

Executive member report to Full Council, 29 June 2006

Modernisation Programme and York Pride Standards

During the last three years we have made extra funding available to the Housing Capital Programme. This funding has not only assisted in fulfilling our long term aim of making homes “decent” through the Tenants Choice Programme but also we have been able to implement a supplementary programme aimed at enhancing the neighbourhood as a whole to achieve, what we term, “York Pride” standards.

The main improvements to the communal environment and neighbourhood have been and continue to be:

- Internal decoration (painting)
- Communal decoration (heavy duty lino)
- Renewal of electrical installations in communal areas including improved lighting.
- Some replacement door entry systems
- Various external large repairs/renewals such as fencing, boundary walls, drying areas, sheds/garages, paths.
- Replacement worn or energy inefficient exterior cladding

In order to support day-to-day maintenance of communal areas and general neighbourhoods we have also appointed 7 extra handypersons using the HRA budget with more efficiency.

I am delighted to report that homes in York are now being modernised faster and to a higher specification than ever before. Tenant satisfaction with the modernization programme is consistently over 90%. We are making a real difference to peoples living environment.

Recent progress

The Housing team has successfully implemented a range of new initiatives over the last year. The results are all the more remarkable given that Housing has undergone a major restructure. The whole of the Housing team are to be congratulated on achieving such excellent results, which include:

- Approval and implementation of the new Allocations Policy
- Increasing the number of properties receiving improvements as part of the Housing Capital Programme;
- Key appointments made within the new Housing Services Restructure.
- The creation of two estate management teams:
 - A specialist income management team
 - A tenancy management. team
- 10% sample of our housing stock has now had an asbestos survey

- The Supporting People Programme delivered on all the action areas identified in the inspection report and completed all service reviews in time despite significant staff changes.
- A number of short-term pilot schemes for supported housing have been introduced through Supporting People Programme including for people with alcohol problems, pregnant teenage mothers and a bond guarantee scheme with Citizen's Advice Bureau
- The number of homeless families housed in bed and breakfast where we have statutory responsibility continues to be zero. However, it should be noted that there are families where we do not have a statutory duty and other types of households that are placed in bed and breakfast accommodation until alternative accommodation is available.
- Howe Hill Temporary Accommodation Hostel has now re-opened following extensive refurbishment and included a new block including 6 additional 2-bed room flats. This has increased the capacity at the hostel from 13 units to 20. Further additional work is programmed for 2006/7 to bring total capacity to 27 units. This will enable the council to better accommodate homeless people who may otherwise be housed in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- Significant sub-regional partnership work has been carried out with North Yorkshire Supporting People and the County Homelessness Forum to produce a Homeless Directory outlining all accommodation and advice services available throughout the county.
- Following consultation in 2004-5, members approved in 2005/6 the first Reviews of the Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleepers Strategy.
- Appointment of a dedicated Homeless Review Officer to reduce the impact of potential legal challenges to homelessness decisions under the Housing Act 1996.
- Introduction of Severe Weather Procedure providing emergency accommodation for rough sleepers in periods of cold weather.
- Commissioned research for travellers needs within York and submitted a bid for capital funding for improvements to the travellers site from the ODPM (outcome of this is still awaited)
- Delivery and facilitation of interagency homeless training within York.
- Following changes to the Local Plan three affordable homes in rural settlements have planning approval for development without public subsidy. These are the first homes in rural areas to be approved under the new planning policy guidance.
- The Housing Corporation have supported bids from housing associations for Social Housing Grant to build 65 new affordable homes in York between 2006-2008
- The first two homes provided by private developers under the council's new 50% affordable housing target are to be built in Knapton

