

**JOINT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY TRANSITION – HOUSING TASK GROUP
2ND DECEMBER 2008**

HOUSING SERVICES SUPPORT FOR AREA BOARDS

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide members with information concerning the new Housing Service's involvement with and support for area boards in the new council.

Action Required of the Task Group

2. To note this information update.

Background

3. A key Commitment of the one council bid is to set up Area Boards across Wiltshire. At the moment there are a number of pilots taking place and the exact number of boards is not yet known. This will depend on the outcome of Boundary Commission reviews but is likely to be between 17 and 20.
 - a. Decision making They will have real and wide ranging powers: power to take local decisions - power to shift budgets to reflect local priorities - power to challenge local service standards - power to call other public service providers to account and much more. They will be challenged to deliver improvements in their area and they will be clearly accountable for their successes and failures.
 - b. Who will take the decisions? The new councillors will take local council decisions, but they will not do that alone. They will sit alongside parish and town councillors, the police, health and other service providers and community partners. Sometimes the issues will be passed on to the parish or local community to decide for themselves. The boards will involve and engage local people in the process.
 - c. Handbook A new handbook is currently being developed to help give a clear framework as to how the new boards will function

How will housing get involved?

4. It is anticipated that many of the issues that are seen as important at an area level will not directly involve housing. However it is anticipated that housing activity may be part of the solution on some issues. For example problems concerning anti social behaviour may involve work by the police,

public protection, community safety and housing. It may not be necessary for a housing officer to attend every board meeting in every area, but we will ensure that we are present when we are required and that we are available in between meetings to work through local issues with board members.

Service Director

5. It has recently been proposed that Service Directors should engage with specific boards. That is, each board should have its own service director that it can work with as the key senior officer. The Directors will not be there to represent their own service area, but will attend on behalf of corporate management. As the Service Director for Housing, I support this approach and will be very happy to work in support of a specific board.

Locality Manager

6. The Housing Service will have six Heads of Service and each of these will be expected to engage with approximately three area boards. They will do this on behalf of the housing service as a whole. They will be known as housing locality managers, and in addition to their main thematic role, they will also be responsible for taking a housing overview of the areas for which they are responsible. Consequently if an area board wishes to consider a number of housing issues, say, homelessness and affordable housing, it does not have to invite housing officers from each activity, simply the housing locality manager. It is anticipated that to be a locality manager for three areas and attend every board and partnership meeting could be quite onerous for a locality manager. Therefore the locality managers will be asked to ensure that a member of the housing team is able to attend on the occasions when the locality manager is not available.

Housing Reps

7. In section 4 it was pointed out that a housing locality manager may not always be available for every board and partnership meeting. Therefore other members of staff such as housing advisors will be encouraged to attend meetings and also act as a communications route between boards and the housing service.

Front Line Staff involvement

8. A very practical way in which all housing staff can support the areas is by providing direct work on their key projects. It is proposed that staff throughout housing be encouraged and permitted by their manager to spend one day out per year on a community based project. This could be and probably should be something that is not connected with the day job but relates to a specific labour intensive project, e.g. painting the community centre, or clearing a footpath. Boards would be encouraged to bid for "Community Awayday" time and Locality managers would then put together a team of staff to work on each project.

Other housing links to Area Boards and Partnerships

9. It should also be noted that external housing organisations such as the larger housing associations will have a keen interest in being involved with the boards and partnerships and will want to send reps along to the meetings. In addition, tenants of both the new council and the RSLs will want to take part at an area level.

Recommendation

10. That the above proposals for area involvement of housing services be noted.

Graham Hogg, Director of Housing