

Business Plan

Strategic Director (Neighbourhood Services Directorate) – Housing Services

Head of Service: Deborah McLaughlin

Service Summary

- Housing Services will aim to ensure that all Manchester residents have access to decent, affordable, energy efficient homes in neighbourhoods of their choice, which are clean, safe, thriving and diverse. We will enhance neighbourhoods through supporting the delivery of new high quality homes and by targeted improvements to the existing stock.
- Building on the City's economic success there is and will continue to be significant growth in the number of households in the city and access to housing is now the key issue across all tenures. Factors include:
 - Inappropriate housing offer to sustain economic growth
 - Average income levels have not risen in line with house prices
 - Fewer options available to first time buyers or low income families
 - Tenure imbalance being exacerbated by an increase in 'buy to let' and 'buy to leave' properties
 - The number of social lets has fallen
 - A significant increase in waiting lists
 - Increased pressures on homelessness, in particular, temporary accommodation
 - High levels of social deprivation in areas of the city, including skills gaps, low aspirations and resulting support needs
 - Demographic change and community cohesion issues
 - Inadequate equity products to enable a wider range of households to access ownership
- It is clear that Housing Services needs to work through the Strategic Housing Partnership to meet these challenges and achieve the Community Strategy target of 60% owner occupation. It is therefore crucial that we develop a holistic approach by
 - Supporting growth through appropriate new provision
 - Optimising the use of, and raising quality and standards of existing private sector homes
 - Ensuring effective management of social housing
 - Enabling people reach their full potential through the development of integrated work to address worklessness and tools to improve access to a wider range of stakeholder products.

Headline Priorities

To support the Service in achieving the aims and objectives above, the following key Service Priorities have been identified:

- Secure stable finances through the Housing Investment Options process and secure sustainable, long term funding for the Council's future housing functions:
- Develop a housing market growth strategy set within the context of the Community Plan and complimented by improvements in quality of existing stock, market restructuring and in residents enhanced access to affordable housing:
- Provide a strategic housing lead across the city, play an influential role within the region and sub-region and through the Strategic Housing Partnership (SHP), maximise the opportunities presented in the Green Paper and housing reform agenda:
- Implement the reorganisation of the Strategic Housing Service ensuring it is fit for future purpose by 2010:
- Complete the successful transfer of ownership and/or management of housing stock and create and staff new, high quality housing organisations.
- Facilitate access to high quality affordable housing in the City by harnessing the skills, experience and resources available to the City and our partners to ensure the housing offer supports the growth agenda and promotes community cohesion.
- Carry out fundamental challenge, review and restructure of Homelessness Division to refocus on prevention and worklessness and developing a response to the Legacy Asylum Programme; develop and implement the Hostel Replacement Strategy.
- Ensure the housing related support needs of vulnerable people are met through the Supporting People Strategy to achieve the Community Strategy/Local Area Agreement objectives and compliment area-based Strategic Regeneration Frameworks.
- Promote active neighbourhood management with all partners, particularly in relation to the Crime and Disorder agenda and community cohesion.
- Develop and implement policies and initiatives to deliver environmentally sustainable new and existing homes in line with the City's Climate Change Strategy and fuel poverty agenda.
- Contribute to the delivery of neighbourhoods of choice by fully implementing strategies to improve the physical environment across all tenures, particularly with regard to implementing Private Sector Licensing

- The work of the Service will be underpinned by concerted efforts to improve value for money, such as:-
 - Establishing the Homelessness Prevention Executive Group to look specifically at Meeting the CLG target of achieving reduction's in the use of temporary accommodation and finding new ways to increase prevention activity, thus reducing the overall number of presentations.
 - Introduction of new technology in the Housing On Call Centre thereby enabling greater efficiencies, including a reduction in staff numbers, further supplier efficiencies and benchmarking costs and quality with other call centres.
 - And, a similar project to find a replacement for Homefinder with a modern cross-tenure Choice Based Lettings system

Key Activities

The following are some of the key objectives/activities that will contribute to the delivery of Housing Service Priorities

- Successfully negotiate additional funding from central government to support growth bid and continue Housing Market Renewal Programme
- Publish the Corporate Housing Strategy within the framework of the ten-year investment strategy.
- Complete the restructure of centrally based services.
- Deliver a contract monitoring and quality assessment framework to allow stakeholder involvement in contract and performance management for Decent Homes delivery where the Council retains stock ownership
- In partnership with Planning implement through housing and planning policy increased access to affordable housing
- Review Allocations Policy to take account of Access to Affordable Housing Strategy
- Review Homelessness and implement change across business plan period
- Widen Housing Choices Scheme to include access to private rented tenure
- Investigate potential for assisting homeless people access work and skills
- Develop new 5 year Supporting People Strategy that reflects the need to contribute to the Local Area Agreement and Strategic Regeneration Frameworks

- Ensure Strategic Housing Partnership community cohesion sub group develop and begin to implement plans for meeting Respect Standard for Housing Management and actions to improve and maintain community cohesion
- Increase the take up of micro-generation technologies in the domestic sector in new and existing homes across the city and across all housing tenures
- Review Private Sector Housing strategy and Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder Programme to reflect emerging housing reform agenda
- Procure a Private Finance Initiative contractor(s) to regenerate Brunswick and Collyhurst including the delivery of decent homes and a range of housing for sale.

Key Challenges facing the service

- As the Housing Service goes forward there will be a number of management challenges that will be constantly monitored, principally by the Heads of Service Performance Group.
- The group takes collective responsibility and ownership of these challenges, including finding solutions. The group will provide regular exception reports to the Departmental Management Team on all key challenges. These have been identified through various management focus groups. These challenges are under constant review and include the following:
 - Ensuring synergy between a number of business partners from a range of organisations in the public, private and voluntary and community sector each with different aims and objectives.
 - Continued pressures on resources as a result of challenging national and local financial settlements.
 - A continual search for improved value for money and increased efficiency whilst maintaining excellent standards of service delivery and customer care.
 - Managing community expectations whilst work to increase access to affordable housing continues. This is particularly important within the context of rapid household growth and associated diversity of income.
 - Sustained and increasing pressures on the Homelessness Division, particularly temporary accommodation.
 - Monitoring national economic circumstances and measuring the impact on the regional and sub-regional economy, including local housing markets.
 - Maintaining staff morale during a period of rapid organisational change
 - Private sector interventions, including Licensing to drive up standards for all residents and to support the regeneration of the City.

