

Tenant and Leaseholder Services Transition Update

OSP	27 August 2020
Report Author	Sally O'Sullivan, Tenant and Leaseholder Services Manager
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Helen Whitehead, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing & Community Services
Status	For Information
Classification:	Unrestricted
Key Decision	No
Reasons for Key	N/A
Previously Considered by	N/A
Ward:	N/A

Executive Summary:

This report provides members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel about the progress made towards bringing the housing management and maintenance service, currently provided by East Kent Housing, back in house.

Recommendation(s):

Members are asked to:

1. Consider and scrutinise the contents of the report.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Financial and Value for Money	The financial implications of the decision to bring Housing Management and Maintenance services back in house were set out in a detailed report to Cabinet on 30 July 2020, and revised operational budgets will be considered by full council at its meeting on 10 September 2020. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
Legal	The legal implications of bringing the housing management and maintenance service back in house were considered in the report presented to Cabinet on 17 February 2020. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.
Corporate	The decision to bring housing management and maintenance services back in house will provide an opportunity to improve services provided to the councils tenants and leaseholders and to ensure that the service is more accountable to members and open to scrutiny from tenants and leaseholders. This specifically supports the council's service ambitions, as set out in its published Corporate Statement.

Equality Act 2010 & Public Sector Equality Duty	<p>Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to the aims of the Duty at the time the decision is taken. The aims of the Duty are: (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and (iii) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.</p> <p>Protected characteristics: age, sex, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy & maternity. Only aim (i) of the Duty applies to Marriage & civil partnership.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="418 699 1370 955"> <tr> <td colspan="2">Please indicate which aim is relevant to the report.</td></tr> <tr> <td>Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act,</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.</td><td></td></tr> </table> <p>The council's tenants and leaseholders include residents that have protected characteristics as set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty.</p> <p>An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed and published when the decision was taken to bring housing management and maintenance services back in house. The assessment identified positive impacts for tenants and leaseholders with physical disabilities. No negative impacts were identified.</p> <p>Any changes or improvements considered to the service, following go live on 1 October 2020 will be subject to further Equalities Impact assessments.</p>	Please indicate which aim is relevant to the report.		Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act,		Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it		Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.	
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CORPORATE PRIORITIES (tick those relevant)	
Growth	
Environment	
Communities	✓

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The council's Cabinet decided to bring Housing Management and Maintenance Services back in house at its meeting on 17 February 2020, and agreed to delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive to terminate the agreement with East Kent Housing (EKH) and establish a new in house service. Delegated authority was further agreed for initial transition costs of up to £250k in 2020/21.

- 1.2 A further report to Cabinet on 18 June 2020 set out further specific costs in relation to the ICT needs of the new service, particularly in relation to the Northgate system. Cabinet approved specific capital and revenue funding, totalling £187k in 2020/21 and on-going revenue funding of £82k for these costs.
- 1.3 A detailed HRA budget review was presented to Cabinet on 30 July 2020. Cabinet agreed to recommend a revised budget to council, including the one-off transition funding required to terminate the arrangement with EKH and set up the new in-house service, as set out in 1.1 and 1.2 above, and a revised service budget for the on-going costs of the new service.
- 1.4 Working with the other owner councils of Canterbury City Council, Dover District Council and Folkestone and Hythe District Council, notice has been served on East Kent Housing to terminate the current arrangement on 30 September 2020. The new in-house service will be launched on 1 October 2020. This report set out the progress that has been made in establishing the new service.

2. Staff Recruitment

- 2.1 Detailed work has been completed on the staffing arrangements for the new service and the costs of this are included within the budget papers presented to Cabinet. The new service will employ around 58 officers, providing a range of functions across the service. The new service will be led by a new post of Tenant and Leaseholder Services Manager, reporting to the Director of Housing and Planning and an appointment has been made to this role.
- 2.2 Existing staff at EKH were invited to express a preference about the council that they would transfer to, and this process has seen offers made to 28 people in the new Thanet service. This number may change if people successfully apply for alternative roles or leave EKH before the transition date of 1 October 2020. The officers will transfer to the council to continue with the same role that they currently perform. It has been agreed with EKH and the other councils that any redundancies would be kept to an absolute minimum, and only a small number of officers at EKH have not been able to secure a new role so far. These are officers that currently undertake duties that will not be required by any of the new council services.
- 2.3 Recruitment to the remaining vacancies is progressing well, with 9 appointments confirmed and 19 posts progressing through the recruitment process. The remaining roles are ones that can be recruited following the launch of the new service.
- 2.4 Out of a total of 16 managers, team leaders and supervisors only 2 posts remain to be filled.

3. Induction and Go Live

- 3.1 The go live date of the new service is set for 1 October 2020, and extensive induction plans are in place for all new and transferring staff. This includes the issuing of new ICT equipment, TDC email accounts and telephone numbers, briefing and handover sessions prior to go-live with EKH and a series of training events planned for the first weeks.

