

## Agenda Item: 13

Housing Review Board

25 June 2009

JJ



### Review of Communal Cleaning and Caretaking Service

#### Summary

This report presents the findings of the review of communal cleaning which has been undertaken following concerns raised during the preparations for the housing inspection. The communal cleaning service provided by East Devon District Council is in need of a new direction. We have had an indication that some residents who receive this service would welcome an improved service from the one currently being offered. Our consultation with tenants has revealed mixed views on the subject and the results are included in this report.

The detailed cost implications of any of the options explored in the report have yet to be established, therefore it is suggested that the Board discussion on this subject be based on the outcomes of the tenants survey results, and comparables with other high achieving Councils regarding their cleaning and caretaking services, before making any recommendations as to how you would like the preferred option progressed.

#### Recommendation

The Board provide a steer on which one of the options detailed in the report it wishes to see developed to improve the communal cleaning service.

#### a) Reasons for Recommendation

To obtain a steer from the Board on which of the options for improving the communal cleaning service you wish officers to work up in more detail, and whether you want us to incorporate a caretaking service option.

#### b) Alternative Options

Four options are set out in the report.

#### c) Risk Considerations

That agreement cannot be reached on the option to pursue.

#### d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

The policy position is explained in the report. Cost implications will be detailed at the next stage when a preferred option is selected.

#### e) Date for Review of Decision

A further report will be necessary once the options have been reduced.

---

## 1 Background

- 1.1 On 29 November 2007 the Housing Review Board was presented with a report on the need to review and improve the communal cleaning contract with Streetscene for the cleaning services they provide in respect of communal areas and community centres in the district.
- 1.2 The Board recommendations were as a result of a recognised need to look closely at the current contract in place, which had not been revisited for approximately 20 years. Although the current terms of the contract are comprehensive, there is a need to examine the contract to determine whether it meets current tenants' expectations, and/or is being performed to the full specification.
- 1.3 The Board were asked for some direction in terms of improving the current service and the future of the service for our tenants, and what such a service should look like.

The Board indicated that they would like to see the following:

- A full review to take place, and the specification in place to be re-negotiated to improve the communal cleaning services.
  - The service currently being offered should be expanded to provide higher quality communal cleaning and a defined caretaking duties paid for through an identified service charge, and that the work should be tendered on the basis of a detailed specification.
  - The Board also indicated they would like the Tenant and Leaseholder Customer Panel (TaLC) to be consulted on the proposals to charge the tenants for an improved service through a service charge to provide a caretaking service.
  - The Board finally indicated they would like a detailed cost proposal for service improvements to be brought back once those receiving the service and the service provider had been consulted. In the meantime, the Council would take steps to improve the quality and consistency of the current service and update the service specification to ensure it was accurate and achievable.
- 1.4 The current tenancy agreement for EDDC resident's states:

***4.9 Communal Areas. – If you occupy a property that has communal areas associated with it, for example with some flats or maisonettes, you must not litter, dirty, obstruct or allow pets you have to foul such areas. You are responsible for keeping clean any communal stairs and landings.***

- 1.5 Since the initial recommendations made by the Housing Review Board, a Communal Cleaning Review Group was set up to include all interested parties involved in the service to explore and progress the Board's recommendations.

## 2. Reasons for the review process.

- 2.1 The main reasons for reviewing the current communal cleaning arrangements are set out below:
  - Poor performance and increasing customer complaints about the Communal Cleaning Service.
  - Breakdown in communication between Housing & Streetscene in dealing with complaints.
  - Community Centre cleaning standards not acceptable.

- Audit Commission Inspection 2007 outcome & recommendations for improved communal cleaning.
- Out of date specification and increased cost implications regarding fulfilling a future reasonable service.
- Tenants increased expectations of cleaning service & clarity in Tenancy Agreement of responsibilities of communal cleaning.
- To inform the Housing Review Board of the issues to be addressed and provide a future a steer on tenant expectations to address the above (29th November 2007 HRB report).
- Contract monitoring, performance indicators and Service Level Agreement processes to be identified and implemented.

### **3. Progress to date**

3.1 In taking the Board's recommendations forward we have to date achieved the following:

- Communal Cleaning Contract Review Group formed.
- Regular meetings taking place with all parties to discuss the concerns and issues to be addressed.
- Improved communication with a view to achieve an enhanced understanding by all parties regarding problems and expectations of maintaining a good service.
- Review and improved cleaning specification, capturing more detail of expectations and clearer monitoring systems of the Contract.
- Involving residents in the Review Group and requesting resident involvement in the future definition of the Service by way of a customer survey.
- Better understanding by Senior Managers of the Operational roles of the cleaning services with 'back to the floor days' for those involved in the Group.
- Improved cleaning standards of community centres and communal areas.
- Responses to complaints and problematic locations identified by Streetscene cleaning staff to Estate Management staff in feedback on area 'hot spots'.