- Raised York's housing profile in the region through a Housing Affordability summit hosted by the Government Office
- The Golden Triangle has launched a Good Practise manual for delivery of affordable housing through the planning system and piloted a enhanced Home Buy scheme to enabled more people to access affordable homeownership opportunities.
- The adaptations team continues to exceed its target by providing 97.64% minor adaptations within seven days of assessment in 2005/6, against a target of 95%.
- Major adaptations (those costing over £1000) were also approved on average in 22.04 weeks in 2005/6 which is faster than the target time of 30 weeks from assessment to approval of works
- Significant inroads into the council adaptations bathing waiting list have been made, which was reduced to 11.
- The private sector grant policy was reviewed in February. One of the main changes was the introduction of a new efficiency grant aimed at 75 year olds living in council tax A, B and C properties.
- The home appreciation loan scheme has now been formally delegated to Sheffield City Council. Detailed work is now being carried out about the delivery of the scheme on the ground, already we have had more than a dozen residents who have shown interest to date

Rent Arrears Reduced

But perhaps our biggest achievement has been in achieving a substantial reduction in rent arrears, during this period of change, coupled with a reduction in void turn around times.

There was significant improvement in performance on arrears with 97.23% of the rent collected as a % of the rent due (target A97.12%). This is due to a sustained focus on this element of the service and the established of a dedicated income management team I am grateful to all those involved in achieving what is the lowest ever recorded arrears percentage in the Council's history. This will benefit all tenants as it means there will be more money available to reinvest in maintaining and managing their properties.

Swipe card system

The swipe card system, which was introduced, has been successful in collecting rent. Up until June 11th 2006 there have been 58,127 payments received.

York Pride Blocks

We now have 10 York Pride Blocks across the City. The scheme was introduced to recognise and reward tenants who live in blocks of flats that are well cared for by those living there. A poster advertising the scheme has been placed in both the Acomb office and City Customer advice Centre.

Antisocial Behaviour

The partnership between the Council and Safer York Partnership is beginning to show good results in terms of tackling antisocial behaviour. There have been 39 evictions of tenants since April 2003 on the grounds of neighbour nuisance and antisocial behaviour, a further 19 cases of tenants leaving prior to eviction have also been recorded.

From April 2003 12 ASBO's have been issued, during the three years prior to April 2003 only 7 were issued. Currently there are 32 active ABC's.

All the agencies continue to work together to ensure that people understand that that keeping to there tenancy agreement is an essential element of retaining there home. I would like to acknowledge the part that other residents have played in providing evidence to ensure that positive action can be taken against those who persist in antisocial activities.

Allocations Policy

The new allocations policy has been successfully introduced and incorporates both a band based and choice based letting system. There are 5 bands and applicants are placed in one depending on there circumstances. Properties are allocated to the person in the highest band who has been on the waiting list for the longest period of time. This system has been introduced to make the process more equitable and transparent to applicants.

Choice Based Lettings

Some properties across the city are to be let using choice based lettings: a property is advertised and applicants express an interest in a property by 'bidding ' for it. This means that the applicant would like to be considered for the property. The applicant must be on the housing register in order to apply. Adverts will be displayed form Wednesday through to the following Monday. The adverts will be displayed on the council website, the Finance and Housing Centre, the Customer Advice Centre, the Acomb Housing office and Thursdays York Evening Press property supplement.

Good Neighbour Standard

As part of the new allocations policy we have introduced the Good Neighbour Standard to reward existing secure City of York Council tenants who have not breached there tenancy conditions for at least the last three years. Tenants who qualify will be given prior consideration for suitable properties within their areas of choice. Priority is given to the Good Neighbour Standard Tenant in the highest band who has been waiting the longest.

Looking Forward

To further enhance York Pride, In the coming year Housing Services are introducing a 'Tenants in Bloom' garden competition to reward those tenants who live in take pride in there gardens. The competition is also open to tenants who live in flats and only have communal gardens. Prizes will be presented to the winners in a ceremony at the Mansion House later this year.

Housing Services are also introducing a pilot 'Mobile Working IT Project' jointly with Resources. The pilot will enable field officers to be more pro-active, spending more time out of the office providing a better service to our customers in their homes.