



Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 23rd July 2015

Report of: Policy and Improvement Officer

Subject: Written responses to public questions

Author of Report: Matthew Borland, Policy and Improvement Officer
matthew.borland@sheffield.gov.uk
 0114 273 5065

Summary:

This report provides the Committee with copies of written responses to public questions asked at the Committee's meeting on 26th March 2015.

The written responses are included as part of the Committee's meeting papers as the way of placing the responses on the public record.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	
Other	X

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Note the report

Background Papers: None

Category of Report: OPEN

This page is intentionally blank

**Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny and Policy Development
Committee 26th March 2015**

Written responses to public questions asked by Mick Watts on housing repairs

1) Why choose the high cost option?

Insourcing is not 'the high cost option'. There will be initial up-front costs involved in transferring the service which are higher than for the other two options. However, following these initial costs, the insourced option is expected to generate sustainable year-on-year revenue savings. So in the longer-term this option is actually the cheapest. In addition, once fully integrated into the Council there will be further opportunities to reduce duplication, join-up procurement with other Council Services and increase efficiency within the Service – enabling it to achieve more and improve outcomes within the same level of spending.

Insourcing the HR&M Service will give the Council more control, flexibility and accountability in managing the Service, enabling the service to be fully integrated into the Council and to work in close partnership with other relevant key Council services. This will help to transform its approach to one which is more holistic, joined-up and outcome-focused. This cannot be achieved within the confines of an inflexible contractual arrangement.

In particular, it will enable the repairs service to integrate better with other housing services. Operatives will be more locally based, and will work closely with the new Neighbourhood Teams delivering Housing+ - which will mean we will be better placed to get to know customers, to keep them safe and to support them in successfully maintaining their tenancies.

Insourcing the Service will put it in a stronger position in terms of its ability to deliver the customer vision for the Service. The Service will be directly linked into the Council housing governance and engagement framework (as all other key Council Housing Services are), enabling greater transparency and accountability. This will also enable tenants and leaseholders to more easily have direct influence on how the service is shaped and delivered in the future.

Directly delivering the service in-house, with minor elements of it being outsourced to locally-based contractors wherever possible, would help support the concept of the 'Sheffield Brand'. Materials would be purchased from local suppliers wherever possible (subject of course to the usual procurement rules and Council policies), and the workforce would be predominantly local.

Sheffield would not be alone in insourcing a key service such as the HR&M Service. Independent research by APSE (the Association for Public Service Excellence) has identified a number of potential benefits of insourcing services, based on actual case-studies and local authority experiences:

- Improved performance
- Stronger links to corporate strategic objectives
- Greater flexibility, and more responsive to local and national policy changes
- Efficiency savings

- Improved customer satisfaction
- Enhanced local supply chains
- Better integration and joining-up with other relevant key services
- New development and employment opportunities for the city

There are of course risks associated with the option to insource the Service (as indeed there are with the other two alternative delivery options discussed in this report), and some of these risks are significant. However, measures are and will continue to be in place to mitigate these risks.

2) Which other local authorities have officers and members looked at?

During the course of compiling the report officers have visited Islington Council, Nottingham City Homes and Stockport Homes. In addition to this, a visit has been made to Sheffield by the City of Stoke on Trent.

Additionally officers have attended an “Association of Public Service Excellence” Seminar on Repairs and Maintenance at which speakers covered topics relating to the insourcing of housing maintenance.

A number of local authorities are in the same position as Sheffield in respect of working to develop in-sourced services who we are working closely with. Sheffield is by no means alone in developing plans for in-sourcing services across the country.

3) Which tenant groups have been consulted?

Tenants have been kept well-informed of progress on the Repairs Project. Updates have been given at February’s and April’s Local Area Housing Forums (LAHFs). All 56 TARAs across the city are invited to these, and so these meetings are representative of all tenants and leaseholders across the city and are a key channel through which the customer voice is heard. The project will be working closely with these, and other, forums over the next 2 years.

Updates have also been given at March’s Housing and Neighbourhoods Advisory Panel meeting and at meetings of the Investment and Repairs Partnership Group. An article will be included in the next edition of the InTouch magazine, which goes to all tenants and leaseholders.

Over the last 12 years tenants have been working closely with the Housing Service to develop customer service standards which are now embedded in the repairs service. As part of the existing repairs service governance arrangements, tenants and leaseholders can attend monthly Action Planning Groups. There are currently three groups whose role is to scrutinise performance and service standards across responsive repairs, heating mechanical and electrical and voids.

Customers have the opportunity to discuss how performance can be improved and make suggestions based on their day to day experience of the service. These Action Planning Groups are instrumental in ensuring that customers

have a direct influence in the way that services are shaped and performance standards maintained.

During the 'It's Your Shout' consultation campaign undertaken as part of the Future of Council Housing Programme, a large number of tenants were consulted with to find out which aspects of the housing service are most important to them. The Repairs Service emerged as one of the most important areas to tenants, and so a dedicated tenant-led Service Design Project Group was established to do more detailed work on building the tenant vision for the future repairs service.

The vision developed and agreed by this Group has formed the basis for work now being done with a sub-group of IRPG to develop a 'Target Operating Model' for the service. This Model will describe what the Service needs to do and how it needs to do it - and will help to ensure that the new repairs service achieves the agreed tenant vision.

What matters most to tenants is the performance, service standards and value-for-money of the repairs service - regardless of *who* delivers the service - and so these need to continue to be our focus in the consultation we do over the coming months.

This page is intentionally left blank