

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2007/2008 REPORT NO. 18**MEETING TITLE AND DATE:**

Housing Improvement Board
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Cabinet
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REPORT OF:

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and Policy
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Agenda – Part: 1	Item: 6
Subject: Housing Improvement	
Wards: All	
Cabinet Member consulted: Cllr Laban	

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report advises Cabinet of the significant progress already made and further actions planned to improve housing services in Enfield. It includes information on actions taken to address past performance issues, key service outcomes and next steps towards achieving housing improvements that will contribute to Enfield's ambition to become a 4 star "excellent" council.

The report highlights significant and continuing improvements in Enfield's housing service with key messages arising from the Council's latest performance indicators, tenants survey results and Audit Commission findings which all indicate that housing in Enfield continues to improve apace.

The key message from the 2006/07 Ipsos MORI tenants satisfaction survey is of significantly improved satisfaction levels with the overall housing service and in particular: the quality of accommodation, repairs and maintenance, being kept informed and opportunities for participation.

The Audit Commission report (April 2007) on its voluntary improvement work in Enfield points to housing's improved performance management arrangements, increased capacity to deliver improvements and stronger focus on residents.

The latest provisional performance indicator figures show that Enfield is now in the top CPA threshold for: urgent repairs in timescale, average time for non-urgent repairs, average time to relet council dwellings.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to note the significant progress made by Housing and comment on the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. Cabinet is aware of the positive pace of improvement which has seen the Council move from a CPA “weak” one star rating in 2002 to its current 3 star “good” rating. In addition, the Audit Commission’s direction of travel judgement in December 2006 considered Enfield to be “improving well”, thereby indicating that Enfield has every potential to become a 4 star “excellent” Council.
- 3.2. All council services have contributed to Enfield’s improvement journey. Significant examples include the benefits service rise from a 1 star rating in 2002 to 4 stars by 2005, the environment service’s move from 1 star in 2002 to a 3 in 2006, improvements in adult social services and Education’s continued strong performance.
- 3.3. Achieving sustained improvements in other areas including housing has however proved more challenging. Although housing performance has improved, the service overall has scored 2 consistently since 2002 and the improvements to date have not yet been enough to help shift the Council’s overall CPA score. Further improvements to Enfield’s housing service remain critical to achieving Enfield’s ambition of becoming a four star “excellent” council.
- 3.4. It also became apparent, during the last year, that a range of increasingly demanding and new challenges necessitated a radical transformation of housing performance. These challenges include meeting the decent homes standard, equipping housing to help deliver the Enfield Strategic Partnership’s (ESP) new sustainable communities strategy and to play its part at the heart of implementing the Council’s new “place shaping” strategy.

4. THE IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY – CORPORATE ACTIONS

- 4.1. The Council recognised that decisive action was required in order to meet the challenges referred to above in paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4. Key actions taken included:
- 4.2. Enfield’s application to establish an ALMO. A successful ALMO bid would enable the Council to accelerate progress towards meeting the decent homes standard by making available £147m of government funding (including £7.3m for environmental improvements). The Council is currently still awaiting the outcome of the ALMO bid and continues to work closely with the ALMO Shadow Board on a programme of work to further accelerate service improvement.
- 4.3. The establishment, as part of the Council’s restructuring in July 2006, of a new Performance, Partnership and Policy (PPP) department, which incorporates a stronger strategic housing capability and client management arrangements for the ALMO. This has aligned housing strategy more closely with the Council’s corporate performance, partnership and policy functions, thereby enabling a joined up approach to the development of housing services in Enfield.
- 4.4. The location of the Council’s community housing functions within a new Health and Adult Social Care (HASC) department. This has enabled the Council to more closely align its community housing service with its adult social services functions and the work of health and social care partners across the borough and thereby ensure improved customer focus.
- 4.5. These structural changes are essential building blocks for ensuring that the availability of external resources and the council’s own capacity are properly harnessed to meet the major challenges facing Enfield’s housing service. It was also recognised however that structural change, whilst important, could not of its self enable the Council and its partners to drive service improvements forward. A number of other actions were therefore taken, as set out in paragraphs 4.6 to 4.9.
- 4.6. An invitation to the Audit Commission to carry out Voluntary Improvement Work (VIW) in Enfield. The Commission’s work, which was carried out in two stages, provided an

independent assessment of the Council's housing improvement work and recommendations for moving forward. The Commission's initial report (October 2006) on stage one of the VIW identified areas where performance could be improved including the need for better performance management arrangements and increased organisational capacity.

