

**REPORT FOR: Employee
CONSULTATIVE FORUM**

Date of Meeting: 26th January, 2010

Subject: Housing Peer Review

Key Decision: No

Responsible Officer: Lynne Pennington
Interim Divisional Director of Housing

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Barry Macleod-Cullinane
Portfolio Holder Adults and Housing

Exempt: No

Decision subject to Call-in: No

Enclosures: N/A

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the main findings from the recent housing peer review and forms the basis for future working arrangements between housing services and the unions.

Recommendations: ECF is requested to note the report

Reason: There are no specific actions requiring ECF approval, but comments on the proposed way of working and way forward are welcomed.

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

Better working relationships between housing services and the unions will lead to an improved service and improved morale. Housing has a key role in delivering Harrow's corporate priorities, particularly supporting vulnerable people and building stronger communities. Improved staff satisfaction will inevitably lead to improved customer satisfaction.

Options considered

A number of options were considered for conducting the peer review, including an internal review within housing, an independent review by someone outside of the Council and a review by a senior corporate colleague.

The Corporate Director of Place Shaping conducted the review which was then handed over to the Divisional Director of Housing to conclude and finalise the actions for improvement with union colleagues.

This report sets out those actions.

Background

The review was initiated following concerns raised by staff and unions in mid 2009 following the introduction of HARP. The concerns were not in connection with the HARP concept; they were more about perceived inadequacies in the consultation and communication processes that took place in connection with its introduction.

The review consisted of a number of meetings chaired by the Corporate Director of Place Shaping; a staff survey carried out by the unions of some staff in Resident Services and a number of meetings between housing management and the unions.

Current Situation

The review recommended a number of improvements to communication between housing management and the unions and between housing management and all staff.

In parallel with the peer review there has been a root and branch service improvement review carried out within housing and a corporate staff survey conducted.

The findings of all three exercises; peer review; service improvement review and staff survey findings from both surveys now need to be brought together to form a comprehensive service improvement plan that will shape priorities for the department throughout 2010.

A staff conference is planned for 14th January 2010 to communicate all of this to staff and to introduce them to recently appointed permanent members of the management team who will help them drive forward the improvement planning process.

The conference will be used to launch a communication and engagement calendar designed to ensure that housing main streams the involvement of all staff in the development, implementation and review of the improvement plan.

Why change is needed

The protocol for managing change was not followed comprehensively when HARP was introduced and the unions were clearly right to raise their concerns. The peer review has provided an opportunity to discuss those concerns openly and learn lessons which will help the department move forward. The Divisional Director of Housing would like to thank union colleagues for the positive and constructive manner in which the peer review was conducted and for embracing the opportunities to work better together. Unions have started attending housing management meetings on a monthly basis and there is an agreed protocol for dealing with union queries.

The GMB rep was also involved in the recent recruitment process for new members of the management team.

The need for change has also been highlighted by the recent two staff surveys and whilst there are some positive messages within the council staff survey, the union survey clearly indicates that staff, particularly those in Resident Services are looking for considerable cultural change. They want to be listened to and feel valued. It is clear that for customer satisfaction to improve, cultural and structural change is required. The improvement planning mentioned elsewhere in this report provides the opportunity to also address cultural issues.

Implications for Recommendations

There are clearly significant implications for housing to be able to respond to the service review and drive forward a comprehensive service improvement plan. There is a very optimistic air amongst the management team and the relationship with the unions is the best it has been for some time. There will however be the need for structural review in order to deliver the changes that are required and this process needs to start in the spring.

The changes can clearly only be achieved within budget so a process of prioritisation needs to commence with staff, unions and residents and this process is due to commence with the staff conference on the 14th January.

There are no immediate implications identified that would prevent the improvement process from continuing.

Financial Implications

Whilst the service review focussed on Resident Services, the improvement plan and other changes highlighted in this report need to apply to the whole service. The HRA is ring fenced and therefore changes to council tenant services will need to be part of that ring-fenced arrangement. The department is also acutely aware of the Council's efficiency drive and the need to create savings in order to make change happen.

The HRA is presently the subject of a major national policy review and the financial consequences of this are yet to be determined but will inevitably have a bearing on what Harrow can and cannot do in relation to its housing service.

February Cabinet will agree the three year HRA budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy [MTFS] for the period 2010-11 to 2012-13, and is likely to report reducing HRA balances. In recent years, annual expenditure has exceeded income, resulting in an annual reduction in HRA balances, causing pressure around the longer term funding of the HRA.

The impact of the lower level of balances will significantly shorten the period during which the Council has a viable HRA. The point at which balances fall below the recommended level of £750k will require the Council to have considered the options around the future of housing in this respect.

Risk Management Implications

Risk included on Directorate risk register? Yes

Separate risk register in place? No, however a separate risk register will be drawn up as part of the overall improvement plan.

Corporate Priorities

Please identify which corporate priority the report incorporates and how:

- Deliver cleaner and safer streets
- Improve support for vulnerable people /
- Build stronger communities /

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Donna Edwards.....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: 12 Jan 2010		
Name: Linda Cohen.....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Monitoring Officer
Date: 13 Jan 2010.....		

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Lynne Pennington, Divisional Director of Housing 0208 424 1998

Background Papers:

Minutes of Peer Review Meetings
Housing Quality Network Executive Summary
Draft Housing Communication and Engagement Calendar