

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

Housing & Health Committee – 21 May 2008

THE HOUSING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

Report by Executive Director (Housing & Community Care)

ABSTRACT

This report provides details on the progress made by the Housing Service in meeting the challenges and milestones contained within the Improvement Plan approved by Communities Scotland in December 2007.

1. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Committee notes:

- (i) The improvements in service delivery to date, and the further improvements which have been planned.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Housing Service Improvement Plan was agreed by the Housing and Health Committee on 6 June 2007 (Report No 07/376). Following its submission to Communities Scotland in September 2007, it was approved by them in December 2007.

2.2 Since June, significant improvements have been made within the Housing Service. The Improvement Plan has proved to be a useful tool in monitoring our progress against agreed targets and priorities.

Our operational strategy has been to:

- Focus on those service improvements which required immediate attention – such as improving conditions in Greyfriars hostel
- Develop individual project boards to progress areas where processes and IT systems require reworking
- Continue to roll out service improvements which were underway at the time of Inspection
- Develop a performance management framework which supports the improvement action plan and which drives forward the cultural change needed to support our vision for the service
- Undertake staff training and development to ensure staff are confident in delivering the full agenda for the Housing Service.

3. PROGRESS MADE TO DATE

3.1 Current Position

It has been important to develop our improvement plan inline with the Council's overall corporate objectives and within timescales we are capable of achieving.

Moreover, there are a number of recommendations made by Communities Scotland which currently do not fit with our strategic thinking and where specific changes in policy will be required to achieve our required outcomes – for example, the housing allocations policy, and our strategic approach to managing temporary accommodation.

3.2 In Housing Management

- The Member Officer Working Group is undertaking a full review of our housing allocations policy. This work has focussed on two key areas – developing a holistic framework for allocating our houses, and in establishing clear definitions of our vulnerability criteria
- We closely monitor the number of homes allocated to homeless applicants and to those in other priority need groups – in 2007/08, 58% of all allocations were let to homeless applicants, with the remainder allocated mainly to those in overcrowded living conditions or where there was a medical requirement for different type of accommodation
- Area Improvement Plans are in place and we have established an Estate Management Group with tenant involvement to determine and monitor agreed environmental standards for each of our estates. As part of this improvement, we undertook a benchmarking exercise with other local authorities via the Best Value Network which is helping us develop our approach to estate management.
- We are working closely with the Environment Service and with Community & Cultural Services to develop a coordinated approach to estate and environmental management, including community capacity building.
- The Junior Community Wardens Scheme has been successful and we are expanding the Community Warden Service to Rattray and Muirton.

3.3 In Property Management

- We have reviewed all our literature in relation to Right to Repair and we are fully compliant with our statutory duties in this area.
- We are publicly reporting on our gas safety performance, but are aware that further work is required to streamline our recording of gas servicing.
- We have put in place independent gas quality assurance processes and are working to develop in-house capacity to complement this.
- We have successfully rolled out the Area Response Teams across the district to deliver repairs by appointment for all non emergency or high cost repairs within 5 days. Since April 2007, performance has ranged between 97.7-99.3% within target, with customer satisfaction reported as 95-100% over the same period.

3.4 **In Homelessness** we have made significant improvements to service delivery. Whilst we do acknowledge that many improvements will take time and will require the support of other Council services and that of external service providers, we are confident that our approach to the prevention, management and alleviation of homelessness is robust.

The most significant changes in service delivery to date have been:

Greyfriars Hostel

The previous service offered at Greyfriars was that of a traditional direct access hostel with no on-site support services.

Our review of Greyfriars has refocused our attention on support and sustainability and it is within this context that the service has been redeveloped and improved.

- Full internal refurbishment of the building including new kitchens, new laundry facilities, upgraded common room, full redecoration, new furniture and soft furnishings, upgraded CCTV, restructured office accommodation and interview facilities, established clear external boundaries for the hostel by installing remote controlled gates to the front of the building.
- We have established a programme of planned maintenance to ensure the investment is secured and that it is financially supported through appropriate application of the Hostel Support Grant, Supporting People funding, Community Care contributions, and through maximising our income through rent and service charge recovery.
- The most recent fire inspection was carried out in January and the report states that no additional work is required

In terms of management and staffing,

- We have appointed a full management team for the hostel which delivers accommodation and support services 24/7
- We have appointed two Social workers – who are based in the hostel - with particular specialisms in mental health and substance misuse to complement the personalised support services we are delivering

The refurbishment of the hostel together with the establishment of this comprehensive support team has had an immediate effect on the morale and satisfaction of staff and residents.

We have established regular staff and resident meetings which are leading on the development of a customer charter, service standards and resident satisfaction monitoring. At the most recent meeting in December, residents and staff reflected on the changes to Greyfriars and the impact they have had. Comments and feedback include:

“All the staff here are brilliant, very approachable and willing to help”

“God knows where I’d be if it wasn’t for the hostel staff”

“I am now in my own place thanks to Greyfriars”

“Greyfriars is very different from the other times I have been in. This time I feel safe and supported. I get help with any problems I’ve got....I’m getting on with things”

“I’d been in Greyfriars lots of times in the past. I didn’t get any help. I hated the place. Now I’m in a flat (4 months) and I’m doing really well”

“I’ve been in here loads of times before but it’s changed so much... it’s clean and nice to be in. I’ve got help and support to sort out my problems... when I’m ready”

“What a difference in here – you used to let left without any support”

“I have been in Greyfriars in the past and cannot believe how it has changed for the better”

“I’ve been in here a few times before, but due to my past drinking I can’t remember a lot about it... it was easier to cope with being here if I was “out of it”. Since I’ve been in here this time, I feel safe, the place is clean and nicely decorated so I feel motivated to make changes. Having support and encouragement from staff made it easier to keep going. I lost my tenancy last time... but now I’ve been offered a flat again, I know I’ll manage to keep it this time. I know I won’t be back (I mean that in the nicest possible way)”

We are committed to establishing a Management Committee for Greyfriars which will be multi-agency and oversee governance, good practise and performance standards.

