

KEY ISSUES HOUSING SERVICE:

Key elements of the Service:

The service covers the council's housing functions, across all sectors (c100,000 private and public sector units), the main ones being:

- The Housing Strategy and associated functions, integrating policies and programmes related to the council's private and public sector related powers and duties.
- The landlord functions associated with the council's own housing stock.
 - *Currently c16,500 rented accommodation units, including c1,400 Sheltered and Good Neighbour schemes for the elderly, and a further c4,500 leasehold properties within its housing estates.*
- Technical Construction and Repairs Services related to the council stock, and, to some limited extent, certain other aspects of the council's corporate buildings.
- The Housing Needs related statutory functions of the council, including the use of Temporary Accommodation and housing allocations procedures across tenures and sectors.
 - *Currently there are c14,500 households in the council's housing register and c5,500 in various forms of Temporary Accommodation (one of the highest in London).*
- The council's functions related to the private sector housing conditions and provision, including support and regulation measures in relation to the private rented sector, housing standards in older private sector housing and regeneration of older residential areas.
 - *Currently an estimated 12-13,000 small private landlords operating in the borough, providing housing for c20% of the borough's population (substantially higher than the London average)*
- Liaison with the local Housing Associations sector, through an Enabling specialist Team.
 - *Currently c50 RSLs active in the borough, managing c12,500 units of social housing and a number of leased private properties, and involved in the development of new housing units (a target of c1,000 new units of social and affordable housing over the next two year period, involving c£85m of Housing Corporation grants over a two year period, one of the highest in London).*

Recent Key events:

- The Service has gone through a massive transformation over the last 3 years, including a series of fundamental reorganisations of the human resources devoted to it.
- *Most of these re-organisations have now been completed and consolidated, with a few still at their final stages.*
- A strategic decision was taken by the council some 3 years ago to separate the day-to-day management of the council's housing stock and condition from the other aspects of the service and, after securing the users backing, to set up an Arms Length Organisation to run on behalf of the council the key landlord, technical and associated functions.

The approach was deemed necessary in order to enable the council to access additional government funds towards bringing all its stock up to a high standard.

- *It is estimated that in order to achieve full Decent Homes Standard across the whole stock and other essential communal improvements in the council's estates, the council needed to find c£300m of Capital resources in the next 5 years. The estimates indicated that the council would need an extra c£160-220m over the period (in addition to the "standard" resources that it would otherwise be able to access) in order to achieve the DHS target.*
- The ALMO was formally launched in 2006 and has now been well established, as a fully owned subsidiary of the authority, with its own independent board (comprising Tenants and Leaseholders representatives, independent experts and council nominees) and has met until now its key targets and milestones.
- *Key examples are improvements to the quality of the service to the point of achieving for the first time a 2 stars rating from the Audit Commission and carrying out a range of VFM reviews and market testing of key aspects of its operations and contracts with 3rd parties.*
- All the other housing services were grouped together in a new Strategy & Needs division, which was initially placed on an interim basis within the then Social Services Directorate, pending a corporate re-organisation of the council's structures.
- *Following the appointment of the previous Director of Housing to the new post of Chief Executive of the ALMO (in mid 2006) and the departure of the previous Assistant Director (late 2006) and pending the corporate restructuring, the service has been managed through temporary external appointments on an interim basis, driving through some of the necessary reorganisations.*
- More recently the council established a new Urban Environment Directorate with a new Director (early 2007) and the Housing Service, was transferred into the new directorate, under a new post of Asst Director (Strategic & Community Housing Services) established and recruited to (with a starting date this October).
A further recent development is the establishment of an integrated Private Sector Housing section within the new housing division, bringing together for the first time the various related functions previously divided between the Housing and the Enforcement divisions, with a new Head (starting this month).

KEY ISSUES & CHALLENGES FOR NEXT YEAR:

(A) STRATEGIC & COMMUNITY HOUSING:

1) Consolidation of new structures and initiatives:

- The service has inevitably suffered from the disruptions and uncertainties of c. two years of fundamental reorganisations and more than a year of interim management arrangements, (this is the first time during this period that it has a clear structure and a full management team in place).
- However, despite these factors the service has during this challenging period delivered a range of fundamental changes and new initiatives that were necessary, including a complete review and recasting of the Housing Register, the establishment of the Prevention & Options Service, a revised Allocations Policy and procedures, joining and consolidating locally the Homes Connections Choice Based Lettings service, the establishment of a Partnering arrangement with 6 key RSLs and a new Integrated Housing Board (under the HSP), the establishment of a new “client” function for the ALMO, a review of Temporary Accommodation provision, an expansion of the Domestic Violence service and the Vulnerable Adults partnership, and jointly with Adults Services recasting the previously struggling Aids & Adaptation Service and reviewing the Supporting people programme, amongst other things (eg establishing a fuel Poverty post and achieving some notable results in terms of Thermal Efficiency, introducing a new CPO policy towards prominent empty private houses and so on).
- *Consolidating all these changes, embedding the new structures, completing ongoing reviews and generally ironing out remaining details is a key challenge for this service over the next year. All the changes have been based on sound analyses of good practice, creating for the first time a service structure and approach that is designed to meet the future challenges, but the service is still in a transitional state, requiring continuing effort to ensure that they are completed, embedded and perfected.*

2) Re-innigoring certain areas that had fallen behind:

