

Norwich City Council

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT for meeting to be held on 22 July 2010

Progress report on the Housing Improvement Plan.

1. Summary:

This is the fourth progress report submitted to Members of the scrutiny committee.

This report highlights the progress made with the Housing Improvement Plan (HIP), following the Audit Commission (AC) inspection in January 2009, as at the end of the first year of our improvement journey for the landlord service.

The scope of the inspection included tenancy and estate management, housing income management, resident involvement and the three cross cutting areas: access and customer care, diversity and value for money. An additional inspection was undertaken in relation to the Council's housing allocation service to assess whether or not Norwich City Council's homes were being appropriately allocated in accordance with agreed policies and procedures.

The AC assessed the landlord services provided by the council as being a zero-star, poor service, with uncertain prospects for improvement.

The AC set challenging targets asking us to deliver change over a six to twelve month period, of November 2009 and April 2010. The Council has provided a mature and timely response to all the recommendations arising from the Audit Commission inspection.

2. Achievements

During the course of the last twelve months a significant amount of work has been achieved in building the foundations on which to move the service forward and to achieve our aspiration of being a two star housing service by April 2011. Some of the achievements to date include:-

- The development of a demographically balanced tenants and leaseholders panel - Tenant TalkBack Panel.
- Development of a tenant's involvement framework.
- Revised service standards for the service, developed in consultation with the Tenants Talkback panel and City Wide Board publications sub group.
- Revision of the Commission for Racial Equality code of

practice for housing which has led to the development of an action plan to ensure that the service was compliant.

- Substantial increase in tenants profiling data, from a base of 39% to 79% for ethnicity, gender 100% and 77% to 93% for age. Further work is being undertaken to increase the known data across all indicators, including disability.
- Performance management framework and score card, again which was developed in consultation with tenants and leaseholders and the City Wide Board, performance sub group.
- Development of a competency based framework for housing staff, together with personal development plans.
- Realignment of the housing structures in order to build capacity within the service to support the objectives of the housing improvement plan, creating a dedicated team for voids management and tenant involvement.
- Joint staff, Member and tenant workshops across a number of different themes within the housing service.
- Development of a Blueprint and vision for the service which was designed following consultation with the tenants' panel, through various focus groups.
- Responding to the recommendations arising from the supplementary inspection for the allocations and lettings of the housing service.
- Significant work has been achieved in regard to the review and monitoring of Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) for the service area. This has included self assessment with gap analysis, and will serve as a basis on which to build as part of the preparation for the advice/ assistance work which is planned with the audit commission in April 2011.
- Working with City Wide Board to create a number of sub groups, one of which the publications sub group has now awarded the 'Tenants' ✓ 'to approximately 37 housing related publications.
- Working towards the accreditation for the Customer Service Excellence Standard, and early indications are that this will be achieved by September 2010.

The progress of the housing improvement plan has also been subject to a number of reports being submitted to the Council's scrutiny committee and the Housing Improvement Board has provided challenge and advice.

From the work which has been achieved we have been able to put in place robust foundations from which to embed service improvements across all areas of the Neighbourhood service.

Members are asked to note that the work of the Housing Improvement Team has recently been recognised as part of this year ROARS awards, in being awarded Team of the Year.

3. IDeA- Peer Review

The Council invited the IDeA to undertake a peer review of the service to confirm the progress which had been made over the last twelve months and to identify areas for further improvement. This was carried out between the 8 March and 10 March 2010. The review covered the key areas of the housing improvement plan and a number of staff, tenants, leaseholders, stakeholders and Members were interviewed by the IDeA as part of that process.

They commented that we had made significant progress in the first year of the improvement programme for housing and this was recognised by tenants, staff and other stakeholders that they spoke to during the on-site visit.

It is suggested that we now need to build on the work we have done to establish a framework for engagement and ensure that we meet the expectations of the new regulatory framework in enabling tenants and residents to be actively involved in the design and delivery of services. This will also include working with our new repairs and maintenance contractors Connaught's, and celebrating successes.

They also saw evidence that the improvement plan had been underpinned by good programme and project management and this is reflected in the high proportion of actions which have been completed.

4. Housing Improvement Plan Year 2 and Continuous Service Improvement Plan

As part of our improvement journey we have developed an action plan for the second year of the housing improvement project (2010/11). This will capture the nine actions that still need to be finalised from year 1, but also looking at key issues that have been identified as part of the development of our continuous service improvement plan (CSIP) and include the learning points from the IDeA peer review.

The second year of the housing improvement plan will also be managed by robust project management and will include regular checkpoint meetings with lead officers and progress reports to the housing improvement board, as well as reports to Scrutiny Committee when requested. There are overall 73 actions in the housing improvement plan which will be completed between April 2010 and March 2011.

The continuous service improvement plan has identified a number of key actions to be delivered within the neighbourhood and strategic housing service. These are broken down to the relevant service area and will be included as targets for managers to deliver against as part of the annual appraisal performance system. The progress of the CSIP will be monitored by:-

- Housing management team meetings – on a quarterly

- basis looking at continuous service improvement.
- practice supervision sessions(1:2:1's) with lead officers – monthly
- departmental management team meetings - monthly
- The housing improvement board - bi monthly – offering challenge and advice in relation to key areas of the housing improvement plan.
- Corporate performance team - as part of the ongoing monitoring of the corporate strategic priorities.
- Through the development and published reports to tenant and leaseholder groups including the performance scorecard on a quarterly basis.

The CSIP has been driven by the corporate priorities, underpinned by the corporate strategic plan of which the housing improvement plan is a key feature.

It is anticipated that the Audit Commission will be revisiting the housing service in spring of 2011 to undertake advice and assistance work with us. This is envisaged to take the format of a review of the recommendations that were included in their last inspection report, along with the actions and improvements plans that we currently have in place.

5. Conclusions:

Recommendation

This is the fourth report to Scrutiny Committee regarding the progress of the housing improvement plan.

Members are asked to note this report and the actions contained within the housing improvement plan for year 2.

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