
Meeting: Social Care Health and Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date: 1 August 2011

Subject: Tenant Service Authority – Local Offers and Annual Report

Report of: Julie Ogley, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing

Summary: The report provides Members with a briefing on the Housing Service's Local Offers and an update on the 2011 Annual Report. The Local Offers have been agreed with officers and tenants following months of meetings and consultations. The Local Offers follow four National Standards set out by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). The aim of the Offers is to improve services provided by the Council as well as raising awareness of what is available.

Contact Officer: Zulf Awan, Tenant Involvement Manager

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

None identified as result of this report.

Financial:

None directly at present. The delivery of the Local Offers and production of the Annual report is budgeted for in existing budgets.

Legal:

It is a requirement that all local authorities with housing stock must produce an Annual Report and Local Offers in consultation with their tenants. This was originally an area that was monitored by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA). However the TSA is one of the many organisations that the Coalition Government has agreed to disband. Although many of the duties carried out by the TSA will be handed over to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the TSA still want to see Local Offers and Annual Reports produced by all Registered Providers. The HCA has agreed to continue with this commitment.

Risk Management:

There is a reputational risk to the Council if we do not respond to the new regulations and requirements on all housing authorities.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

None identified as a result of this report.

Equalities/Human Rights:

None identified as a result of this report.

Community Safety:

None identified as a result of this report.

Sustainability:

n/a

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **That the Social Care, Health and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the Local Offers and receive an update on the Annual Report for 2010/11.**

2. **Background to the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 and the Tenant Services Authority**
 - 2.1 Members may recall the presentation and report on the Annual Report and Local Offers in October last year. The report included an update on the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 and the development of the Tenant Services Authority (TSA).
 - 2.2 The full list of Local Offers is attached as **Appendix A** to this report. Some examples of Local Offers are:
 1. Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
 - The Council will involve tenants in more of a scrutiny role inviting them to inspect all parts of the service
 - The Council will hold at least two conferences/open days per year
 2. Home
 - The Council will provide laminated user guides with all new gas and electric installations
 - Appointments on repairs will be agreed at time of booking
 3. Tenancy
 - The Council will provide an in-house debt advice service
 - The Council will hold Open Days to promote Sheltered Housing
 4. Neighbourhood and Community
 - Abandoned properties will be investigated and made secure within 10 days from when the Council is notified/made aware
 - 2.3 All Councils and Housing Associations were required to implement new national standards, and consult with tenants in producing Local Offers which were to be agreed by April 2011. Local Offers are essentially agreed service standards

between the landlord and the tenant based on local consultation. These Local Offers are based on the National Standards which are the minimum level of service to be achieved. If both landlords and tenants want to provide and receive a higher level of service, then these form the Local Offer.

3. Requirements from the TSA

3.1 The TSA have stated that Local Authority Local Offers must include the following:

1. Be produced with full consultation of tenants
2. The Local Offers must fall in line with four of the National Standards including:
 - a. Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
 - b. Home
 - c. Tenancy
 - d. Neighbourhood and Community
3. The Offers must be measurable and have realistic targets.
4. Local Offers should look to improve services provided by the Council as well as raising awareness of what is available

4. Tenant Consultation

4.1 In the process of developing these Local Offers, the Housing Service carried out significant consultation from the very early stage. Members of the two main tenant forums, Way Forward Panel and Sheltered Tenants Action Group, assisted staff with writing the document and ensured tenants views and opinions were listened to, and taken in to consideration when producing them. In addition, a survey was sent to all tenants, and a number of meetings were held to allow tenants to give their views in person.

4.2 These were at the following locations:

- Tenants Conference, Central Bedfordshire Council, Watling House, Dunstable.
- Tenants Conference, Leighton Linlade Town Council, The White House, Leighton Buzzard.
- Tenants Conference, Customer Service Centre, Bedford Square, Houghton Regis.
- Sheltered Housing Open Day, Sheltered Housing Scheme, Furness Avenue, Dunstable.
- Sheltered Housing Open Day, Sheltered Housing Scheme, Manor Court, Caddington.
- Sheltered Housing Open Day, Sheltered Housing Scheme, Finch Crescent, Linlade.
- Kensworth Community Drop In, Kensworth Village Hall, Kensworth.
- Sheltered Tenants Action Group Meeting, Dunstable Community Fire Station
- Focus Panel Meetings, Dunstable Community Fire Station

- Way Forward Panel Meetings, Watling House, Dunstable.

