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**Report of Chief Officer Housing Management**

**Report to Housing Advisory Board**

**Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2016**

**Subject: Customer Services Plan Update**

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):		
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number:		
Appendix number:		

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**Summary of main issues**

Through the Citizens@Leeds agenda Leeds City Council is addressing a number of challenges to tackling poverty and deprivation across the city. A key objective of the Citizens@Leeds agenda is to provide a citywide network of community hubs, which deliver local solutions within communities and integrate more council and partner services, with the aim of dealing with more complex issues at the first point of contact.

Housing Leeds is working closely with Citizens and Communities to support the delivery of the community hub programme at specific sites across Leeds, which will see greater integration of housing management customer services within customer hubs instead of traditional housing offices.

In 2010, the Homes & Community Agency (HCA) introduced a set of national consumer standards, as part of the regulatory framework for social housing in England, which all social housing providers are required to meet. The original Leeds Service Offer was developed in 2010 in line with this regulatory framework.

The last STAR survey in November 2014 suggested a shift in the priorities of tenants with a move towards the environment featuring as a more important priority that previously indicated. A review of the Leeds Service Offer is currently underway to incorporate these changes in priorities for tenants.

It is a priority for Housing Leeds to develop a wide range of customer access options, to more effectively meet the needs of customers. In particular, work is underway to increase opportunities for customers to self-serve

via a Customer Access Portal and the internet, therefore allowing staffing resources to focus communication with vulnerable tenants and on complex tenancy management issues.

## **Recommendations**

That Housing Advisory Board:

- Supports the overall approach to developing community hubs.
- Provides comment on the review of Local Housing Offer.
- Provides comment on the approach to improving the quality of customer service and access to services in Housing Leeds.

### **1 Purpose of this report**

1.1 To update the Housing Advisory Board on the following:

- Progress with the delivery of community hubs through the Citizens@Leeds agenda.
- Progress made in the review of the Local Housing Offer to tenants.
- Progress with improving the quality of customer service and access to Housing Leeds tenants.

### **2 Background information**

2.1 Citizens@Leeds was established by the Council to put communities at the forefront of what we do through the provision of inclusive, locally provided citizen-based services. Through the Citizens@Leeds agenda the Council is addressing a number of challenges to tackling poverty and deprivation across the city through four key priorities:

- Providing more accessible and integrated services.
- Helping more people out of financial hardship.
- Helping more people into work.
- Being responsive to the needs of local communities.

2.2 A key objective of the Citizens@Leeds agenda is to provide a citywide network of community hubs, which deliver local solutions within communities and integrate more council and partner services, with the aim of dealing with more complex issues at the first point of contact. The community hub principles build further on the work done through the development of the Council's one stop centre network.

2.3 In 2010, the Homes & Community Agency (HCA) introduced a set of national consumer standards, as part of the regulatory framework for social housing in England, which all social housing providers are required to meet. The original Leeds Service Offer was developed in 2010 in line with this regulatory framework. The HCA takes a co-regulatory approach puts a greater emphasis on supporting tenants to shape and scrutinise service delivery and holding the landlord to account.

2.4 A review is currently underway of the Service Offer to take account of the establishment of Housing Leeds, changes in tenant priorities and to take account of policy changes, e.g. welfare reform. Potentially some elements of the new Service Offer may then be able to feed into the Corporate Customer service standards. These are due for review as part of the Corporate Customer Access Strategy.

### **3 Main Issues**

#### **3.1 Citizens@Leeds – Development of Community Hubs**

3.2 Three pathfinder community hubs became operational in early 2014 at Compton Centre, Harehills, St. Georges Centre, Middleton and the One Stop Centre in Armley. These hubs brought together all existing community based one stop centres, libraries and housing management offices to be managed as a single set of front of house services, and developed real integration with a wide range of services including the police, health, credit union and third sector partners.

3.3 Based on the successes of the three pathfinder sites, in October 2015 Executive Board agreed a number of recommendations for progressing the roll out of the community hub approach across the city under phase 2, of 3 different community hub types:

- 'Extra' – a community hub which is open full time, has a multi-skilled front of house team, a range of specialist providers and partners co-located to meet the needs of the local community, e.g. police, health, Leeds City Credit Union and third sector partners.
- 'Local' – a community hub which is open full time, has a multi-skilled front of house team, and surgeries for more specialist providers and partners to meet the needs of the local community.
- 'Mobile' – a more flexible community hub which has varied hours and services based on demand, with signposting to services of a community hub 'extra' or 'local'.