3.5 **Review of the management of temporary accommodation**

- We have established a property management function within the Homelessness service to ensure that we deliver an efficient temporary accommodation service which is financially monitored and which maximises access to our temporary accommodation pool. In addition, it has begun to monitor standards in Bed and Breakfast provision and weekly visits are made to all establishments we use.
- We have developed a pilot private sector leasing scheme which we launched at the Private Sector Landlord Forum at the beginning of this month. It is our intention in the first instance to negotiate long term leases for specific properties to support our existing pool of temporary accommodation and to develop a pool of properties which can be occupied as settled accommodation - an emerging new definition of accommodation which recognises the difficulties some local authorities are experiencing in meeting their statutory duties in terms of homeless legislation. To date we have entered into leases for 3 properties with a further eight to be leased in the next month

- Service improvements in terms of streamlining homelessness assessments, decision-making processes and in developing a robust performance management framework are to a large extent process driven and between October – December 2007 we undertook a scoping exercise to evaluate the work we require to progress this. This exercise has produced clear guidance and we now need to move forward in process and IT system redesign. We have established a Project Management Team which reports into the Northgate IT Project Board. A Business Improvement Team event took place between 12 and 14 February 2008. From that the project parameters were identified.

It is clear that much remains to be done, but the enthusiasm of staff for service improvements cannot be overestimated. There is a huge commitment to delivering high quality services for our customers and staff are confident that the support is in place to ensure that this happens.

3.6 In more general terms, the improvement plan contains service wide issues which required attention.

- In relation to equalities we have commissioned a training programme to ensure appropriate staff are aware of the need to undertake equalities impact assessments in all service developments
- Across Housing and Community Care we are developing a performance management framework which accurately reflects our service delivery and which provides managers with the information they require to make improvements and changes

We have recognised that communication between the various parts of the service can be improved. We have established fortnightly Housing Management Team meetings and regular meetings with staff groups with service managers from across the service. We have held two 'How Good is your Service Days?' for all managers within the Housing Service and have specific actions managers and team leaders at all levels have been tasked with taking forward. We are developing our IT capacity through Northgate to open up access to shared information for all staff.

3.7 **Future Improvements**

In Housing Management

- The Member Officer Working Group for housing allocations intends to report its recommendations to Committee in the autumn
- We are developing the Housing Options & Advice assessment tool within the Northgate System and are delivering training to all relevant staff
- We are developing an Estate Management Financial Plan which will involve devolved budget management

In Property Management

- We are progressing well with the integration of Building Services to the Housing Repairs Service

- We are holding a business improvement team event to agree the changes in work processes which are required to ensure improvement in our performance in relation to empty homes management. Whilst we have reduced the rent loss due to voids in 2007/08 there are other efficiencies we can make to further improve the service
- We are undertaking a Kaizen – blitz in June in relation to the Housing Repairs Service.

In Homelessness

- In relation to Bed & Breakfast we have received a number of expressions of interest for establishments which wish to register with us as approved providers and to contract with the Council to deliver dedicated services to our client group with enhanced access to services and support
- We have secured accommodation for vulnerable families which will be operational in Autumn 08
- We are continuing with the improvements in assessment, temporary accommodation management, support and resettlement
- We are developing a detailed performance management framework for homelessness

4. CONSULTATION

We have consulted with the Tenants and Residents Federation in the production of this report.

We are committed to involving tenants and customers at all levels in implementing our improvement plan and are seeking to formalise review processes within that consultation framework.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The cost of achieving the service improvements contained within the Improvement plan are contained within the Housing Service budget for 2008-09.

6. COUNCIL CORPORATE PLAN OBJECTIVES 2006-2010

The Improvement Plan and this progress report seeks to address one of the key Corporate priorities – the prevention, alleviation and management of homelessness

In addition, it meets objectives in terms of

Community Safety –working towards creating safer communities in Perth and Kinross

Housing supply and quality – improving the standard and choice of housing opportunities in Perth and Kinross to support sustainable communities.

7. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

The Council's Corporate Equalities Assessment Framework requires an assessment of functions, policies, procedures or strategies in relation to race, gender and disability and other relevant equality categories. This supports the Council's legal requirement to comply with the duty to assess and consult on relevant new policies to ensure there is no adverse impact on any community group or employees.

The function, policy, procedure or strategy presented in this report was considered under the Corporate Equalities Assessment Framework and assessed in relation to the Race/Disability/Gender Equalities Assessment. Consequently the following points were identified and actions –

- Will support socially excluded groups into appropriate accommodation options. Homeless households and individuals are particularly vulnerable in terms of equal access to services and many of our service users are further disadvantaged by dint of disability, age and gender

8. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a legal requirement under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 that applies to all plans, programmes and strategies, including policies (PPS).

The plan, programme or strategy presented in this report was considered under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 and the following points were identified –

- Our improvement plan in relation to the repairs and maintenance of our housing stock requires an environmental assessment in relation to procurement, usage of materials and disposal of waste

9. CONCLUSION

This report details the progress made to date in terms of improving Housing services in the context of the approved Improvement Plan.

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Dave Roberts
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Note: No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

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