

Potential Service Re-Prioritisation

Brief Explanations

1. Tenant Incentive/Reward and Recognition

As part of the housing services improvement agenda a range of incentives aimed at improving efficiency/performance and ensuring tenants adhere to tenancy conditions need to be introduced. These incentives will be joint developed with tenant representatives themselves (from N-Tact). Examples of incentives will be: -

- 25/25 incentive – allowing pre-termination access – this will significantly contribute to improved performance of key BVPI 212 (top priority for NBC). In addition the undertaking of a satisfaction/exit survey will allow us to collect and analyse qualitative data about reasons why people are leaving which will assist the service to plan future sustainment plans and also demonstrates commitment of a “spend to save” nature.
- Maximising “take –up” of Direct Debits - the new IBS system, which is due to go live in April 2007 provides the Housing Service with an opportunity to accept direct debit as a form of payment towards rent. Encouraging existing tenants to change their current preferred method of payment will require some form of initial incentive to obtain maximum “sign-up”. It is envisaged that the introduction of Direct Debits will significantly contribute to improving Rent income BVPIs which are currently in the bottom quartile, allowing staff to concentrate resources on other priority areas.
- “Golden Goodbyes” – it is generally considered as current best practice within the housing profession to have some form of “golden goodbye “ incentive. This is a one-off payment to a tenant who must satisfy certain conditions at the point when vacant possession is given to the Council as the landlord (e.g. property left clear and tidy, rent payments up-to-date etc). This incentive again links in with the “spend to save “ philosophy, as less expenditure at the time of the property inspection will result.
- Under-occupation incentives – There is a significant shortage of general family sized accommodation (i.e. 3 – 4 bedroomed properties), available to house an ever-increasing number of families on the housing register. Incentives will need to be offered to encourage single people/couples who are currently “under-occupying” their present property to move into smaller accommodation.

- Rent Payment/Community Chests – there are a range of other incentives that we will be looking to develop in 2007/08 to ensure tenants comply with their tenancy agreement and which will assist in various community initiatives – e.g. prize draws for those tenants with a clear rent account etc.

2. Housemark/Housing Quality Network

In order for the housing service to deliver improved outcomes and performance in addition to accelerating the pace of change required, it is essential that we keep abreast of current national and local good practice affecting our service provision and that we are able to benchmark our current services in terms of value for money, efficiency and performance. To achieve this, membership of professional benchmarking clubs provides a valuable tool in comparing a range of factors with peer organizations and the ability to learn and adopt good practice from better performing and more effective organisations is viewed as an essential element of the 'prospect for improvement' criteria outlined by the Audit Commission. The annual cost of Housemark amounts to 10k and other membership costs of additional professional bodies equates to 3-4k per annum.

3. Tenants Handbook (set-up costs)

The 25k projected for 2007/08 represents all costs associated with the publication of a Tenants handbook in April 2007. The handbook is currently 150-160 pages long will be sent to all 12,000+ tenants (in addition to new tenants after the publication date) and again is evidence of best practice within the profession. The continuing absence of a handbook for tenants has been an area of concern for the Audit Commission. There will be on-costs associated with the handbook after the publication and this will be in the form of regular amendments.

4. Service Training Budgets

Although there is a corporate budget for training it was felt that there should be a service specific budget for future training and development of staff. As part of our service improvement agenda it is imperative that we undertake a number of reviews which will result in re-engineering business processes in order to deliver change and a more effective / better performing service and the re-training and development of staff will be a key factor in achieving success. A specific housing service training budget will enable Service Managers to have more influence in determining the most appropriate training required to ensure that staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to deliver a professional service that meets customer needs.

5. N-Tact Mystery Shopping

Following the recent publication of the Housing service standards to all 12,000 + tenants it is crucial to have a process of independent assessment and evaluation of the nature, quality and effectiveness of the standards that have been set. Mystery shopping is an ideal way for our standards and our ability to meet the targets contained therein to be assessed and the recipients of our service (i.e. our tenants) should be the people involved in the monitoring and assessment of our activities. The recent tenant Involvement strategy and the tenant involvement pledge both

contain numerous references to mystery shopping exercises. Again, this will be a plus point for any future Audit Commission inspection, as it constitutes best practice. The budget will include training and literature connected with this process.

6. Mediation Service

A mediation service was introduced in October 2006 for two-year period .The annual costs, as part of the current contract amount to 17.5 – 18 k per annum and we need to ensure that there is sufficient funding during 2007/08 and part of 2008/09. There has been a raft of legislation in recent years, which have given Local Authority Housing Depts more tools to deal with ASB in an effective manner. The use of a mediation service is widely acknowledged as a valuable preventative tool to assist with the reduction of ASB.

7. Translation Service

Current provision – to continue

8. Satisfaction Survey

Housing services need to know and values the views and opinions of its customers. In order to continually improve outcomes, we need to gauge views and opinions concerning a range of service issues and over the next 3 years there will a range of surveys and information-gathering exercises conducted in order to achieve this.

9. Advertising Rent Income

Current provision – to continue

10. Ombudsman Complaints

Required for compensation/"time and trouble" payments – Housing Services, as a major front-line service receive a high level of comments and complaints. A culture shift is required within the service area whereby complaints are used as an effective learning tool and pro-actively utilised to improve the service. Effective complaint handling also determines that you admit when the service has got it wrong but takes steps to ensure that similar incidents do not re-occur.