3.4 The phase 2 programme has focused in the main on developing community hubs at sites where there is an element of co-location at present, e.g. an existing one stop centre, library or job shop.

3.5 Housing Leeds is working closely with Citizens and Communities to support the delivery of the community hub programme at specific sites across Leeds, which will see greater integration of housing management customer services within customer hubs instead of traditional housing offices. This presents a number of opportunities for the service:

- Improved customer service, as tenants will be able to have multiple enquiries dealt with as part of a single visit to a community hub.
- Increased opportunities for closer working with key partners, e.g. health and police. A key outcome of the Armley community hub pathfinder was that it facilitated close, effective working relationships with the police in managing local issues.
- A opportunity to rationalise housing office assets, including for sale, or conversion back to retail or residential use.

### 3.6 **Housing Leeds Service Offer**

3.7 The main objectives of the review of the Service Offer are:

- To have one Service Offer that reflects that Leeds now has one Housing service
- That one set of city wide standards are defined for both tenants and staff
- That our Service Offer has been developed with tenants, giving them the opportunity to consider any changing priorities and consider feedback from the 2014 STAR survey
- That our Service Offer gives tenants the opportunity to suggest changes based on issues affecting them in the future such as welfare reform and fuel poverty.

3.8 Housing Leeds is working with Voice of Involved Tenants At Leeds (VITAL) to develop the Housing Leeds Service Offer.

3.9 VITAL will support Housing Leeds in preparing the annual report against the new Service Offer for 2016/ 2017. Every year as a landlord we must tell all our tenants how we are performing and provide information about our services. This annual report is a requirement under the Homes and Communities Agency's (HCA) regulatory framework.

3.10 Housing Leeds has been working with tenants to review their priorities for each of the 4 standards. Key themes being raised by tenants are as follows:

**Home Standard** – completing repairs right first time, ensuring that properties let to new tenants are in good state of repair, making it easier to report repairs, keeping homes safe.

**Tenancy Standard** – improving information available about homes at lettings and in Tenants Handbook, increasing opportunities for tenant mobility, and making it easier for tenants to pay their rent.

**Neighbourhood & Community Standard** – more proactive work in managing antisocial behaviour, estate inspections, caretaking and cleaning.

**Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard** – better communication with tenants to better understand customers' needs and providing feedback, report learning from complaints.

3.11 The Service Offer will continue to be developed over the next month or so, with the final draft being considered by VITAL in March 2016 and HAB in April 2016.

### 3.12 **Customer Service**

3.13 The new Service Offer will underpin how we provide services to our customers and how we train staff to deliver a high quality customer services. A strong focus has been placed on staff engagement by Housing Management. Staff engagement surveys have been undertaken and the results taken on board. Tailored induction courses have taken place for new starters to ensure that culture and knowledge, as well as process are embedded. Officers have been provided with a range of training

courses to enable them to do their jobs effectively. Housing Leeds understands that if its workforce is motivated and happy in their work, this will impact positively on the service that customer receives.

- 3.14 Stronger relationships are being developed with Citizens and Communities to support the work of the Contact Centre. Plans are being put in place to manage peaks in demand and resourcing issues, to minimise the impact on call handing performance. Housing Officers are being deployed into the contact centre to identify opportunities for process improvements. This should cut down on call handing time, meaning that more calls can be answered and customers can access the service more efficiently.
- 3.15 **Customer Access**
- 3.16 Housing Leeds wants to ensure that tenants have a choice in the way that they access services. Allowing tenants to self-serve via the internet provides a more flexible and efficient communication tool for some customer contacts. A priority is to drive channel shift and encourage more tenants to self-serve. This will allow staff resources to focus on support for more complex issues.
- 3.17 The Housing Leeds website was launched on in September 2015. Information is presented in a much clearer and organised way, making it easier for both customers and staff to access information. Next steps are to develop local sites. These will provide customers with information about their local Housing office teams, local events in their areas such as Community committee dates, local projects taking place and estate inspections.
- 3.18 A new Customer Access portal will be launched in late February/March 2016 Initially this will allow customers to access their rent account information and view their balances. Future enhancements will enable the updating of personal information, reporting repairs and booking appointments on line and being able to access the Choice Based Lettings system. By enabling tenants to self-serve where ever possible, this will allow officers more time to focus on customers who need more support.
- 3.19 Housing Leeds Facebook and twitter accounts are gathering more followers. Officers across the service are making use of them to promote campaigns, highlight good news stories and alert customers to new initiatives that we are supporting. Our partners can keep track of events and re tweet them on their own feeds for further promotion. Links are being made with local social media sites to enable us to promote our local services and to see what is going on in the local area and react to it.
- 3.20 Work continues to engage with our younger tenants. During 2015, Yagi held roadshows at One Stop Centres across Leeds, not only to promote the group but also to find out the priorities for young people. The Welfare Reform changes and lack of understanding of the impact on tenants were common issues raised. To address this Yagi have worked with the Income Improvement team to run an online discussion about welfare reforms on social media (Twitter). Young tenants were encouraged to submit questions and received an instant answer from income officers. Roadshow participants also highlighted the need to also communicate with younger tenants in less traditional ways. To address this Yagi have now created a Facebook page in addition to their Twitter page, and continue to develop the content of the Yagi webpage.