- 4.3 These meetings were also used as an opportunity for tenants to discuss any aspect of housing, to discuss the proposed Local Offers and to let the Council know what tenants saw as their local priorities for the Housing Service. They also allowed staff to seek feedback on any additional information that tenants would like to see in an annual report.
- 4.4 Way Forward Panel members supported officers at all of these meetings, which allowed them to assist in the gathering of any necessary information. They could also see at first hand the issues raised by residents. Officers have also made specific visits to Resident Associations and forums in the area to ask them directly what their priorities are for the service in relation to the Standards
- 4.5 To supplement these meetings, articles were included in Housing Matters, and a further 400 questionnaires were sent out to members of the Housing Sounding Board to gather more information on both Local Offers and the Annual Report. Through all these methods of engaging with residents, the Housing Service has collected some very useful information to go in to the report and for the development of the Local Offers.
- 4.6 This whole process also demonstrates very strongly the significant efforts that housing staff are making to engage with the Council's tenants, and giving them the opportunity to shape the Housing Service going forward.
- 4.7 The Tenant Participation Team has also worked closely with other local housing providers to share ideas and forms of engagement. Tenants too, have been given the opportunity to meet other tenant groups and receive joint training.
- 4.8 To add to this an overview of all Local Offers provided by the six largest landlords in Bedfordshire was carried out by the Housing Partnership Team based at Luton Borough Council.
- 4.9 A summary of the findings is attached as Appendix B to this report. The *Profile of Local Offers* show that the Council have covered more service areas than any other landlord in producing its Local Offers

5. Progress to date

- 5.1 The Housing Service is able to demonstrate some early achievements and steps in the right direction in terms of meeting these Local Offers. These include:
- The implementation of new IT systems for use by residents in two Sheltered Housing Schemes, namely Manor Court in Caddington and Gale Court in Barton Le Clay.
 - Welcome packs for all new tenants
 - Tenant involvement in procuring contracts such as the new Cleaning Contract for communal areas
 - The first of the two Open Days will be going ahead in September.

- New Leaseholders Handbook has been written and agreed with the Leaseholders Panel and sent out to all leaseholders

6. Update on Annual Report 2009/10

6.1 Last year's Annual Report was sent out In October to all Council tenants. Tenants were invited to complete a feedback form to share their opinions on the report. This allowed staff to find out what worked and what could be improved in readiness for this year's report.

6.2 The figures below suggest that the majority of residents that read the report were very satisfied with it.

1. Overall satisfaction with the Annual Report

	%
Satisfied	87
Neither satisfied/dissatisfied	11
Dissatisfied	2

2. The design of the Annual Report

	%
Satisfied	87
Neither satisfied/dissatisfied	12
Dissatisfied	1

3. How easy was the Annual Report to read and understand?

	%
Easy	79
Neither easy nor difficult	20
Difficult	1

4. Do you think the Annual Report provided a balanced picture of the Housing Service's performance?

	%
Yes	85
No	4
Don't know	11

6.3 To add to this a national group of tenants, plus organisations such as Tenants Participatory Advisory Service and Confederation of Comparative Housing were brought together to look at many reports from all over the country. This overview was funded by the Tenant Services Authority's "Tenant Excellence Fund" with the purpose of identifying good and poor examples of Annual Reports.

6.4 The report from the TSA is called "*Good Start, but could do better*". Their findings stated that the Council's Annual Report was one of the best in the country in terms of Local Authority reports. It also noted a section of the Annual Report as a very good model of explaining how the Council measured tenant involvement and felt the explanation on Local Offers was clearly defined.

7.0 Progress on the Annual Report 2010/11

This year's Annual Report is underway in terms of meeting with a panel of tenants that are helping to produce it. Similar to the last report, staff are working

with colleagues in the Directorate's Business Transformation Team to assist with collating figures for the service and that of other Registered Providers in the area. At the Way Forward Panel meeting in July this year the Panel agreed that comparisons should be made with the Council's previous year's figures plus Luton Borough Council and the Eastern Region average. Housemark (benchmarking club) data will be used to ensure data entered is correct, up to date and the comparisons made are using the same measures. This will allow officers to make accurate comparisons on a much wider group of landlords than previously.

7.2 At this stage the figures are not yet available for comparison purposes but will become available late August. The time available will be used to write reports on what has been achieved against commitments made in last year's Annual Report. This will be through a series of meetings with the Panel to ensure they are satisfied with the content and finding.

7.3 The report will be available on line with all the up to date figures by 1 October this year. Tenants will be sent a copy of the Annual Report with their rent statements by the end of October, and all Members will be sent a copy at the same time.

8.0 Conclusion and Next Steps

8.1 The report will be available on line with all the up to date figures by 1 October this year. There is not a requirement to send it to the TSA or the HCA this year.

8.2 Copies will be sent to all tenants by the end of October, together with the rent statements as a cost saving exercise. They will also include a questionnaire asking tenants for feedback on the Annual Report. This will assist in the production of the next Annual Report.

8.3 Work will also continue in setting up a Scrutiny Panel of tenants who will take the lead on ensuring that the Local Offers are monitored and delivered on, over the course of this financial year. Local Offers will be reviewed and refined on an annual basis.

8.4 Members will also be sent a copy of the Annual Report in October.

Appendices:

Appendix A – List of Local Offers

Appendix B – Profile of Local Offers – Comparisons with other local Landlords

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

- Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2010, Tenant Services Authority – Annual Report.
- Tenant Services Authority report on Annual Reports – "*Good Start, but could do better*". See pages 22, 34, 36, 47 and 59. (link: http://www.tenantservicesauthority.org/upload/pdf/A_Good_Start_-_Could_do_Better_-_full_version.pdf)

Location of papers: Watling House, Dunstable