- 4.7. Following stage one of the VIW the Council developed a new Housing Improvement Plan (HIP), which has given direction and momentum for both the strategic housing function and the ALMO. The HIP is fully integrated into the Council's performance management framework and includes strong links between the Council's corporate and housing priorities.
- 4.8. Establishment of a Member led Housing Improvement Board (HIB). The HIB chaired by the Cabinet Member for Housing and involving the Leader of the Council, the Chair of the ALMO Shadow Board, the Federation of Enfield Community Associations (FECA), the Council's Chief Executive and other senior officers has been another important step in driving improvement. The HIB ensures there is top level Council and partnership leadership on driving service improvements. Its meetings focus on implementation of the Council's HIP including activities in response to the VIW and preparations for the ALMO.
- 4.9. Stage two of the VIW was carried out in January 2007 by when the new HIP and HIB referred to above had both been established. In addition, the PPP Department Management Team (DMT) had also established a weekly pattern of proactively considering key performance management data.
- 4.10. The Audit Commission's subsequent VIW report (April 2007) reported that progress had been made against all the key recommendations highlighted in their October 2006 VIW report. These included:
 - Progress made in developing the HIP
 - Some clear improvement planning process outcomes and where appropriate comparisons against national indicators
 - Strengthened leadership around performance management
 - Increased capacity including corporate resources to support housing improvement.
 - Progress in implementing previous recommendations in Audit Commission reports. Although they also pointed out that the rate and impact of progress varies and in some instances further work is required to capture additional evidence of outcomes.
 - The Audit Commission also pointed to some areas including diversity, value for money and cross cutting issues where further work is required.

5. THE IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY – HOUSING MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

- 5.1. In addition to the corporate actions outlined above and in response to specific weaknesses identified by previous Audit Commission inspections, the housing service introduced a range of improvement measures. Examples of the identified weaknesses and improvement actions are set out below:
- 5.3. Improve the working relationship with the FECA
 - Relationships with FECA have significantly improved and there is now a successful partnership between the Council and FECA.
 - FECA meets on a regular basis with the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Chief Executive, the Director of PPP and other Council officers including in a range of joint working groups.
 - FECA's positive partnership work with the Council, including the organisation of community festivals in 2006 has contributed to improved resident satisfaction. Other examples of partnership work with FECA has included work on the introduction of a tenant estate inspection scheme, producing a community halls strategy, arranging a tenant/leaseholder conference in September 2006 and residents' involvement in selecting repairs partnering contractors.

- 5.4. Ensure that performance management arrangements for staff are implemented consistently
- Robust performance management systems are now used including departmental and service centre planning, structured monitoring and appraisals and target setting for all staff.
 - At senior level performance is now measured by the HIB, Corporate Management Board and the PPP DMT. In addition, customers are involved in the monitoring process through a monthly performance newsletter.
- 5.5. Improve the opportunities for all residents to participate and engage fully with the Council
- A new residents consultation network
 - Joint working groups with FECA to examine key activity areas
 - A tenant inspection scheme enabling residents' involvement in identifying and prioritising estates improvements
 - Residents representation on the ALMO Shadow Board and the HIB
 - A new involvement strategy is being developed jointly with residents.
- 5.6. Give leaseholders the opportunity to participate and influence service delivery
- A strengthened leaseholder panel now acts as a consultative body on leaseholder issues
 - An annual leaseholder conference and a newsletter to all leaseholders keeps them updated on relevant issues
 - Leaseholder representation on the ALMO Shadow Board.
- 5.7. Ensure that contractors consistently meet the required standards when carrying out works to void properties
- A new voids lettings standard was introduced following detailed consultation with residents
 - New tenants receive a questionnaire to test their experience of the lettings process and satisfaction with their new home.
 - Works are now carried out to bring void properties up to the decent homes standard.
- 5.8. In addition the housing management division of the PPP department has been reconfigured into specialist teams covering anti-social behaviour, income collection and tenancy management. This has enabled housing management to focus more effectively than hitherto on priority areas for improvement.