- 3.21 At a recent TPAS regional conference a tenant of Yagi gave a presentation on why she felt it was important for young adults to be actively involved with Housing Leeds, and her role as the Yagi representative on VITAL. She also detailed how Yagi had looked at how young adults are consulted with through roadshows and young peoples' activities such as Breeze, and how members were contributing to developing services by being consulted on the tenant newsletter and development of Housing Leeds webpages.
- 3.22 In November 2015, Housing took part in Takeover challenge week. Working with school children and their teachers in Seacroft and Burmantofts, they were involved in estate walkabouts and visits to the local housing offices. They then had presentations in local assemblies by Housing managers. One school has asked for Housing to engage with them further, looking to work with students as part of their curriculum.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.2 Over the last 18 months there has been significant consultation on the Citizens@Leeds agenda with all involved partners, including staff, Members and other public and third sector organisations.
- 4.3 The STAR survey is a key consultation tool, which collects tenant feedback around services provided and consults on their priorities. This has been taken into consideration when considering the new service offer.
- 4.4 VITAL will be consulted throughout on the development of the service offer and will be asked to sign off the draft service standards in March 2016.
- 4.5 Involved tenants have attended workshops to consider what changes they would like to make to the service offer.

## **5 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

- 5.1 There are clear links between poverty and inequality if outcomes in relation to education, employment, health and life expectancy, and the integrated services proposition is focused on ensuring that citizens and communities can access services in the simplest way for them whilst ensuring that the council and its partners response to help citizens and communities is integrated and joined up so that access is as equal as possible.
- 5.2 Tenants from across our city wide groups have been involved in creating the new service offer. This has ensured a fair representation and voice for all.
- 5.3 The equal access group will be consulted on the draft document to provide feedback on its accessibility e.g. regarding font size and colour.

## **6 Council policies and City Priorities**

6.1 The development of community hubs supports the Best Council Plan objectives of supporting communities and tackling poverty and promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Addressing poverty and deprivation, helping people into work and tackling social isolation are key priorities for the Council.

6.2 The Best Council Plan includes the objective of ensuring a high quality public service, with a focus on improving customer satisfaction. By involving our tenants to develop our new service offer, we should be confident of delivering the services they want.

## **7 Resources and value for money**

7.1 A revised service offer will refocus officers on the level of performance customers expect. Resources will be deployed as necessary to meet the offer.

7.2 Officers will be aware of the priorities of customers when considering how to manage their budgets effectively.

## **8 Legal Implications**

8.1 The service offer is being developed in line with The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing 2015. In particular: 'Providers are expected to engage meaningfully with their tenants and offer them opportunities to shape the tailoring of services to reflect local priorities. Tenants should have the ability to scrutinise their provider's performance, identify areas for improvement and influence future delivery'.

## **9 Risk Management**

9.1 Housing Leeds will ensure that the service offer is reviewed regularly to provide assurance to tenants that the offer is being met. With current and future budget pressures, there may be a need to prioritise the services that can be offered. The annual report will provide an overview of the overall performance.

## **10 Conclusions**

10.1 Good progress has been made in delivering a network of community hubs across the city. The 3 pathfinder community hubs have delivered significant improvements in the quality of services to customers and increased opportunities for closer partnership working. The phase 2 roll out is now underway and making good progress.

10.2 Housing Leeds is committed to delivering the service that tenants have told us they want. The revised service offer will provide a framework for the creation of an annual report to be undertaken by VITAL. The revised service offer will underpin our approach to customer services and access.

## **11 Recommendations**

That Housing Advisory Board:

- Supports the overall approach to developing community hubs.
- Provides comment on the review of Local Housing Offer.
- Provides comment on the approach to improving the quality of customer service and access to services in Housing Leeds.