

Integrating housing services communications strategy and plan

DRAFT

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1.0 Introduction and aims

Following a full review of management services and arrangements of council homes in Leeds, including an extensive eight-week consultation with all stakeholders, Leeds City Council's Executive Board will consider a recommendation on June 19th to move to an integrated housing service managed directly by the Council. The status quo has not been an option for some time, so engagement activities have fostered an atmosphere and platform for change. However, communications have largely been focused on establishing information and engagement to inform the review, so we now need to provide continuity and a bridge between the review and implementation phase. All major stakeholders are now aware of the recommendation, and the results of the consultation with tenants.

The communications aim to:

- Establish timetable and opportunities to engage;
- Reassure tenants, staff and other stakeholders about continuity of service and commitment to excellence;
- Secure intelligence and input to shape the best possible service, and
- Continue to prepare staff in ALMOs and housing services for period of change and to build a single team and culture.

2.0 Communications objectives

- 100% of staff briefed on timetable and implications for change by June 30 2013
- All managers delivering briefings and reporting back through feedback channels
- 50% of staff visited or registered on sharepoint
- 100% of staff to have taken part in multi-organisation events in next six months
- Increase in number of tenants actively engaging in tenant panels, TRAs and other engagement activity.
- X% tenant understanding and recognition (measured through citizen's panel, STAR or separate sampling)

3.0 Stakeholders

ALMO and housing Boards/leaderships

While it has always been clear that this was never a referendum on the individual ALMOs or their services, the professional pride within the outgoing organisations could manifest itself in defensiveness, challenge or campaign against the recommendations. This will have a large influence on the attitudes of staff, so communications need to focus on collaboration and cooperation on managing change.

Approach to comms

- Continue to highlight the successes of the ALMOs.
- Work closely with tenant and board members to establish nature of recruitment to and lessons learned for new board.
- These relationships are best managed at a senior level.

Staff

Staff engaged in process so far have offered a constructive, pragmatic critique of current situation, an understanding of the reasons for change and a determination to take every opportunity to improve services. There is nervousness in some quarters about 'returning' to the council. It is also clear from some sessions that relationships between council and ALMO staff, and perceptions of the organisations, could be healthier.

Above all, staff need to know when things will happen, their terms and conditions, the likelihood of job losses, that they will have genuine influence over shaping the service, and to be reassured that any restructures or competitive processes will be entirely on merit – there can be no perception that one service is consuming another.

Approaches to comms

- All staff, whatever organisation, to receive same information and opportunities to engage. We need to align the various newsletters, team briefings and other communications which exist.
- Efforts need to be directed to both maintaining the energy and focus of those already engaged, while at the same time reaching the pockets of staff who either don't know about or don't believe/trust in the process for building a new service.
- Continue to highlight the successes of the ALMOs, and also highlight the progress the council has made. This is the amalgamation of very successful, progressive organisations

Tenants

Some parties are interpreting results of engagement as representing a confused picture from tenants. While not contradictory, increased tenant satisfaction mixed with the preference for a council rather than ALMO option do reinforce the great strides the ALMOs have taken and the good practice which has to be retained. There has been a noticeable indifference to the proposals in comparison to previous ALMO-related reviews, best represented by the lack of a campaign - either by organised groups or vocal individuals - in favour of either option. One major reason for this highlighted during the consultation was the presence of more immediate and 'real' concerns to many tenants, primarily linked to welfare changes. Another is the lack of a radical difference between the options in terms of the tenant experience. With arrears increasing just one month into the changes to welfare payments, the management of council homes will continue to play second fiddle to more pressing economic concerns

The tenant engagement questions suggests a desire and willingness to get involved in decisions which affect them, but a lack of perceived influence.

Approach to comms

- Utilise existing structures to reassure tenants that services and relationships will continue as normal, and offer opportunities to shape the service.
- Work with community involvement teams to explore and deliver additional engagement - and recruitment – opportunities to enhance participation and perceived influence.

Elected members

A small number of members took the opportunity to engage with the original review and consultation, with many then contributing in their role as members of the ALMO boards. All three leaders of the major political parties had advance notice of the consultation materials and questions, and all three approved without amends. Need to be fully briefed to respond factually to all constituent enquiries.

Approach to comms

- Offer further opportunities to engage, both at ward and party level.

Trades Unions

Trade unions have been fully engaged in the review process. They will continue to be a vital channel for dialogue with staff.

Approach to comms

- Regular consultation through JCC meetings
- Invited to speak to staff through TUPE process

Partners/contractors

Contractors and partners may be unsettled by news of dissolution of ALMOs.

Approach to comms

- Need to proactively brief on implications for contracts, timescales for decisions and reviews. These will be determined by workstreams.

4.0 Key messages

For every stakeholder we need to be clear about:

- Timescales
- Details which affect each stakeholder; phone numbers changing, tupe processes.
- How they can engage in the process to shape the organisation.

General

- Leeds City Council wants to make sure Leeds has the right arrangements in place to deliver high quality, efficient services that offer value for money to Leeds' taxpayers and tenants.
- This has never been a referendum on the ALMOs. They have done a fantastic job, attracting investment, and transforming the quality of housing and services over the past ten years. But with no new government money for housing we only have what we earn from rent to invest in housing, so the costs of running three separate companies are an obvious way to free up money to invest in housing and services.
- The Council has also changed dramatically, so we are bringing together the best of two improving, progressive and customer-focused sets of services.
- We don't want to disrupt or reduce services to tenants; we want to keep what they like and improve what they don't.
- This isn't just a decision based on the tenant survey, but the results did help us separate two options which both have strengths and opportunities to keep improving services for council tenants.