3.2 The Group also looked at options for longer term changes to the cleaning service by comparables with other social housing providers. This was achieved by researching cleaning services to ensure that this Council is providing a cleaning service which was comparable to other social housing providers. Also to ensure that if changes were to be made or put forward as possible options, that a good practice exercise had been carried out and was researched to provide the Board with some examples to consider.

3.3 A number of options were considered as possible enhancements or changes to our existing service:

#### **Option 1**

Stay as we are, and retain the current contract and specification as it is currently – this is not a favoured option as Streetscene have already expressed a wish not to continue being the service provider for this Contract, and wish to pass this service over to staff to manage in the Housing & Social Inclusion Service as soon as possible.

**Option 2**

Revise the current specification (with assistance from Streetscene) and then put the Contract out for tender with an enhanced specification section to include additional cleaning requirements for all Community Centres, Guest Rooms on sheltered housing schemes, and the new district Offices at Burnside Exmouth, Home Safeguard Lymebourne Community Alarm Office, Honiton district office at Dunning Court, Palmer House district offices Exmouth, and the Lymebourne annex staff offices and toilets. The costs would be based on the current hourly rate paid to the staff and Streetscene would be asked to give estimated cost forecasts for the materials, transport costs and management costs for the amendments required to identify these additional areas to be included for cleaning in the Contract.

**Option 3**

Develop and improve the current specification to clearly re-define the areas to receive increased frequency of cleaning, and develop a caretaking element to cover basic scheme and communal area caretaking functions to include path and moss clearing, litter picking, small repairs and maintenance (yet to be agreed). The enhanced service specification to include the Community Centres, guest rooms on sheltered housing schemes, and basic maintenance duties for which a 'caretaking & additional cleaning element' will be identified through a service charge which will be passed onto the residents who will receive these services at an additional cost, separate to their rent. This model could be based on the Teign Housing model and be implemented using their support and guidance towards full migration towards an integrated cleaning and caretaking service.

**Option 4**

Any of the above options, but with the current specification and Contract not being put out to Tender but be brought back in-house, managed and run by the Housing Services Team (Estate Management Section), Thereafter an additional caretaking and enhanced cleaning regime of the indicated areas can be developed and a service charge applied for this additional service once the de-pooling of the service charges has been completed from April 2010.

- 3.4 The final task for the Group is to report back to the Housing Review Board its findings after the process of looking at an all options approach for the future of the cleaning contract for East Devon Council residents who benefit from the service, and make recommendations on possible future communal cleaning arrangements. The Group also needed to take into account their views on the future of the service, but also look at the cost implications and good practice examples the service could base itself upon if changed in the future.
- 3.5 The Action Plan (below) was presented to the final Review Group meeting held in March 2009 for approval as the remaining outstanding work still to be achieved before presentation of their findings back to the Housing Review Board.

**Actions to be achieved****March April May June July****Set dates for future meetings**

•

**Agree content of Service Specification**

•

**Present Review Group findings to TALC**

•

**Present Review Group findings to HRB**

•

**Development of improved service subject to HRB option choice**

•

3.6 An important element of the review has been a Communal Cleaning Survey (**annex 1**). The results have shown a clear indication from those who returned their forms with comments and indications that such residents are willing to consider paying a small contribution by way of a service charge for a caretaking service and an improved cleaning service.

3.7 It is important to note that those tenants who expressed an opinion in favour were not given any indication of what that caretaking service or details of such an enhanced cleaning service would be, they just indicated a desire to have a better service and this is an important point that so many were prepared to pay a contribution towards it.

3.8 Another point for the Board to consider is that if a caretaking and enhanced cleaning service is introduced, all tenants receiving and entitled to full Housing Benefit would have such charges fully covered and paid for within their Benefit entitlement, and therefore the cost would only be paid in full by those not entitled to Benefit, or paid only partially for those entitled and in receipt of partial Housing Benefit.

3.9 The Customer Survey results are summarised as follows:

- 56% were satisfied with standard of communal cleaning on their block.
- 68% considered their stairwells to be clean.
- 71% stated the landings or corridors were clean.
- 55% though the communal areas were free of dust and cobwebs.
- 74% were satisfied with the politeness and helpfulness of the cleaning staff.
- When asked to rate the cleaning service over the last six months most (67%) thought it neither improved nor got worse.
- 56% wanted the current service improved.
- 57% would like to see the inclusion of a caretaker service.
- 70% thought the cleaning should be carried out weekly.

*(The above totals do not include those who left questions blank)*

- 548 questionnaires were sent out to all tenant and leaseholders who received communal cleaning to their properties.
- 188 replies were received from eleven different towns across East Devon giving us a respectable 34% return rate.

The full survey findings are detailed in (**annex 1**)

- 3.10 You will see that this consultation process was well subscribed, with a good return of forms to give reliable feedback. Many comments were made which have now been passed onto Streetscene for them to look at with their current cleaning staff on a performance based approach, and to continue to improve the current contract standards until a further decision is made for the future of the cleaning services.

