on restructuring purely the housing management element of housing services following their reintroduction into the Council, the project was subsequently overtaken by the broader council wide initiative; Planning for the Future, in which staff members were asked to consider their future life and work plans. When the expressions of interest submitted by staff were considered there were a number of staff within strategic housing who wished to be considered for early retirement or voluntary redundancy and to

accommodate these wishes and save significant sums for the General Fund budget it was necessary to propose a restructure of strategic housing to run as part of that of housing management .

- 5.2 On October 11th 2010 the formal consultation document was released to all affected staff and their trade union representatives and to assist with the understanding of the proposals four staff briefing sessions were arranged within the first three of the 30 day consultation phase and each of these were followed by a question and answer session through which managers aimed to improve the understanding of the process, to clarify the aims of the restructure and to allay any fears or uncertainty regarding the job matching and redeployment processes. Each of the sessions were facilitated by the Strategic Director of GBE, the Interim Director of Housing Futures and the Assistant Director of Housing and in total were attended by 68 staff, 50% of the 136 who were invited. For staff who were unable to attend the briefing sessions each of the questions raised were answered in writing and added to a list of project FAQ's which were lodged on the Council's intranet.
- 5.3 Following on, all staff who were directly affected by the proposal (at risk of redundancy, prior considered or ring fenced for new posts) were given individual 1-2-1 meetings with the AD Housing and a representative of HR to ensure a full understanding of the process and to provide support and assistance to deal with the understandable level of uncertainty that some staff were experiencing. At the completion of this phase other staff who sought clarification but who were not directly affected by the proposals were also given a dedicated time with the Assistant Director and in total some 32 1-2-1's were undertaken over a three week period.
- 5.4 To complete the consultation options staff were also able to seek clarification by emailing the specific [housingfutures@slough.gov.uk](mailto:housingfutures@slough.gov.uk) email address and in addition to receiving a direct response the questions were then added to the FAQ's list to the benefit of all staff.
- 5.5 As agreed by the Cabinet in September the combined restructuring proposals were established in accordance with the enhanced project objectives which were applicable to all tenures within our community.
- Improve the overall value for money of providing a housing service for Slough residents.
  - 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 The proposed structure incorporated a significant increase in front line housing officers each responsible for the generic management of a patch of around 650 dwellings, a new post of Leasehold Service Manager and a high level intervention team of experienced staff to deal with difficult cases of anti-social behavior and rent arrears.
- 5.7 The formal consultation phase ended on the 9th November 2010 by which time approximately 25 responses had been received from staff. The project board subsequently met to consider each response and on balance felt that a number of suggestions were worthy of inclusion into the proposal or at least of further consideration. Having concluded this process a number of amendments were made to the proposed structure and these were considered sufficiently significant to re-consult with staff for a shorter two week period commencing on the 22nd of November 2010.
- 5.8 This consultation period will close on the 6th December and from that time forward, subject to any significant reservations identified during the consultation, the process of internal and external advertisement of vacant posts will be commenced. The amended proposals do not directly affect all employees and where staff are currently held subject to ring fenced or prior considered competitive interviews, these interviews will proceed at the earliest opportunity to end the period of uncertainty and to offer displaced staff time to consider expressing interests in other vacant posts soon to be filled.
- 5.9 As identified above, one of the key objectives of this project is to deliver a step change in performance and customer care across the whole organisation and to ensure that all appointments both from internal and external recruitment are in the best interests of the Council the Project Board agreed to incorporate an assessment centre into the process. This centre will be externally facilitated and will test all applicants against the council's adopted staff and manager competencies through a number of challenging tasks appropriate to the level of the post within the organisation. Applicants who successfully complete the assessment centre will then be subject to a technical interview with key officers already appointed to the new structure.
- 5.10 Because of the imminent release of proposals for the re-organisation of corporate support service staff the proposals have not yet incorporated the former People 1st support staff. Additionally corporate reviews of Customer Access, Complaints and the Accommodation Strategy which are yet to report mean that some staff are yet to be placed on any emerging structure. In the meantime managers are attempting to minimize the level of uncertainty by continuing an open dialogue with all staff and as more information becomes available these staff will either be assimilated into the Housing Services structure or elsewhere within the Council.

- 5.11 Once the structure has been 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 we are already planning a programme of 'Slough specific' training of NVQ's and Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) accredited qualifications appropriate to each tier of the organisation. This will also enable employees to develop clear career paths strengthening our ability to retain quality staff and also to 'grow our own' starting with school leavers in tandem to the already successful NVQ's in business administration which the council currently offers.
- 5.12 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 and our new proposed structure has been shared with tenants at a series of roadshows over the last two months. As part of the government's localism agenda they are promoting the concept of dual regulation whereby the housing service will be co regulated by elected members and the tenants and leaseholders who use the services.

## **6. Comments of other Committees**

- 6.1 This report will be presented to the Neighbourhood and Renewal Scrutiny Panel on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 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 third stage of the process which was to develop a new integrated structure to deliver future services. The forth stage will now be to fill the structure with competent and motivated staff who will deliver better services more quickly and more efficiently.