



One Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee

6th July 2011

Report from the Director of Regeneration and Major Projects

For Action

Wards Affected: ALL

Report Title: HOUSING NEEDS TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the Housing Needs Transformation Project and updates Members on current progress. The project is part of the One Council programme and focuses on the work of the Housing Resource Centre and Housing Solutions in the Regeneration and Major Projects Department. The report also provides some information about how the impact of the project will be monitored and evaluated.

2.0 Background and context

- 2.1 The Housing Needs Transformation Project focuses on the work of the Council's Housing Resource Centre and Housing Solutions. The two sections are responsible for providing advice and assistance to people in housing need, including assessment of statutory homelessness, management of temporary accommodation and choice-based lettings. The two sections employ around 145 staff, with operational budgets of £5.783m in 2011/12.
- 2.2 The project builds on successful improvement work already done by the housing needs service to reduce levels of homelessness applications and use of temporary accommodation and has been driven by a number of different issues and agendas. These include a need:
- To meet operational budget reductions, with the services forecast to see a 30 per cent reduction in resources between 2010/11 and 2012/13;
 - To ensure that the management of customer contact within the service meets the requirements of the corporate Future Customer Services project and delivers related savings; and
 - To respond to, and manage the impact of, welfare reform and the new housing policy agenda. Changes to the housing benefit regime and temporary accommodation subsidy system will put upward pressure on temporary accommodation costs and are likely to increase service demands due to increased levels of homelessness. The wider housing reform agenda set out in the

Localism Bill will give the council more local discretion to determine its own housing policies but pose new challenges in terms of delivering affordable housing and addressing under-supply.

- 2.3 Initial service review work has identified scope to improve customers' experience of housing needs services and achieve efficiencies through closer alignment of workload and staffing resources, simplified procedures and better use of IT. Visits to other councils, with a range of different housing needs service models, have also helped to identify areas for development and focus proposals for future work.
- 2.4 The project will contribute to the Council's wider efficiency programmes, with forecast full year savings of £750,000.

3.0 Project approach and work streams

- 3.1 The broad aim of the project is to ensure that the Council provides a customer-focussed and effective housing needs services and makes best use of available resources (staffing, IT and accommodation for people in housing need). Three work streams have been set up to manage the work and are summarised briefly below:
- **Service transformation** – this work stream includes an end-to-end review and rationalisation of front-line housing needs services, including housing advice, homelessness prevention, assessment and the re-housing functions. The approach is very similar to work undertaken by the adult social care customer journey project and the lean review in revenues and benefits, with a strong emphasis on developing a more integrated, customer-focussed approach to service delivery and improving performance monitoring.
 - **Accommodation management** – a new Brent Accommodation Team will bring together the accommodation services that are currently managed across the two services into a single team. This will promote a more integrated, efficient approach to managing the accommodation portfolio and offer a single point of contact to private sector landlords and other housing providers. In the longer-term, all of the council's procurement and management of emergency accommodation could be consolidated in this team.
 - **Demand management** – this work stream covers a review of the housing allocations policy and development of a strategic tenancy policy, taking into account the new flexibilities introduced by the Localism Act. Full consultation with partners and Members will be undertaken during this work.
- 3.2 In terms of timelines, the aim is to fully implement any changes arising from the first two work streams by the end of March 2012. The third work stream on housing policy will operate to a longer-time frame, dependent on the progress of legislation. Work on this strand is not expected to commence until autumn 2011.
- 3.3 Project design and implementation is taking place at a time of increasing pressure on the service, with requests for housing support and numbers in temporary accommodation already starting to rise. An integral part of the project is therefore to make sure that the new structure is as efficient and sustainable as possible, with improved performance monitoring helping to ensure a timely and flexible response to new demands.

4 Progress with housing needs transformation project

4.1 The first two work streams began in mid-April 2011 and a Project Board, chaired by the Director of Regeneration and Major Projects, has been set up to steer the project and keep progress on track. The Assistant Director (Community Care) also sits on the Project Board, ensuring that learning from the customer journey project informs future work. Below is a short summary of progress to date:

4.2 Service transformation work stream

4.3 Lean consultants (Ad Esse) have been appointed to support this work stream, with work starting at the end of May 2011. The consultants are working closely with staff and service managers to map the service delivery process, identify waste and inefficiencies in key processes, and assess scope for improvements. Over the next month, improvement centres will be rolled out across the service to capture real time performance information and engage all front-line staff in developing new, leaner ways of working. This approach aims to create ownership of new ways of working across the service and will help to make the transition to new arrangements easier to manage. Proposals for a new service structure and remodelled customer contact arrangements will be developed over the next three months.

4.4 Accommodation management work stream

4.5 Activity and process mapping work across the accommodation-related services is now almost complete. Views on current services have also been sought from some external accommodation providers and internal customers. The Project Board recently considered a report setting out key findings from this work and agreed some broad principles to inform future service design. Further consultation with key stakeholders and more comparative work will take place over the next two months.

