

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Neighbourhoods & Renewal **DATE:** 10<sup>th</sup> February 2011  
Scrutiny Panel

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Neil Aves, Assistant Director, Housing  
**(for all enquiries)** (01753) 875527

**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I** **FOR INFORMATION AND CONSIDERATION**

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

##### **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 Panel 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 has 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 otherspecialist 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 Soon after the last report to Panel in December, the second round of staff consultation was completed and as there were no significant responses from staff or trade unions, the proposed structure was formally adopted and the process of populating it with staff was begun. The adopted structure charts are appended to this report at appendix A
- 5.2 The first stage was to hold competitive interviews for staff who were either ring fenced or prior considered for posts in the new structure. To reduce the uncertainty for staff this process was completed by mid December and allowed unsuccessful staff to express interests in the remaining vacant posts which were advertised internally for both Housing staff, staff in other directorates and those already on the redeployment list.
- 5.3 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, while on the strategic housing side management tiers have been reduced in order to maintain existing levels of front line staff.
- 5.4 As agreed by the Cabinet in September the project continues to be governed by the following principles
  - 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
- 5.5 As mentioned in December, 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 recruitment process incorporates an assessment centre which is externally

facilitated and tests 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 are then subject to a technical interview in front of key officers already appointed to the new structure.

5.6 The first task was to appoint interim managers into the Head of Housing Management and Head of Strategic Housing posts in order to oversee the future development and direction of the service. Following the completion of the internal process a further seven applicants had been successful in gaining new posts and this left a remaining 12 posts where external applications were sought through a national advertisement which appeared in Inside Housing on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2011.

5.7 the posts advertised were;

- 3 x Area Housing Managers
- Housing intervention Manager
- Leasehold Services Manager
- 5 x Neighbourhood Housing Officers
- 2 x Tenancy Sustainment Officers

Shortlisting, interview and appointment to these posts is expected to be completed by the end of February but given that any appointees current in employment elsewhere will be required to give two or three months notice it is now apparent that the new structure will not be complete at the point of launch in April. Accordingly officers have worked with colleagues in HR and our partner recruitment agency Pertemps to review over 200 CV's to select suitably qualified and experienced interim staff to ensure that service continuity and the rate of improvement is maintained throughout the transitional period.

5.8 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 a programme of 'Slough specific' training of NVQ's and Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) accredited qualifications appropriate to each tier of the organisation will be established and professional training will be seen to be the norm rather than the exception amongst competent and motivated staff within the new service. 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.

5.9 Tenants and leaseholders have continued to be updated with progress through the pages of the monthly Housing newsletter which will continue

to be delivered throughout the next financial year. At the same time and as explained elsewhere on this agenda, the service is beginning to move on the new Tenant Services Authority (TSA) regulatory and empowerment. 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.

- 5.10 With the completion of the corporate review of office accommodation it was determined that the new Housing Service would relocate in its entirety to The Centre in Farnham Road. The first stage of this was completed on the 17<sup>th</sup> January and the full move of the remaining staff is likely before the end of the financial year. The move will allow both housing management and strategic housing to be co-located as the new service evolves while customer access will continue to be via My Council at Landmark Place.

## **6 Conclusion**

- 6.1 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 fourth stage will now be to fill the structure with competent and motivated staff who will deliver better services more quickly and more efficiently.

## **7 Appendices**

A – Adopted structure charts for the new Housing service