

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Appendix 8

Notes of the Stakeholder Forum meeting held at 4.00 p.m. on Monday 23rd September 2002

ATTENDANCE

Marian Nash – Strategic Project Manager
Councillor Andy Simmons
Councillor Michelle Pearce
Francisca Ubogagu – Tenant Council Deputy
Sue Plain – TU Representative

APOLOGIES

Chris Brown - Acting Head of Housing Management
Councillor Beverley Bassom
Cllr Eckersley
Gary Glover – Tenant Representative
Ellen Brown – Tenant Council Delegate
April Ashley – TU Representative

NOTES

1. Notes of previous meeting held on 22nd July 2002 and matters arising

- 1.1 The notes were agreed as an accurate record of the last meeting.
- 1.2 Marian confirmed that Leaseholder Council Representatives have been nominated for all of the consultative groups.
- 1.3 Marian advised the meeting that TMO's are to be a part of the Strategy and Regeneration Division Review, concern has been expressed that TMO's seem to suffer with poor rent collection rates and void turnaround times. The question was asked as to the TMO's role in Best Value. Marian explained that this is part of Rachel Sharpe's remit. The following comments were made in respect of the TMO Organisations:
 - ❖ It was further confirmed that rent collection from the TMO's is not monitored as part of the BVPI's
 - ❖ Southwark have joined a benchmarking group with Westminster
 - ❖ A Best Value Review of TMO's will be carried out in years 4/5 and will form part of the Regeneration Review
 - ❖ Each TMO pays 98% of rent collection back, this is to ensure that they are granted their full allowances
 - ❖ TMO's have their own forum type committeesMarian said that she feels that there is an urgent need for TMO's to be the subject of a separate review and that this definitely not part of the Housing Management Review.

It was felt that the Final Vision Document needs a paragraph to explain why the TMO's have been excluded.

- 1.4 Marian gave feedback on the Challenge Day Event which took place on 19th September, this was attended by Assistant Directors of Housing from Camden,

Islington and Wandsworth, Cllrs Bassom and Zuleta, the Chief Executive from Hexagon Housing Association and a Leaseholder Representative. The question was asked as to how the attendees were selected, Marian explained that this was agreed by the Project Board. The notes from this meeting will be distributed.

It was generally felt by the attendees that:

- ❖ The review had been thorough.
- ❖ There was some discussion regarding the competition element Islington felt that by tendering out one area that it would bring other dimensions as opposed to keeping everything in-house.
- ❖ Outsourcing has brought a lot of improvement on Customer Focus to Islington.
- ❖ Wandsworth tendered all services out but have since taken them back in-house
- ❖ Camden operate much the same as LBS and they have no plans to outsource
- ❖ There was wide spread support for the reduction of Neighbourhood Housing Offices, all 3 of the authorities attending felt that we should be looking at 3/6 Area Offices. It was suggested that we look at this to control consistency better
- ❖ There was no suggestion as to the number of properties that should be managed in the larger Area Offices but to change would improve performance and services:
 - ◆ Increase performance
 - ◆ Offices working similarly
 - ◆ Customer Care better and managed well

- 1.5 The question was asked as to whether or not there is currently any clear idea of how many offices we propose to have, Marian advised that this is being worked on at present and any recommendations made will be based on what is best for Housing Management and not necessarily the Councils future proposals for governance.

2. Draft Service - discussion

- 2.1 The review gives the general direction of here the service wants to go, but the next stage i.e. Implementation will provide the detail.
- 2.2 Sue raised the point that Unison are opposed to both centralisation and a call centre and the thought of a call centre is particularly scary.
 - ◆ Concern was expressed regarding additional money being spent on setting up a call centre and that we would still need back up measures.
- 2.3 It was raised that the latter half of 2.16 in the Draft Vision – consistency will need to be looked at from the top down, i.e. HQ Housing Management and Neighbourhood Managers. The following areas will also need to be looked at:
 - ◆ Training and Terms and Conditions
 - ◆ Not enough of the relevant training
 - ◆ There is a general lack of investment in staff
- 2.4 Marian pointed out that the whole question of staffing i.e. job types, etc will form part of the Implementation Plan.
- 2.5 The question of the poor response times for answering telephones was raised - what proposals are there for improving this.
- 2.6 It was felt that if HR were to be centralised that this would lessen the problems experienced with recruitment and the lack of formalised training within offices.