- Whatever the outcome, there will be no expensive rebranding exercise

For staff

- The response from staff in particular has been fantastic, showing a real understanding of the challenges we face and a strong commitment to keep improving services at a difficult time for local authorities.
- There is only one place our talented, passionate housing and support staff should want to take the next step in their career; building a great, responsive housing service just when our tenants, and the city, Leeds needs it most.

About the review/consultation process

- Every element of this review is conducted in an impartial, objective and transparent manner. The project was chaired and delivered by a member of the council's corporate team, rather than the directorate having client responsibility for housing. The project team also included the chief executives and chairs of all three ALMOs and a member of Leeds Tenants Federation.
- The consultation itself was designed and delivered by a consultation group including members of the council's communications team, the ALMO business centre and Leeds Tenant Federation. The project team approved the consultation plan and made amends to the materials and questions.
- We didn't have a strong sense of tenant opinion when we began this review. We were convinced both options had advantages and were perfectly workable, which is why we asked tenants and other stakeholders for their opinion on both.

5.0 Opportunities

Tenants comms

Established mechanisms

- ALMO comms
 - Tenant mag (quarterly)
 - Area panels
 - Media
 - Community involvement activity. Potential to expand, working with community involvement teams:
 - **Use Established face to face groups:** The Community Involvement teams have told me that if you need to latch on to already established coffee morning type groups or Tenant Scrutiny (they'll be good for tracking progress on standards).
 - **Online consultation** potential, especially using smart phones. There is a module on TalkingPoint that allows you to invite people via email to an online chat room between certain times. However, I don't think it's been used before so we'd be the pioneers! An alternative is to use the ALMOs' individual Facebook message pages or maybe set up a Yammer account as a cross-ALMO forum.
 - **Recruitment campaign** to engage the disengaged/those groups that want influence but don't feel they have it
 - Housing offices and public facing staff
 - Work with tenants or children's groups to develop brand/identity of new service
- Leeds Tenant Federation
 - Newsletter to 1000 tenants and 120 tenant and resident groups
 - Board meeting (last Wednesday of every month)
 - Consultation and communications panel meeting (monthly)
- Media

- Press releases and photo opportunities at milestones
- In-depth briefing for key media on funding changes
- Tie to welfare change communications

Ward members

- Briefings and opportunities to engage
- Area committee/management meetings
- Workshops with area committee chairs to shape tenant engagement; give tenant feedback on hopes/fears for new-look panels and closer working with members.

Staff communications

ALMOs

- Informal staff sessions started May 29
- Large events planned 10-12 July
- Weekly team meetings for all ALMO operational staff, fortnightly for 'back office'
- Newsletters issued, currently different frequencies for different organisations – align form next edition
- Chief exec updates – visit all teams on a six-weekly rotation

Council

- Cascade from managers
- Invited to large events in ALMOs

ALL

- Staff events
- Implementation workshops
- Sharepoint site reflecting all feedback, advertising engagement opportunities
- Trade Unions

- Need to replicate or standardise internal comms as part of change management process
- Whole-staff induction in values, behaviours and services – potential joint event with tenant representatives
- Anonymous feedback boxes and question cards at all events and staff locations

6.0 Resources / Budget

The communications strand will be lead by Leeds City Council's head of communications, supported by a communications group containing officers from the council's communications team, Leeds Tenants Federation and the ABCL.

7.0 Communications activity

See below table – to be populated to align to emerging implementation timetable

8.0 Monitoring and evaluation

We can use a number of qualitative and quantitative methods to monitor the effectiveness of our communications

Tenants

Satisfaction survey

Increase in participation in engagement activities

Complaints

Staff

As part of change management process, stakeholders could be invited to keep a change diary/respond to a regular, short survey checking understanding of key messages, response to change and flagging up any emerging service issues.

Staff survey

Sickness rates

Staff turnover

Volume and nature of feedback in stakeholder engagement activities, including staff workshops, area panels

9.0 Plan of Activity

This is designed to be a working document, reflecting and helping to identify communications support required to deliver the strategic and operational priorities of the programme.

Date	Opportunity/Challenge	Communications/engagement activity	Audience(s)	Messages	Lead	Status/outcome	Resources	Risks
May	Sharing results	Graphic posters in all libraries, one stop centre and housing offices Letters and briefing note to all tenant panels Article in LTF newsletter LTF communications panel (June12) Briefing for members Briefing for project group Briefing to boards Leeds.gov & social media platforms Manager cascade and staff briefings Sharepoint Media release	All	Shared results, recommendation and rationale. Core key messages Decision made June 19	GW	Completed May 9		
May/June 13	Filling void between results and decision Start building single team/integration	Informal staff briefings Script to all area panels	All staff	Timetable Why recommendation is being made Opportunities to engage Member of review		Completed for ALMOs		

				team visiting during July cycle				
11 June 13	Exec board paper published	Media release/reactive comments Managerial cascades/internal comms	All staff	Timetable for consultation over TUPE				
19 June 13	Executive board meeting – publicising decision	Tenant magazines issued 20.6.13 Media Release Briefings to all stakeholders Leeds.gov. and almo websites and social media accounts Leeds Tenants Federation newsletter						
June 13	Set up Project Co-ordination Group							
June 13	Set up Project Board							
June/July 13	HR consultation over TUPE							
June/July 13	Set up Shadow Housing Management Advisory Board							
July cycle	Area Panel meetings							
August cycle	Area Panel meetings							
September	Recruit senior leadership posts							
October	TUPE of staff							