6. IMPROVED PERFORMANCE

- 6.1. The radical changes and improvements set out in sections 4 and 5 of this report have led to a significantly improved housing service for residents. This is demonstrated by a range of performance indicators including:
- Overall tenant satisfaction with landlord services has increased from 64% in 2003/04 to 69% in 2006/07
 - Satisfaction with opportunities for participation in management and decision making increased from 53% in 2003/04 to 61% in 2006/07
 - BME satisfaction has increased by 5% from 2003/04, for both overall landlord service and opportunities for participation
 - Overall satisfaction with repairs increased from 65% in 2003/04 to 71% in 2006/07
 - The percentage of tenants who felt that we were good at keeping them informed increased from 71% in 2003/04 to 82% in 2006/07.
 - The percentage of tenants who are satisfied with their accommodation increased from 71% in 2003/04 to 77% in 2006/07
 - In 2006/07 71% of tenants felt that rent represented good value for money, compared with 68% in 2003/04

- Provisional end of year figures show our PI performance to be in top CPA threshold for
 - urgent repairs in timescale
 - average time for non-urgent repairs
 - average time to relet council dwellings

7. NEXT STEPS

- 7.1. Enfield's housing service has come a long way in a very short time. The Council's structural reorganisation, preparations for the ALMO including the work of the Shadow Board, development of a comprehensive HIP and establishment of the HIB, improved performance and positive residents survey findings have all contributed to Enfield being in a position where it can anticipate a breakthrough in terms of improved services and customer satisfaction.
- 7.2. As the recent Audit Commission VIW report concluded, "The service is now in a position where it has a clear plan to improve services and both Enfield Homes and the Council must progress in a timely way to deliver improved outcomes to demonstrate a sustained track record of improvement".
- 7.3. The challenge ahead is therefore to build on the significant improvements made during the past year and to accelerate progress towards achieving a 3 star CPA housing rating. This will contribute to the Council's ambition of achieving 4 star "excellent" status. With this in mind the key next steps for housing include:
- 7.4. To continue preparations for the ALMO. Although there is still uncertainty about the timing of the Government decision on Enfield's bid, the Council and its partners are already working together through the ALMO Shadow Board. The close working relationships and community involvement in planning the ALMO will continue to contribute to service improvements across the whole of housing. The establishment of an ALMO will place responsibility for housing management with a board including tenant representatives and other partners - thus bringing housing decisions closer to local residents and the wider community.
- 7.5. To prepare for the ALMO inspection and indicative inspection. Arrangements have now been made for a full Audit Commission inspection of the ALMO in June 2008, to be preceded by an indicative inspection in November 2007. The impending indicative inspection provides an opportunity for the Council to self assess progress to date and to do further work on identifying and tackling areas for improvement. Inspection preparations are already underway with managers, staff, external partners and residents involved.
- 7.6. To refine the HIP in light of the Audit Commission's VIW final report. The Audit Commission's recommendations for immediate action have been incorporated into the VIW action plan and longer term actions will continue to be built into the three year HIP.
- 7.7. To maintain the HIB's focus on sustained service improvements across the whole of housing. The continuing work over the next year on ALMO planning, implementation of the HIP and preparations for the Audit Commission inspections requires continued top level focus on housing improvement. The HIB will therefore continue to meet on a regular basis throughout 2007-08.
- 7.8. To continue the development of a cohesive council wide approach to housing. As explained in paragraphs 4.3 and 4.4 the Council's new organisational structure divided housing services between the PPP and HASC departments. This has enabled closer working arrangements between housing strategy and corporate improvement services whilst continuing to align community housing with adult social services. Close working relationships between the two departments already exist and these will be enhanced further during 2007-08 through the appointment of a new permanent Assistant Director for housing strategy and regular forums involving housing officers across the Council.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

None

9. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To enable the Housing Improvement Board and Cabinet to contribute to further improvements in Enfield's housing service.

10. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE RESOURCES AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS

10.1 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications pertaining to this report.

10.2 Legal Implications

The satisfactory outcome of the ALMO bid is an integral part of the proposals in this report. The actions outlined in the report are all consistent with the Council's duty to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised.

10.4 Property Implications

None.

10.5 Community Implications

Although the recommendations made in this report do not themselves have significant community implications, it is recognised that the service improvements referred to throughout the report have a positive impact on Enfield tenants and the wider community.

11. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

This report refers to improved performance management within housing services and its alignment with the Council's corporate framework.

12. PUTTING ENFIELD FIRST

Improved housing performance contributes to achieving the Council's vision of making Enfield one of the best places to live, work, study and do business, and in particular to Aims 4, 5 and 6 of "Putting Enfield First".

Background Papers

Performance Management – It's everyone's job. Report for Enfield Council, Tribal April 2007
Update report on Voluntary and Additional Improvement Work, Audit Commission April 2007
LBE STATUS Tenant Satisfaction Survey Summary Report, Ispos MORI December 2006.
Voluntary and Additional Improvement Work report, Audit Commission October 2006
Review of the Organisation Structure of the Council, Cabinet report July 2006
Repairs and Maintenance Inspection report, Audit Commission August 2005
Housing Management Inspection Report Audit Commission June 2004