- ◆ There was also is need to revise the very out of date job descriptions that staff are working to and recruited by
- ◆ Recruitment could be more effect and staff appointed on competencies and skills relevant to the post – i.e. more specialised and higher paid front line staff

2.7 Marian pointed out that initially the call centre will only be for the repairs Service. Concern was expressed that:

- ◆ there needs to be decent involvement and engagement - it was suggested that the original idea was for a coach party of tenants and residents were taken to see various call centres so that they had first hand experience
- ◆ a call centre could suffer from a lack of expertise
- ◆ on any call centre we would be looking for a satisfaction rate of 98%
- ◆ there is a need to look further at those authorities who are considered to be good call centre service providers
- ◆ a favourable point was that customers would have to be given the correct information and priority details for the job being raised.

2.8 It was also felt that staff employed need to be more customer focused and that whilst training is needed to put the point over as to ow Southwark treat their customers there appears to be too much emphasis on Customer Focus Training – some people will never change however much you train them.

2.9 Marian pointed out that the Review is a Vision and does not give all the answers at this stage. The outcomes of the review are believed to be the best chance of achieving where Housing Management needs to be in 5 years time.

2.10 It was stated that even if we were to stay as 16 Neighbourhood Offices we would need to ensure that the office managers are strong and provide the correct type of leadership:

- ◆ Unison said that they are not just defending post but want to see an improved service
- ◆ More support for job share and work life balance

2.11 It was also felt that if staff cannot perform that we should use the capability procedures, some of the pitfalls to this were pointed out i.e. time consuming, often staff perform middle of the road and this would preclude action from being taken.

2.12 It was also generally felt that the Performance Management Scheme is not on an equal footing – what happens when 100% of staff perform well, increments are awarded in line with budgets and not everyone can be rewarded, this in its self is demotivating.

2.13 In response to some of the staffing issues raised by Sue Plain Marian made the following points:

- ◆ Job content and expectations are different now to 10/12 years ago
- ◆ We are too old fashioned and need to look at services from a modern point of view
- ◆ The idea is not necessarily to downgrade staff but to reflect what we want from a modern service on which we perform and consider the customers
- ◆ We need to shape and remotivate staff

2.14 It was felt that appendix K does not give sufficient detail on the vision for the staff.

- 2.15 Marian advised that whoever does the Implementation that she will suggest that the various consultation groups who currently meet continue to do so throughout the process.
- 2.16 There will be further staff briefings once the Draft Vision has been approved by the Executive Panel.
- 2.17 The issues relating to problems with contractors is not highlighted enough in the draft vision. It was felt that very often staff perform but that they are let down by the contractors, there is a need for contractors and sub contractors to be monitored more vigorously. Marian pointed out that the Egan Partnership should lead to a much improved service.
- 2.18 Marian advised that the Council wide CPA shows the need to address our communication systems. There are problems with new technology and the infrastructure i.e. network. In the authorities who are performing well there is no difference in the software that they use.
- 2.19 Marian extended her apologies to the Ward Councillors for not inviting them to the Group Forum Meetings, Marian explained however that the Group Forum Meetings had been abandoned due to comments at Tenants Council and the fact that only 4 residents attended the Bournemouth Road meeting. The presentation of the Draft Vision will now be made at Neighbourhood Forums.
- 2.20 It was suggested that these plans were leading to the abolition of Neighbourhood Forums, Marian assured delegates that this was not the case but they may need to be renamed/restructured.

3. Update on the Community Development Review

- 3.1 Marian handed out a briefing paper. Comments made include:
- ◆ Meetings need a more focused theme of items of interest to the local Community
 - ◆ The Community Development Officer needs to be able to respond to general issues raised
 - ◆ More publicity is needed
 - ◆ We need to get the right people attending the meetings
 - ◆ There needs to be better feedback and minutes
 - ◆ An action plan is needed
- It was pointed out that someone is needed to do this type of work and that it should not be left to the tenants and residents – there should be paid facilitators, i.e.
- Could organise group functions such as bar-b-ques and fun events on the estates
 - Need to get away from the distribution of leaflets and posters
 - We need to re-organise to take account of the needs of those who do not necessarily want to get involved or be engaged
 - We cannot afford to get fixated on getting everyone involved or to participate.
 - We need to be more imaginative and perhaps pay people to become involved if need be.
 - There is a need to look at the frequency of meetings do they need to be monthly, quarterly or even yearly.
 - It is considered that most meetings are talking shops with not a lot of action
 - Could be some resentment that staff get paid to attend meetings whereas there is no financial compensation for tenants who attend many meetings.

4. Any other Business

4.1 There was none

5. Date of next Meeting

Monday 21st October 2002 at Basement Conference Room C, Larcom Street starting at 4.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.