Social Issues Scrutiny Panel – 18th October 2007

Housing Information Systems Informal Scrutiny Group

Report of Heads of Strategic Housing and Landlord Services
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Purpose of the Report
The purpose of report is to advise the Social Issues Scrutiny Panel of the outcome of the Housing Information Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) review of housing systems

Links to the Corporate Strategy
The Corporate Strategy places emphasis on strong performance management. The Housing Information ISG focused on the review of back office systems and procedures to assist with performance improvement.

Recommended
That the Social Issues Scrutiny Panel assures itself that the Housing Information ISG has met its terms of reference with regard to the review and notes the final recommendations made by them on the 7th January 2007. These are that
- The attention of the Portfolio Holder for Housing is drawn to the need for regular monitoring of void and allocation performance
- That a report is brought back to Social Issues Scrutiny Panel (SISP) in July 2007 to review the performance and progress of the new allocation and void process for the period January 2007 to March 2007 and April 2007 to June 2007.

Executive Summary

The Housing Information ISG was tasked with,
> Purpose: To review the present Housing Information Systems and to make recommendations for improvement where necessary and in consultation with Officers.
> Tasks:
>> a. To study and understand the present systems.
>>
>> (i) The handling of data, particularly communications from customers, on receipt within the Housing Department and the procedure for its allocation to officers.
>> (ii) The system for acknowledgement of communications including identification of the officer responsible.
>> (iii) Procedures for allocation of data to Action Officers.
>> (iv) Monitoring of data allocated to Officers to ensure responses are made within laid down Council time scales.

The Group first met in December 2004 to consider the issues above and subsequently gave endorsement to a systems review by the Nineveh consultancy. The result was a comprehensive report that reviewed back office systems which made a series of recommendations to improve performance.

The report considered significant changes to the voids and allocations process should be made and the majority of recommendations concentrated on this. Rather

than just consider each recommendation in turn, the officer project team was tasked with re-engineering the whole process, from tenancy termination through to new tenancy sign up. This has now been completed and was fully implemented from April 2007.

Regular reports are now made to Social Issues Scrutiny Panel (via the Landlord Services report card) on voids and allocations

<u>TACT Comment</u>

The circulation deadlines for this paper did not allow sufficient time for TACT to consider the content and prepare a written comment prior to publication. The paper will be considered at the next TACT meeting on 17 October 2007 and a verbal response will be given to the Scrutiny Panel by the TACT co-optees.

Background Documents
Working documents held in the Strategic Housing and Housing Landlord Services divisions.

Appendices
Appendix 1: Housing Information Systems Outcome Report, January 9th 2007

HOUSING PROCESS REVIEW OF STRATEGIC SERVICES - LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

No	Recommendation	Project Board Initial Response
1.	That the Council run a project to re-engineer processes in Strategic Services	Project team nominated
2.	That a Team Leader is chosen to lead the project from a business perspective.	A Crosskey to lead the project from a business perspective
3.	That the Heads of Strategic and Landlord Services be joint project sponsors to give the strong managerial leadership required to implement the necessary process changes	A Palmer and R Botham will form Project Board and review progress formally on a monthly basis
4.	That the project be supported by an experienced project manager using formal project management methodology	Jacky Wilson (ICT Project Manager) to act as project manager and link to Project Board
5.	That managers develop a plan for managing cultural and altitudinal change.	Communication Plan to be developed by Project Team
6.	That the Orchard System is the main tool for recording in the Housing Department and duplicate recording in Access databases, spreadsheets and paper recording is stopped	Agreed – Project team to ensure coordination with Arch House+ project and to identify areas where Orchard cannot be used effectively
7.	That the Process re-engineering project and the Orchard upgrade programme be run as an integrated project.	Agreed as above
8.	That pending the implementation of document image	Project team to include review of potential for DMS

