

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICES – Appendix 6

Notes of the Stakeholder Forum meeting held at 4.00 p.m. on Monday 22nd July 2002

ATTENDANCE

Chris Brown - Acting Head of Housing Management

Councillor Andy Simmons

Councillor Beverley Bassom

Councillor Michelle Pearce

Ellen Brown – Tenant Council Delegate

Francisca Ubogagu – Tenant Council Deputy

APOLOGIES

Marian Nash – Strategic Project Manager

NOTES

1. Notes of previous meeting held on 25th February 2002 and matters arising

- 1.1 The notes were agreed as an accurate record of the last meeting.
- 1.2 Chris explained that the Project Board have met and discussed all of the options and that attendees have either been briefed on or have had all of the documents.
- 1.3 Chris confirmed that IHMS are still working on the HIC site.
- 1.4 In respect of item 2.4 on the previous minutes it was confirmed that there is no further information available at the present time, the question was raised regarding the Community Development Review and that there has been no update on this. It was pointed out that there is a need for feedback. Chris agreed that he would ask Marian to prepare a briefing update.
- 1.5 Concern was expressed that Leaseholders are not involved in the various groups. Chris confirmed that this should be included as an agenda item for the various group meetings.
- 1.6 Questions were raised regarding the TMO's, clarification was sought as to how they work and the effect that they have on the Neighbourhood Offices, i.e. what they take out of the Neighbourhood offices by way of finance, staffing etc. Chris agreed that he would ask Rachel to feed back to the group members and that he would get a brief done for the Alfred Salter Forum.

Chris also agreed to clarify the position regarding the TMO's and the Best Value Review, what happens with monitoring. There is a need to look closely at the grey areas.

2. Update on Current Position of the Review using Key Issues for Draft Service Vision papers

- 2.1 The Project Board had previously felt that there was not enough on Tenant and Resident consultation and that we had not properly identified the links in the service or how we would facilitate this. As a result further consultation has been undertaken and much more detail has been obtained from information held on previous research. The Project Board now feel that this has filled in the gaps.
- 2.2 The key areas for improvement have been identified and these have been issued to all T&RA Forums, Leaseholders etc for comments.
- 2.3 The Mini Challenge Day looked at the Improvement Plans; those attending made valid and pertinent comments. Rents could see nothing that we aren't doing apart from dealing with possible write off for current debts. On voids we appear not to be doing anything radically wrong, we could improve the way we process pending voids and make better use of the 4 week notice period. Repairs and Maintenance have a comprehensive Improvement Plan but this appears to be too process driven, this is being amended and the final version should be available by the end of August 2002.
- 2.4 The Project Board felt that sufficient work had been done and that we had the direction to go in.
- 2.5 Discussion took place around the following points:
- The question was raised about the new boundaries, these do not necessarily include the areas where people live i.e. the spilt in Bermondsey. Chris pointed out that the Area Forums are corporate and are on a Council wide basis, that they are broadly ward-based geographical areas.
 - It was pointed out the changes will hamper people attending meetings as it is felt that a lot of what would be covered at meetings will take in too wide a section of the community, not everyone who should attend meetings does so anyway. It was pointed out that it would now leave the way open for a much wider group of attendees.
 - The whole question of Area or Community Councils is still to go to the Scrutiny Panel, at which point they will look at the logic and whether or not the changes will be meaningful.
- 2.6 The Project Board favour Option 4, there might be a need to revise the Neighbourhood Boundaries but we must also look at how we provide the Housing Management Service. No decision has yet been taken but it is felt that this would be the best option.

It was also confirmed that some area offices will probably still need to retain a more localised provision for service delivery.

Chris confirmed that there would be a Challenge Event arranged once the Draft Vision is finalised

- 2.7 There will be a need to address all of the inconsistencies and differences that have come from the review so far, we will need to look closely at this to drive up our performance and to reach the top 25% of London Boroughs.
- 2.8 The general feeling amongst those attending today's meeting felt that the Area or Community Councils based on the Ward boundaries would not necessarily work. Given the fact of the investment needed and the investment gap, the group understood

the logic of building in the potential to go down the ALMO route but not without tenants positively wanting this.

