

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 20 January 2022	Meeting Name: Cabinet Member for Council Housing and Homelessness
Report title:		Homeowners Improvement Plan	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All Wards	
From:		Head of My Southwark Homeowners Service	

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That the contents of this report and the progress made on the homeowners' improvement are noted.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The My Southwark Home Owners Service (MSHO) service was established in late 2016. The purpose of the service is building positive relationships with home owners, advocating on their behalf and driving improvements in service delivery that directly and indirectly impact on home owners.
3. In 2018 Southwark commissioned an independent research company to run a series of focus groups with home owners from Southwark which were held in August 2018. This was followed up in January 2019 when the former MSHO board commissioned the Housing Quality Network to conduct an independent assessment of how Southwark delivers services to home owners. Reviewing the outcomes of both these pieces of work led to a cross departmental home owners improvement board being established in mid-2019.
4. The boards project sponsor is Strategic Director of Housing & Modernisation and the project lead the Head of MySouthwark Home Owners Service. The board was established in 2019 with meetings being held quarterly. However, due to the impact of Covid there were delays in the first half of 2020 which impacted on moving projects forward.
5. The home owners' improvement board has representation from a range of key council service leads from Housing and Modernisation, Environment and Exchequer Services, focusing on working collaboratively to improve services that directly and indirectly impact on the home owners' experience. It is also linked to other projects such as the Great Estates and the refresh of our Asset Management Strategy.

6. The improvement plan is embedded as one of the key priorities in the Housing and Modernisation business plan. It also links in with other key deliverables such as the great estates project and the refresh of the asset management strategy. Benchmarking with other social landlords has demonstrated that Southwarks improvement plan is ambitious and no other social landlord has one in place
7. The plan currently has 48 low, medium and high impact projects covering a broad spectrum of issues. Some of the high impact projects are expected likely to take at least 12 – 24 months to complete.
8. The first board meeting on the 8 of August 2019 agreed that it was improvement to drill down and understand the challenges both staff and home owners faced to inform the plan. We subsequently held focus groups with key internal service leads and then Southwark home owners to ensure the plan captured all concerns. The focus groups identified the following 6 key areas of concern and the projects on the plan have been captured under the following headings:
 - Living environment
 - Day to day repairs and maintenance
 - Major works
 - District heating
 - Service charge billing and collection
 - Communication, Digitalisation, Accessibility & Engagement

IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS

9. Progress reports on progress have been regularly provided to the current and former cabinet members' for housing and we have made steady progress. As of January 2022 progress is as follows:
 - 32 projects have been completed
 - 16 are in progress
 - Total = 48 projects
10. The projects completed to date have been less complex commitments which are set out below:
 - Our cleaning and grounds maintenance cleaning supervisors all now have annual targets that are monitored to make sure they attend estate inspections with residents to monitor the standards on our estates.
 - Based on home owner feedback we have provided information on our home owners' webpage about the support Southwark provides and who to contact regarding rough sleepers.
 - Based on home owner feedback we updated our home owners'

webpage with clearer guidance on when and how Southwark refunds service charge overpayments.

- We held a focus group with home owners who told us that the best way to provide them with the information they need about the responsibilities of the landlord and homeowners was on the home owners' webpage rather than videos.
- We have made sure that now where we are doing any regeneration or major works projects that we include our cleaning and grounds maintenance teams in the selection of materials and finishes to communal areas so that whatever is chosen can be cleaned easily.
- We have a long term project to improve the 'MySouthwark' account moving from Self-Serve to Housing On-Line. One of the key benefits of the project we have achieved is that home owners can now download a PDF service charge statement. We are now working on home owners being able to view their Service Charge Schedules Payments and Debit and Credits on their accounts.
- We have improved workings between Citizens Advice Bureau and Exchequer so that CAB advice is up to date and accurate.
- We have increased the opportunities for all residents to be involved widening the ways they can be involved to improve and increase direct feedback.
- We have implemented a new resident's service involvement structure for homeowners and tenants.
- We benchmarked against a range of external organisations on how they deliver services to home owners to identify how well we deliver services in comparison.
- We incorporated sections in our internal procedures for resident services and asb officers dealing with anti-social behaviour (ASB) on how to deal with breaches of the lease involving home owners.
- Based on home owner feedback we now update the home owners' webpage annually in March when all the funding opportunities are open for applications.
- We created a dedicated webpage called 'How We Manage Our Estates' for all residents covering the following areas that tell you the standards of cleaning and frequency you can expect, how we monitor performance and how to join our estate walkabouts. Residents Services now provide quarterly performance information.
- To improve how Resident Services Officers manage issues facing

home owners we have provided them with access to free external training on a range of management issues relating to home owners.

- We ran two pilot schemes to look at how we could provide improved information on the variances between your estimates and actual service charge invoices you receive. The learning is now feeding into how Southwark will automate the construction of service charges.
- We have provided guidance on the homeowners' webpage regarding Southwark's approach to requests from buyers and sellers for EWS1 forms being requested by mortgage lenders.
- We now offer every prospective right to buy applicant the opportunity to attend a face to face session with a council officer to talk through 'what being a leaseholder involves' so they understand their future obligations and the costs associated with becoming a leaseholder.
- We held a focus group with home owners to seek feedback on what we could improve on the homeowners' webpage and the website in general. The feedback has been provided to the Web team to incorporate into future improvements.
- We have redesigned and simplified our estate cleaning schedules and displayed them on all of our estate noticeboards.
- Asset management have re-organised its commercial team and introduced an in-house estimating section in which now enables feasibility costs to be prepared for individual major works schemes so we assess the most suitable delivery option.
- We held a focus group with homeowners to seek feedback on improvements they would like to see with the service charge invoices they receive and some of those recommendations are being incorporated in future invoices.
- We have reviewed our Pre Assignment Welcome Pack via a one off leaseholder task and finish group and provided additional information that was requested by home owners.
- The officers responsible for the collection of service charges now regularly meet our Citizens Advice Bureau partners who support home owners with issues they can't resolve to work more closely together.
- We have developed information on the average maintenance costs of running a home for perspective purchasers which is now on the homeowners' webpage.