	processing and workflow the Housing Department reduces paper recording to an absolute minimum and that there be only one type of paper file for customers/tenants.	within project scope. Potential for simplifying procedures to be considered by Project team.
9.	That all standard letters are generated from within Orchard	As per rec. 6&7
10.	That documentation of the new processes be held and accessed electronically	Landlord Services currently reviewing all P&Ps with a view to storing on Intranet. Any review of process P&Ps should follow same format
11.	That comprehensive training be provided for staff about new working practices, the required culture change and managers' expectations	To be considered by Project team and by Project Board as part of communications strategy.
12.	That a new reporting strategy is developed to reflect the new business processes. The development of new reports will need resourcing.	To be considered by Project team
13.	That in future all housing advice data, including interviews and performance data is recorded in the Orchard system.	Outside the scope of the project, however feasibility will be considered by homeless team
14.	That training is given in recording techniques and the use of the Orchard system to record all housing advice data.	Requirements to be reviewed by Project team
15.	That the screening interviews currently done by the Housing Needs Support Assistant are transferred to the Customer Services Centre following appropriate training for Customer services staff.	Outside scope of the project team but will be reviewed as and when customer service centre takes on more duties

16.	That the data currently recorded in the JHR Access database is recorded in Orchard and that the Access database no longer used.	Agreed – as per rec. 6& 7
17.	That changes in circumstances of people on the Joint Housing Register are dealt with by the Customers Services Team and that they enter the changes into the Orchard system	To be considered by Project team
18.	That the role of the Senior Housing Needs Officer be clarified.	SHNO is currently full time project coordinator of the Choice Based Lettings project.
19.	That effective staff cover for leave and sickness be provided for the allocations process	Additional staff trained since Process Review completed
20.	That written guidance is produced to support judgements made in the allocations process and that the allocations process is closely monitored	To be considered by Project team
21.	That Landlord Services staff be involved in developing new allocations processes and subsequently the Choice Based Lettings policy.	Hsg Services Mgr involved in CBL project. Project team to consider potential for review of allocations process
22.	That written performance standards be agreed with Landlord Services. These standards should set out responsibilities, expectations and performance targets. Standards should, wherever possible, be the same for the City Council as for Housing Associations	Agreed – Detail to be considered by Project team
23.	That arrangements be made to ensure that Housing	Detail to be considered by Project team

	Associations notify the Council without delay once a person nominated for a Housing Association vacancy has accepted the tenancy. The person can then be removed from the Joint Housing Register.	
24.	That the Council considers researching the reasons why properties are turned down and acts on the findings in order to reduce administrative costs and length of void periods.	To be considered by Project team
25.	That discussion takes place with 'Development and Enablement' to ensure that tenancy criteria are set in a way that enables the Councils to process nominations efficiently. The council should also review the level and type of information collected from people who apply for housing. It may also be necessary to provide more training for the allocations officer on the Business Objects reporting tool or to review the suite of reports available.	To be considered by Project team
26.	That discussion takes place with the Planning Department about 106 agreements. In addition, it is recommended that the information requested on the JHR application reform be reviewed to ensure that it gathers appropriate information.	A Palmer to pursue discussions with Planning. Project team to consider review of application form.
27.	That the council reviews its policy in respect of allocating properties to older people.	Currently under review by Supported Hsg IMOG
28.	That as part of the project to reengineer processes that the Council evaluates whether the following functions would be better located within landlord	Project team to review all processes and procedures and consider most effective way forward

| | services:

Tenancy terminations
Allocations to City Council properties
(including viewing)
Management of transfers including sign up
The void process from tenancy termination
through to letting
The management allocation and letting of
garages | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 29. | That the Council reviews the levels and types of attribute held in Orchard taking into account the needs of allocations/choice based lettings, void and responsive repairs, planned maintenance and 'Decent Homes'. | To be considered by Project team |
| 30. | That the policy about allowing tenants in arrears to be on the waiting list for transfers be reviewed | To be considered by Project team |
| 31. | That if a transfer applicant fails to respond to the letter asking them to arrange for an inspection of their property without a good verifiable reason then they should have to make a new application. All reasons for rejecting a property should be recorded | To be considered by Project team |
| 32. | That only one visit is made to tenants on the waiting list by the Visiting Officer. A property check list be developed and appropriate training be given to the Visiting Officers | To be considered by Project team |
| 33. | That the processes for transfers are re-mapped and | To be considered by Project team |