- 3.2 Proposals for service cover during the first two weeks have been discussed and agreed with representatives of the Thanet Tenants and Leaseholders board, so that essential services are maintained throughout and arrangements with the council's principal repairs contractors are being developed.
- 3.3 Officers are holding weekly contact sessions with transferring EKH staff and where newly recruited officers start prior to 1 October 2020 there will be opportunity for them to meet with their new teams and colleagues.
- 3.4 The four councils and EKH have agreed the principle that services would not change on day 1. But after this, each council can develop and implement its own service improvement plans with its own tenant and leaseholders, staff and elected members.

4. Resident Involvement

- 4.1 Regular briefing meetings have been held with representatives of the Thanet Tenants and Leaseholder Board so that they are aware of progress and can input into issues as they arise. Discussions have been held on issues such as:
 - Service provision during the first two weeks.
 - Functionality of the council's website for tenants and leaseholders.
 - Consulting with tenants and leaseholders about priorities for a service improvement programme.
 - Information to be provided to tenants and leaseholders in advance of go-live.
- 4.2 The new staff structure will include a Resident Involvement Manager, supported by a Customer Engagement Officer and a Customer Insight Officer. The aim of this service is to develop a much greater understanding of the needs and priorities of tenants and leaseholders and to identify a wider range of opportunities for people to become involved in the service.
- 4.3 There will be an on-going role for the Thanet Tenants and Leaseholders Group, with direct elected member involvement in regular meetings. However this does need to be supplemented with new opportunities for a broader mix of people to contribute.

5. ICT Support

- 5.1 The ICT requirements, particularly in relation to the Northgate Housing Management System were set out in a separate report to Cabinet, so that costs could be agreed.
- 5.2 The agreed approach to the Northgate system used by EKH is for it to be a system hosted by Northgate, on their cloud and then subsequently separated into four individual systems for each council. Detailed plans are in place with Northgate and the other councils for this transition, which will be completed during the 6 months following transition. Interim arrangements are in place to ensure that the system and data remain available to staff over the transition period.
- 5.3 The councils and EKH have set up an ICT workstream to help coordinate the transition of the Northgate system, but also to review other systems currently used by EKH and ensure suitable arrangements are in place for these as well.
- 5.4 For EKH staff transferring to the new Thanet service, they will be required to move from Microsoft Office 365 to Google for their main office systems including email

functions. Arrangements are in place with the council's digital team to support transferring staff through this transition.

6. Communications

- 6.1 The council's Communications and Digital Service have fully integrated into the work to manage the transition and are providing support in planning communications with new and transferring staff, with tenants and leaseholders and with other stakeholders.
- 6.2 This support includes:
 - Developing new public web pages for the new service, including advice, guidance and self-service for tenants and leaseholders.
 - A Google site with induction information for transferring and new staff.
 - Weekly briefing sessions with transferring staff.
 - Designing appropriate and timely mail outs and communications with tenants and leaseholders about the new service arrangements.

- 6.3 Following transition the council's Resident Involvement Manager will be available to work with representatives of the councils tenants and leaseholders to design and distribute regular communications about the service.

7. Finance and Governance

- 7.1 The four councils and EKH have established a finance and governance officer group to coordinate work in these areas. This work has included the service of formal notices on EKH to terminate the existing management agreement on 30 September 2020. It has also included reviewing data protection and data sharing arrangements so that the council will have access to the information required during and after the transition for the service and that disruption to key programmes of work and projects is kept to a minimum. The partners are also drafting a transfer agreement between the partners, so that issues relating to the winding up of EKH as a legal entity can be managed and coordinated, including arrangements for the distribution of any remaining EKH assets to four councils after 30 September 2020 .
- 7.2 The partners have maintained a transition risk register to ensure that key risks are identified and mitigated. Key risk areas identified relate to:
 - Staffing arrangements and recruitment.
 - ICT
 - Statutory compliance.

Mitigating actions are identified in each of these areas and progress is regularly monitored and reviewed.

- 7.3 The financial implications of the transition to an in-house service for Thanet were set out in the report to Cabinet on 30 July 2020, when it was agreed to recommend revised service budgets to the full council. The council and its partners also need to ensure that EKH remains financially stable and viable throughout the transition period and able to provide effective services to tenants and leaseholders up until 30 September 2020.

8. Post Go Live

- 8.1 Section 3, above indicates that the services provided by EKH will remain largely unchanged on 1 October, when the new in-house service launches. However the rationale for the decision to bring the service back in house and terminate the arrangement with EKH was the widespread dissatisfaction with services provided by EKH and in particular reported failures in relation to tenants and leaseholder health and safety.
- 8.2 The original options report on the future of EKH, presented to Cabinet on 17 October 2019 concluded that bringing the service back in house provided the council with the best opportunity to improve service quality and tackle identified service failures.
- 8.3 As well as including additional resources to support enhanced service delivery, the new service structure will include dedicated service improvement officers, who will support the development and implementation of an service improvement plan, including working with the Resident Involvement Manager to ensure that tenants and leaseholders are involved in work to identify the priority areas for improvement and to develop detailed action plans. This will include the development of a new performance management framework for the service, focused on the key performance issues agreed with tenants, leaseholders and elected members.

Contact Officer:	Bob Porter, Director of Housing and Planning
Reporting to:	Tim Willis, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer

Annex List

None	N/A
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Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
None	N/A

Corporate Consultation

Finance	Tim Willis, Deputy Chief Executive
Legal	Tim Howes Corporate Director - Governance