- Resident Services now regularly promote the benefits of home owners participating in estate inspections.
 - We have written a clear policy on who can and cannot disconnect from district heating and provided justification and published this on our website.
 - We have conducted a review and redesign of i.casework includes being able to log complaints by tenure so moving forward we can focus on issues and lessons learnt that directly impact on homeowners.
 - We explored the feasibility of establishing an independent panel or use of an independent expert in high value major works contracts to minimise disputes between the council. Moving forward we will engage external independent experts on high value major works contracts when appropriate.
 - We have reviewed the council's Residents First consultation process through a range of focus groups with home owners and have made this a more inclusive robust process.
 - We have completed a pilot and leaseholders and tenants are now part of the procurement for a range of key contracts.
11. We have a further six projects placed on hold due to current resource capacity and these will be explored at a later date.
12. The homeowners' improvement plan is wide ranging with combination of short, medium and long term projects with some key elements directly benefiting both homeowners and tenants. Please see Appendix A. The following projects are still in progress with the majority due for completion in 2022:
- We are piloting digital noticeboards as part of the Great Estates Scheme evaluating benefits and future use and costs so we provide key real time information to all residents.
 - We are investigating the benefits of piloting mobile phone apps to enable us to see and diagnose repairs more accurately and enable remote post inspections.
 - We are providing a business case on the advantages and disadvantages of allowing leaseholders to install their own windows in street properties through the alterations process with a definitive specification.
 - We are providing options proposal on how Southwark as a landlord can enable 100% leasehold blocks to take control of the major works

programme on their estates.

- We have set up a working group to identify how we can improve the quality of the recording of communal repairs, coding by contact centre and repairs teams who raise repairs to enable accurate real time service charge construction.
- We are investigating the feasibility of a specific contract as a test case/pilot for street properties changing how we package contracts to ensure we get more accurate estimates and value for money.
- We are developing a proposal to allow leaseholders in blocks where all properties have been sold to take on responsibility for all external and communal repairs to the structure and fabric of the building. To include the ability to allow leaseholders in converted street properties to take on responsibility for the repair, maintenance and renewal of their windows.
- We are reviewing Asset Managements end to end process managing major works contracts.
- We are reviewing to ensure we improve, how we manage major works projects guarantees and warranties to avoid invalidating them by raising repairs orders or not undertaking routine maintenance.
- We are working on developing a commitment to be published that where works are covered by defects (patent or latent) or warranty, charges in the event of further works being required are not passed on to home owners.
- We are assessing the feasibility of a single, rolling five year capital programme (preferably within a 30 year asset management programme), identifying all proposed major works to each block/estate, including engineering works.
- We now have quarterly information showing the variance between initial and final major works invoices and are working on how we use the information.
- We are working on how we provide more information on service charges on the council's website. This would include investigating the feasibility of more real-time billing information and making clearer what it required under the terms of the lease.
- We are developing a pilot which will include a budget estimate for major works estimate on the notice of intention.
- We continue as a long term project improving the home owners web page with relevant information with the aim of it being a single

source reference page.

- We are working on identifying what key performance information home owners would like to have published on the homeowners' webpage as currently only MSHO publish their performance information.
13. The improvement plan places great emphasis on the input of homeowners through a range of focus and task and finish groups as well as feedback from the Home owners Forum.
 14. The plan was presented to the inaugural meeting of the new Home owners Forum held on the 17 February 2021 and favourably received. Progress updates have been provided when requested as agenda items.
 15. The plan showing the progress from inception to September 2021 is now a published document available on the homeowners' webpage. It will also be delivered to every leaseholder and freeholder with the service charge estimates by the end of March 2022. See Appendix B.

Policy implications

16. Some of the individual projects embedded in the plan will be presented to cabinet for a policy decision.

Community impact statement

17. A community impact statement is not deemed necessary however this may will be required for any relevant individual policy changes.

Resource implications

18. There are no resource implications currently identified but with reductions in staffing budgets this may impact on individual service areas ability to deliver.

NOTE: Legal/Financial implications

19. Currently there are no legal implications but legal opinion will be sought on any potential policy changes.

Consultation

20. Consultation on the plan has been conducted with the Home Owners Forum.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

21. There is no requirement for supplementary advice.

Director of Communities, Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

22. Not required.

Head of Procurement

23. Not required.

Other officers

24. Comments from other officers at this point in time are not required.

REASONS FOR URGENCY

Legislative requirement

25. Not required.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Title of document(s) Homeowners Improvement Plan	MSHO	Fiona Buist Fiona.buist@southwark.gov.uk

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix A	Homeowners Improvement Plan (HIP)
Appendix B	Condensed HIP

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Michael Scorer, Strategic Director of Housing & Modernisation	
Report Author	Fiona Buist – Head of MySouthwark Homeowners Service	
Version	Final	
Dated	20 January 2022	
Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Director of Communities	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes	Yes
Cabinet Member	Yes	
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	20 January 2022	