	consideration be given to whether the process of accessing the required data can be made easier in Orchard.	
34.	That all queries about transfers and mutual exchanges and assistance with the application processes, and forms be dealt with by the Customer Services team.	To be considered by Project team
35.	That the administration of mutual exchanges be transferred to landlord services.	To be considered by Project team
36.	That the Council review the method of ascertaining priority on the transfer list	To be considered by Project team
37.	That the efficiency of transfer incentives be regularly reviewed in order to ensure that they are having the desired effect and are at a rate that will prove to be an incentive.	To be considered by Project team
38.	That the Council reviews whether all applicants should be visited near the time of allocation. It may be that resources would be better targeted to visiting particular groups, such as the elderly or perhaps redirected to accompanied viewing.	To be considered by Project team
39.	That the process of identifying those to visit and all the monitoring of responses be done in Orchard. That the record of the visit and changes is made solely in Orchard and that the recording be done by the Visiting Officer rather than the Team Clerk. That 'Post-it' notes should not be used for recording	To be considered by Project team

	any customer based information which could become detached from a file.	
40.	That the Council considers the security implications of taking files on home visits. The Council could consider developing the use of hand held devices with appropriate security to hold relevant information for the interview and to capture changes which could then be automatically fed back in to Orchard. Data on hand held devices can be security protected.	To be considered by Project team in conjunction with work by the "mobile working" project group.
41.	That a Team Leader or practitioner is appointed to liaise with the Customer Service Team to ensure that processes and procedures are clear and that any problems that may arise get swiftly dealt with.	To be considered by Project Board
42.	That the Housing Department considers regularly review the information on the web site and ensures that it is consistent and written in plain language	Under constant review. Updated since the process review
43.	That the administration of allocation, letting and maintenance of garages be transferred to Landlord Services and the processes simplified through the process review.	To be considered by Project team
44.	That the voids process be re-engineered as part of the process review. That this review involves all key personnel	To be considered by Project team
45.	That Orchard is the only recording tool used for voids within the Housing Department and that	Agreed - To be considered by Project team

46.	That the Council develop the use of hand held technology for surveyor to specify void work. Job specifications to be sent electronically to Serco and if desired to other contractors.	To be considered by Project team in conjunction with work by the "mobile working" project group.
47.	That the council agree and publish the written void standard as soon as possible. These standards should consistent with Decent Homes standards.	Minimum Void standard now agreed. Pre-printed advice sheets go out with all offer letters
48.	That the Council review whether the budget allocation for voids is sufficient to meet the required standard	Reviewed in detail as part of Options project and in developing Repairs and Renewal Strategy.
49.	That a 'Voids Controller' be appointed to take responsibility for the whole voids process from vacancy to re-let. It is suggested that the post holder should report to the Head of Landlord Services.	Voids performance to be included in job spec for new Senior Area Hsg Mgr post. Project team to consider/review extent of this responsibility
50.	That the Council holds a seminar with Serco and key personal involved in the voids process to identify those factors that are impeding good working relationships.	Management of voids contractors outside scope of project. Report to Cabinet on this issue drafted for January 06.
51.	That the management of keys should be located in Landlord Services.	To be considered by Project team
52.	That managers develop a plan to improve communication within the Housing Department**.**	Outside scope of project team, separate housing divisions communication plan to be developed by A Palmer and R Botham

TACT Report

The Executive Summary, gives the outline purpose and the tasks, set before the Social Issues Scrutiny Panel,

- **TACT realise much of this is ongoing, and it is only in time can a fair judgement be made as to whether our not such systems or schemes are really up and running.**
- **The Orchard System will be an invaluable asset to the council in the future.**
- **TACT, are pleased to see effective staff coverage is in place to cover for leave and sickness, without the use of agency staff, a great step forward.**
- **Written performance standards will make clear what is expected from the service provided, linking them with other service providers where ever possible, such as Housing Associations makes sense, but so much nicer if the Council could go it alone.**
- **TACT, fully go along with (Development and Enablement),to ensure that the Tenancy criteria are set in the way that enables the Councils to process nominations efficiently.**
- **The voids process to be re-engineered as part of the process review another important factor.**

TACT will be keeping a close eye on the many recommendations put forward. They have a habit of slipping through the net at times, we wish you well, and will await the outcome with interest.