- 2.9 The point was made that we cannot have consistency at any price, that 6 or 7 cores may make sense at the moment but we will need to look into the future:
- The Housing Strategy has to be developed by March 2003
 - Housing Management is a very difficult area to be reviewed

- 2.10 The question was asked as to what benefit there has been from the existing Area Forums, the proposals always sound nice, but can they be worked:
- Concern was expressed at the distance that people may have to travel to reach their local offices
 - Computer access or digital systems would have training implications
 - There is a need to make sure that everyone will benefit from the changes
 - Tenants and Residents will be consulted on any proposed call centre
 - There is a need to consider local communities with the boundaries

Chris pointed out that the Area or Community Council boundaries will be the final decision of the Executive after review by the Scrutiny Panel.

- 2.11 There were issues raised around the structure – Cllr Simmons said that
- He feels that Option 4 needs extra work
 - That tenants may feel that they have not been considered
 - Feels we need to step back and look further
 - There is probably a need for an Area Office with other offices if that is what people want
 - Need to look closely at the pros and cons
 - There could be tension with ALMO's and Area Community Councils, ALMO's may not be viable if there is no regeneration i.e. Livesey has an interesting stock, how would regeneration work in this area
 - Need to get stock up to standard – a viable option needs to be thought about
 - One of the first things taken on board must be to improve Tenant & Resident involvement
 - Before we get to any ALMO situation we need to prove that we can deliver an improved service
 - There is a need to improve efficiency to get Best Value
 - The question was asked that if we centralised will staffing be different
 - There is a need to move on Leasehold Management
 - Look at the way we deliver the financial services
 - In respect of Contracts – it is madness in trying to deal with this in 16 Neighbourhoods (there is a need to have centralised resources or to be in smaller office units – with cover for staff absences)

- 2.12 Tenant and Resident Involvement is the subject of a separate review, however, Housing Management is still involved in this and we will need to take account of the functions we undertake, this would definitely be easier to manage in 7 areas. The issues relating to this need to take on board what they are meeting and not necessarily to be 'basic' – the Terms of Reference have been drawn up.

- 2.13 There is a need to look at office locations and whether or not they are in the right locations to serve the properties that they cover.

2.14 There is a need for finance to be dealt with divisionally, Chris confirmed that Neighbourhood Managers have learnt to manage their budgets and the need to project for the full year.

2.15 The following issues were raised around the Service Provider Option:

- The internal culture from both staff and residents appears to be for the service to remain in house, the meeting agreed that in the whole they would agree with this.
- In the boroughs where outsourcing has happened they have brought in new managers, LBS have improved Senior Management, but there are still gaps in the Middle Management (this is across the Council not just Housing)
- There is a difference in the services provided – would like to see better data /evidence where it is felt outsourcing has not really improved services
- The process of change with offices should help to mould an improved service – if after a year no improvement had been identified then we could well be forced to look at a change in the service provider
- More satisfaction data from Neighbourhood Housing Offices is needed
- There is a need to link in performance management for staff who are considered not to be performing
- We should not be relying on the strongest tenants/staff in the strongest offices
- The question of shoddy workmanship was raised, it was pointed out that this should be dealt with under the liability clause of the contract
- There is a need to change front line staff to have a more customer-orientated culture.

2.16 The following areas were also discussed:

- Some of the central areas which need to be looked at include: Legal Services who appear to give little support,
 - housing staff could take on their own legal work,
 - there would need to be a strategy to do this
 - how would this be monitored (SASBU have already set this up)
 - Leasehold Management are about to set up a system to deal with legal actions and this is already up and running in 2 Neighbourhood Offices
 - We would need to clarify exactly what legal work would need to carry on dealing with
- There is a need to look at recruitment, retention and performance management:
 - How do we get and retain good staff
 - There is a need to get rid of non performing staff
 - Too many temporary staff on the front desks
 - Do we use staff properly
 - Do we value staff
- It is felt that all of these areas need to be linked into the improvement plans

2.17 Chris agreed that the Mini Challenge Day documents should go out to all members of the Stakeholder Panel.

3. Timetable for the Review

3.1 Chris explained the timetable for the review

4. Any other Business

4.1 There was none

5. Date of next Meeting

Monday 23rd September 2002 at Basement Conference Room C, Larcom Street starting at 4.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.