#### **4. TALCP consultation**

- 4.1 On 31 March 2009 the TALCP were presented with a report on the Cleaning Contract Review Group's recommendations and findings to discuss and give their views on the data regarding the communal cleaning service. The TALCP discussed at length the recommendations for each option. Ted Brown, Tenant representative who attended the Communal Cleaning Review Group meetings also presented his report in response to the report.
- 4.2 At a further TALCP meeting on 28 April 2009 the report and suggested options were again discussed, and the details put forward by the attendees for consideration are reproduced in **annex 2**.
- 4.3 The TALCP were also given the indication already expressed by Streetscene that to stay as is was not an option, as they had expressed a clear desire to not continue as this service provider, and to not be considered in the future as a contractor for this service. The TaLC took this clear message which influenced what options they would like to have explored and researched.

#### **5. Cleaning service research findings**

- 5.1 In order to look at other communal cleaning services which could be considered good practice, the Business Unit Manager and the Housing Asset and Business Development Officer visited Teign Housing in Newton Abbot who has successfully improved their communal cleaning services over the last few years. They are now in the process of expanding their caretaking services for residents by way of a consultation process to increase the amount of caretaking services available on their sheltered housing schemes, and those living in flats whereby communal areas needed to be managed.
- 5.2 Teign Housing and EDDC have almost identical numbers of sheltered housing and blocks of flats which have communal stairwells and landings which are catered for within a cleaning service, although overall they have less housing stock, they are a good source of good practice benchmarking for us to use locally.
- 5.3 Also set out in **annex 2** is how our current cleaning services compares with the service Teign Housing currently has in place. Their service is fully funded by the service charge levied to only those residents who receive the service and this charge covers all the costs of operating the service including their management costs to run the service in house.
- 5.4 I also researched the Audit Commission guidelines on housing cleaning and caretaking services, and the following was found as a recommendation to Dacorum Borough Council in their Housing Inspection report.
- 5.5 The Audit Commission comments were:

'The Government has placed a duty of best value on local authorities to deliver services to clear standards, of cost and quality by the most economic efficient and effective means available. From 1 April 2000 best value authorities are being asked to conduct best value reviews of all their functions over a 5 year cycle. Authorities must show they have applied the 4C's of best value to every review.

- **Challenging** - why and how a service is being provided.
- **Compare** – their performance with others (including organisations in the private and voluntary sectors).
- **Competition** – embrace fair competition as a means of securing efficient and effective services.
- **Consult** – with local tax payers, customers and the wider business community.

5.6 Dacorum Borough Council at the time of the Inspection had 4 operatives and divided their time between 70% cleaning duties and 30% caretaking tasks. They were awarded a 2 star rating for this service provision due to the following reasons which were evidenced by the Inspector:

- Regular customer satisfaction surveys showing good levels of satisfaction.
- Well defined specifications for cleaning and processes for ensuring conformance to the specified standards.
- Cleaning standards on sites maintained to a high level on the majority of their sites.
- Good comparative data on costs showing costs to be average in comparison to other authorities.
- Well developed procedures for receiving tenant complaints about the service but low levels of complaints actually received.
- Active involvement of customers, staff and members of the Council in service reviews.
- Clear targets for improvement and timescales by which those improvements should be delivered.
- Commitment and pride amongst staff in the quality of the service.

5.7 The Asset and Business Development Officer researched four other Councils cleaning and caretaking services and these were:  
Fareham District Council, Dundee City Council, Three Rivers District Council and Aberdeen City Council, and some of those findings were taken into account when making recommendations for future options for the Board to consider to now progress for the cleaning services provided for East Devon District residents.

5.8 The Board is invited to indicate which of the options set out in this report it favours in order that we can work this up in more detail, cost the implications and report back to a future meeting with a full appraisal.

### **Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications set out within the report. However if it is decided to introduce a new scheme under a new contractor then there will be EU Procurement issues to consider.

### **Financial Implications**

The financial implications cannot be determined at this stage.

### **Consultation on Reports to the Executive**

None.

## **Background Papers**

- ❑ Audit Commission Best Value recommendations -2000.
- ❑ A guide to Social rent reforms in the local authority Sector – Office of the Deputy Prime Minister – 2003.
- ❑ Teign Housing Cleaning & Caretaking Procedures & Job descriptions – 2008.
- ❑ Fareham Borough Council report to the Executive Committee October 2004.
- ❑ Dundee City Council report to Housing Committee - February 2002.
- ❑ Aberdeen City Council report to Community Services Committee November 2005.
- ❑ Three Rivers District Council report to Executive Committee February 2007.
- ❑ Housing review Board recommendations and minutes – 27 November 2007.
- ❑ East Devon District Council Tenancy Agreement – 2008.
- ❑ East Devon District Council specification for cleaning of communal areas – circa 1987.

---

Jill Johnson  
Housing Business Manager

Housing Review Board  
25 June 2009