

**Report To: Performance Scrutiny Committee**

**Date of Meeting: 1 May 2014**

**Lead Member / Officer: Councillor Hugh Irving**

**Report Author: Peter McHugh**

**Title: Housing Service Improvement Plan**

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## **1. What is the report about?**

The report details the service improvements made to the Housing Service as a result of the “mock inspection” carried out by the Housing Quality Network in 2011 and outlines the performance management framework which has been established to support the service aim of continuous improvement.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

This report shall enable members to review the progress which has been made in relation to the key weaknesses identified within the “mock inspection” and to comment upon the performance management framework which has been developed.

## **3. What are the Recommendations?**

That the Committee:

- 3.1. Notes the progress which has been made in relation to service improvement
- 3.2. Provides observations and comment upon the performance management framework which has been developed.

## **4. Report details**

### **4.1. Mock Inspection – August 2011**

The Head of Housing was appointed in April 2011 and in July 2011 commissioned a “mock inspection” from the Housing Quality Network to assess performance of the service against established audit commission ratings which ranged from 3 star excellent service (top 25% of performers across the UK) to 0 star performers (bottom 10% of performers).

The inspectors used a variety of tools of techniques to undertake the inspection which included a desk top review, mystery shopping, focus group interviews, 121 meetings with staff, tenants and residents, analysis and assessments of key documents which informed their findings. The findings were then reviewed and moderated by an independent team to ensure they were consistent, rigorous and robust.

The findings from the mock inspection concluded that the service was predominantly a “traditional landlord service”, it was reactive not proactive, weaknesses outweighed strengths and common problems were experienced across all teams.

The inspection identified a number of key areas of concern which included:

- No performance management system was in place
- Lack of confidence in the IT system which resulted in lots of manual or non standardised processes
- No Customer satisfaction data was collected
- No benchmarking was undertaken
- No defined relet standard existed

The Housing Quality Network therefore concluded that the service was a “0” star performer and required significant improvement.

#### 4.2 Service Response to the Mock Inspection

The mock inspection provided a very damning verdict on the performance of the service and was met by a combination of shock, incredulity, anxiety and denial by some managers and staff. Further internal audit reports relating to maintenance and income management services were received which give further cause for concern.

However, the mock inspection was also a catalyst for change and discussions with staff confirmed that most staff members yearned for change and were up for it. Given the scale of the challenge and the fact that every single service area had been assessed as being weak the Head of Housing embarked upon a root and branch review and restructuring programme.

A quality and performance team was established with the stewardship of a newly appointed Quality and Performance Manager who has taken a lead role in developing the performance management framework.

The following services have been restructured to meet the recommendations arising from the mock inspection:

- Senior Management Team
- Housing Management
- Tenant Participation
- Business Support
- Asset Management
- Warden Service
- Housing Strategy

The restructuring of the Homelessness and Housing Options Team is due to be completed in September 2014 which shall bring to a conclusion the major review and restructuring of all the key service areas bar the DLO which shall undergo significant change as a result of the Housing Excellence project.

The changes above have helped to drive forward the service improvement plans and developed a proactive approach to address the other issues and weaknesses identified within mock inspection. Key improvements to date include:

1. Performance management Framework in place (Appendix 1)
2. Excellence Housing IT Project developed to provide modern, fit for purpose IT functionality and facilitate mobile working and repairs diagnostics for the DLO and a Housing based call centre. (Appendix 2)

3. Housing Services benchmark against the All Wales Peer Group (annually and results due in November 2014) and is the only Local Authority in the whole of Wales to undertake quarterly benchmarking against comparable authorities in England. Latest results show that over 40% of Key Performance Indicators are in the top quartile against the All England peer group compared to 0% in 2011. (appendix 3)
4. Relet standard for voids has been agreed with tenants (Appendix 4)
5. Satisfaction data for the DLO repairs service runs 100% for the last repair and satisfaction with the allocation service runs at 77 %, 95% of homeless applicants were satisfied with the accommodation they were provided with and satisfaction with the homelessness service runs at 98%.
6. Homeless service has been identified as the best performing in the whole of Wales and was mentioned as an exemplar of good practice in the Williams Review
7. The service is on track to complete WHQS to all its housing stock in 2014 (one of only 4 authorities to do so) and the 5 year capital investment programme was approved by Cabinet in February 2014.
8. The service fully complies with internal audit report recommendations relating to maintenance and income management

To conclude the Housing Service has undergone a sustained period of transformation and improvement and whilst there is still work to do the service now has firm foundations on which to build and continue its programme of service improvement.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

- 5.1 The provision of good quality housing is a corporate priority with the effective and efficient management of the Housing Service being key to ensuring this objective is achieved for tenants and residents.

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

- 6.1 The costs of service improvement plans are contained within existing budgets and the costs of upgrading the Housing IT Systems and introducing Mobile working (circa £1million) are financed through a combination of budget cuts and future revenue savings as part of a spend to save strategy.
- 6.2 The Housing Service is largely (80%) funded through the Housing Revenue Account which is ring-fenced and supported by a thirty year business plan. The service improvement strategy has had an impact upon other departments most notably Environmental Services which has resulted in Stores being outsourced and the Ground Maintenance programme shall be going out to external tender in 2014/15. Early engagement with other Heads of Service and a full consultation exercise with affected departments has helped to manage and mitigate the impact on other services.

**7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.**

Each of the restructures has been supported by an equality impact assessment and the focus of the service improvement plans has been to place the customer at the heart of what we do which should ensure the service is more sensitive to and more proactive in responding to equalities issues.

**8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

The findings of the mock inspection, proposals for restructuring and improvement plans have been shared with the Tenant Federation.

**9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

The cost of the improvements has been met from efficiency savings and, therefore, within existing resources - either from the Housing Revenue Account or council funded housing budgets.

**10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

The main risk is that performance falls to unacceptable levels. In order to manage and mitigate this risk, strong performance management is undertaken, performance is reviewed by Lead Member at 121s with the Head of Service and the service challenge process is now far more rigorous and robust.

**11. Power to make the Decision**

Article 6.3.3 of the Council's Constitution sets out Scrutiny's powers with respect to policy development and review

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