- Inevitably, during this period a number of areas (some of which were comparatively well developed in the past) have fallen behind and required re-innigoring. The main examples are around the private sector improvement grants, regeneration/group repairs schemes and landlords forum/accreditation initiatives (which had slowed down and are now being recast), some personnel related issues (eg an increase of temporary staff during the restructuring periods, the need to systematise staff development and training programmes following the new arrangements and so on).
- The work on all these areas has already started (eg Landlords Forum successfully re-launched, bids for the necessary capital resources prepared, a determined programme of replacing temporary with permanent staff well on its way and so on) and the establishment of the new integrated Private Sector Housing Unit will further facilitate this process.
- *Bringing both personnel and private sector housing related initiatives back into cutting edge standards is a key challenge for the service over the next year.*

3) Temporary Accommodation Targets:

- The government has set a target for Local Authorities to reduce their TA numbers by 50% by 2010, (in our case c2,700, from a high last year of c5,900).

- This is an extremely challenging target for us (we've got one of the two highest levels in London).
- Work has already progressed on this in line with a determined TA reduction strategy (which is currently being reviewed and further strengthened by the new Asst Director) and there has been a modest but consistent drop in overall numbers in recent months (our latest figures indicate c5,400, projecting a further drop of c200 before the end of the year, indicating a reduction by c10% already from the historically high levels last years).
- However the target will become increasingly challenging as the time progresses and there are associated budget implications for the corporate council due to a combination of factors.
- The council has already made adequate budgetary provisions in the current year's budget (and also in the draft estimates for the next round) to absorb these financial implications (mainly a loss of subsidy as the numbers are reducing and also progressive reductions in the maximum levels of Housing Benefit that the government is allowing).
- *The achievement of the Temporary Accommodation reduction target is one of the major challenges for the next 3 years.*

4) New Housing Developments:

- We have a target for new housebuilding in the borough (average 680 new homes per annum), under the London Housing plan, consolidated within our UDP.
- This is a challenging, but achievable target, but it is also the source of potential public concerns (about overdevelopment, quality, impact on facilities etc).
- Within that there are a number of other targets for social rented and affordable units (to contribute to our TA reduction) and for family sized accommodation (to assist with overcrowding), which are currently being reviewed by a special group of councillors preparing a Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- The service has established and expanded an "Enabling Unit" working with developers and RSL partners and it has established a liaison mechanism with RSLs (including a new Partnering Arrangement with the major ones in the area). It has also worked with RSL partners in preparing bids to the Housing Corporation for the necessary grants (enabling RSLs to provide the Social Housing elements), securing in the last round the second highest allocation in London. (The bids for the next 3-year round have just been completed and there is an expectation that there will be an even higher allocation to the borough in the future).
- *Delivering the annual targets and also ensuring higher standards and a closer link with the borough's social housing needs is the next major challenge for the next 3 years.*

5. Integrated Housing Strategy:

- Local Authorities have to produce regular Housing Strategies for submission and approval by the government. The council's housing strategy 3 years ago was awarded "Fit for Purpose" status by the government, which removed the requirement for annual submissions (which is the case for the authorities which do not achieve this status).
- That strategy expires this year and the council is preparing its next 3 year strategy for submission next year.

- The service has been working on the preparation of this next strategy, which is intended to be an “Integrated” one, widely consulted by a range of stakeholders, jointly owned by the key ones and adopted by the HSP, through the new Integrated Housing Board.
- A series of research and issues papers have been commissioned and work is proceeding on a number of sub-strategies, many through special inter-agency working groups.
- *The production of the Integrated Housing Strategy for the next 3 years, its adoption by our key stakeholders and the securing of Fit-for-Purpose status is a key challenge for the service over the next few months.*

(B) HOUSING MANAGEMENT/HOMES FOR HARINGEY:

1) Delivering the Decent Homes Standard programme:

- The government has set a target to housing authorities of bringing all their housing stock up to its DHS (initially by 2010/11, though more recently there is an uncertainty on whether they will extend this by one of two years).
 - The council has been eating away on this target the last 3 years within its existing resources and it has taken the necessary steps to secure the necessary resources for meeting the full target. This involved establishing an ALMO, achieving the necessary threshold of two stars and making the necessary bids to the government.
 - The service has until now met all of its milestones in this area, including having put into place the necessary infrastructure for delivering this, by all accounts massive, programme.
 - Negotiations with civil servants are now at an advanced level to ascertain the amounts that the government is making available to the borough (anything between £150m and £220m extra, over the next 3-5 years) and we should know at least our initial allocation by Christmas.
 - Although the service has prepared itself as well as possible (including surveys, draft alternative programmes for the early years, partnership arrangements with good contractors and so on), this would be the largest capital programme the service has handled.
- *Implementing the programme according to plan is major challenge for H4H and the corporate council over the next 3-5 years.*

2) Achieving 3 star performance:

- The recent achievement of the two star rating was always intended as a step towards achieving full excellence status. Although two stars is sufficient for accessing the DHS resources, the service still has shortcomings and is working on plans to achieve the next stage within the next two years.
- *Achieving 3 stars rating within two years is the next major challenge.*

3) Balancing the HRA:

- Detailed projections 3 years ago (annually reviewed and updated) indicated a projected deficit in future years and advance plans have been put into place to gradually close the projected gap.
 - The service has been consistently managing to balance the HRA and a range of further efficiency savings have been identified (most already agreed by the H4H board) and are being implemented.
- *Ensuring that the HRA is balanced with a prudent level of balances over the next 5 years is the other major challenge of the service.*