4.6 Communications and change management

4.7 A communications strategy has been agreed setting out plans for communication with staff, stakeholders, trade unions and service users. These include:

- Weekly staff e-mail updates from the Assistant Director of Housing highlighting key project developments.
- A project intranet page with key project documents and a list of FAQs.
- A series of briefing sessions for staff, with all staff attending initial project briefings on 18th May to learn about the project and give feedback.
- A magazine article about the project for an internal audience in Insight Magazine, with plans to cover the project in the Brent Magazine at a later stage.
- A survey of housing needs customers covering their views of the current service and areas for improvement.
- The production of information about the project for external stakeholders, with more formal engagement planned around the policy work stream.

4.8 In the longer-term, the project team will develop a more detailed change management plan to support the transition to the new structure. This will include a training and development programme to help staff understand the new ways of working and to take on new roles and responsibilities.

4.9 ICT

- 4.10 An ICT sub-group has been set up to ensure that any new processes and service developments are supported by effective ITC. Early work has found that there is scope to create more on-line forms and tools and streamline some of the current ICT processes to make them simpler and more user-friendly. The sub-group will also ensure that staff use ITC effectively, with support and training provided as necessary. No additional investment in ITC is currently planned; the focus is on improving the functionality of current systems.

5.0 Measuring the impact of the housing needs transformation project

- 5.1 The housing needs transformation project aims to deliver a number of benefits aligned to the Council's strategic objectives, including improving the quality and accessibility of services. These are summarised in the table below:

Area of impact	Anticipated Project Outcomes
Service transformation – better staffing and structure	A new integrated housing needs service model will reflect a clearer understanding of the customer journey and inter-relationship between different aspects of the business. There will be better alignment of workload and staffing resources. Staff will benefit from greater role clarity, with more clearly defined responsibilities and simplified procedures. There will be enhanced support for people in temporary accommodation, with improved move-on arrangements. Customers will be more satisfied with the service they receive.
Technology and information management	The service transformation work stream will ensure better use of the COUNT (collect once, use numerous times) principle across the service and ensure that IT resources support business objectives more effectively.
Better procurement and commissioning	The consolidation of accommodation functions in one section will promote a more integrated approach to the procurement and management of temporary accommodation and securing private rented homes. There will be a clearer range of well-publicised options for private sector landlords who want to work with the council. Void loss and penalty charges on temporary accommodation will be reduced.
Improved demand management	A new allocations and strategic tenancy policy will ensure that the Council is maximising opportunities to manage housing demand effectively, based on intelligent use of new policy flexibilities and a good understanding of the local housing market. A revised customer information strategy will give customers better information about their housing options (in writing and on-line), promoting more self-help and less direct customer contact.
Delivery of One Council proposals –	The service transformation work stream will ensure that the approach to customer contact supports corporate policy

reshaping customer contact	objectives and enhances customer focus across the service. It will also ensure delivery of savings identified within the Future Customer Service project.
Reduced financial costs	It is estimated that the delivery of the key projects will generate full year savings of £750,000, primarily through reductions in staffing levels. This represents a 12.7 per cent saving against the 2010/11 staffing budget and includes £600k identified for future savings within the Future Customer Service project.

5.2 As part of the transformation project, performance monitoring arrangements will be reviewed to ensure that the success of the new service model can be assessed and any under-performance can be successfully challenged and improved. This will also help to ensure that both managers and staff are clear about performance expectations and have the right information to identify and solve service problems at an early stage.

5.3 Some broad non-financial performance measures have also been identified to measure the impact of the transformation project and ensure that benefits are realised:

• Reduction in repeat visits to housing reception
• Increase in satisfaction with reception services
• Reduction in homelessness acceptances
• Reduction in average number of days to deliver a homelessness decision
• Reduction in number of households occupying temporary accommodation for by length of stay
• Reduction in number of days to process housing applications
• Reduction in number of housing applications received
• Increase in level of homelessness preventions
• Reductions in average number of documents scanned
• Increase in % of customer reporting satisfaction with resolution of their housing problems

6.0 Next steps

6.1 The first two work streams will conclude on 1st April 2012, with formal staff consultation on a new structure due to commence on 1st November 2011. The third work stream is not due to conclude until the end of December 2012, with a three month consultation period on new policies included in the project plan. The timetable for this strand could still be influenced by the progress of legislation.

6.2 Progress across all the work streams will be reported to the Corporate One Council Programme Office (PMO) on a monthly basis.

Contact officer:

Perry Singh
Assistant Director, Housing
Regeneration and Major Projects
Mahatma Gandhi House
Telephone: 020 8937 2341
Email: perry.singh@brent.gov.uk