



## **Halton Housing Trust Report to Halton Borough Council Progress Assessment & Position Statement: May 2008**

### **1 Purpose**

- 1.1 This report is presented to provide a position statement 2½ years following the transfer of the Council's housing stock to Halton Housing Trust (HHT). It provides an update on progress following the earlier position statements given to the Council in accordance with the monitoring framework agreed prior to transfer.
- 1.2 The report identifies progress made in the establishment of both the Trust and the delivery of its key service areas.

### **2 Pledges to Customers**

- 2.1 Good progress has been maintained in the delivery of the 100 pledges made in the 'Offer Document to Tenants'. Progress is monitored against each pledge with a designated manager identified to ensure each pledge is delivered and progress to date recorded.
- 2.2 The pledges range from those that were achieved at transfer (such as security of tenure and the maintenance of rights including the Right to Buy) as well as others, which relate to investment, which can potentially be across a 30 year period.
- 2.3 Regular summary updates of progress are reported in the customer newsletter "Haltonhousing". A detailed monitoring report is also formally reported to the Trust's Board, the Housing Corporation and internally through the Trust's management team.

2.4 The current position is:

- 69 pledges have been met
- 29 pledges are in progress
- 2 pledges have yet to be commenced
- There are no pledges behind schedule or where the targets have been missed.

### **3 Investment Programme**

3.1 Delivery of the Investment Programme is progressing well, with all four partners reaching their optimum capacity. In 2007/08 investment of over £15.4 million in our homes delivered:

- Over 1,000 new kitchens
- 952 new bathrooms
- 1,294 electrical upgrades
- Over 100 rewires
- 4,200 loft insulations
- 5,668 new double glazed windows
- 2,400 external works/improvements

3.2 By March 2008 over 5,000 properties had some form of either internal or external works completed. Customer satisfaction with the programme is currently averaging well in excess of 90% and the quality of the work is achieving similar performance levels.

3.3 In 2008/09 the Trust will invest a further £18m in improving our customer's homes. This is broken down as shown in the following table

<b>Programme for April 2008 – March 2009</b>		
	<b>Properties</b>	<b>Spend (£ M)</b>
Internal Works	1,553	10.2
External Works	945	2.4
Windows	1,374	1.7
Other/Acceleration	N/A	3.7
<b>Total</b>		<b>18 million</b>

3.4 The Trust's Board have recently approved the acceleration of our investment programme. This will mean we are able to deliver our investment programme approximately 12 months ahead of schedule at no additional cost. This will ensure the Trust not only meets the Decent Homes Standard but more importantly exceeds this through the delivery of the Halton Standard as specified by our customers.

3.5 To date the Trust has recovered £3.2m of VAT incurred on the investment programme through the VAT Shelter arrangement. A further £3.0m is due to be recovered during 2008/09, which will result in an estimated payment to the Council of £1.5m. As outlined in the Transfer Agreement the Trust would welcome further discussions with the Council to explore any housing projects the VAT receipts could be used for.

## **4 Inspection**

4.1 The Trust has recently completed its first housing inspection. This was undertaken by the Audit Commission during the week commencing 12<sup>th</sup> May 2008. This is arguably the biggest single test as well as opportunity the Trust has faced since its creation. Work has already been ongoing in the form of our six corporate priorities to prepare for this.

4.2 The scope of the inspection covered:

- *Tenancy and Estate Management* – with a clear emphasis upon the voids and ASB elements including front end lettings (sign up) and voids standards, ASB, grounds maintenance, estate services, communal areas, security and environmental standards
- *Stock Investment and Asset Management* – including investment programme, response repairs, aids and adaptations, voids and gas
- *Value for Money* – benchmarking costs, procurement, partnerships, longer term direction, cost vs. quality of services and customer involvement in decision making process
- *Access and Customer Care* – telephone, customer contact points (including reception areas), email and letter responses, website, Enquiries, Complaints and Compliment's (ECC's), service standards, satisfaction, customer involvement and publications
- *Diversity* – use of customer profiling data, tailoring services to individual needs and Housing Code of Practice compliance
- *Housing Income Management* – including current and former customer arrears, rechargeable repairs, leaseholder and service charges, shops and garages and sundry debtors
- *Prospects for Improvement* – assessing our plans for future improvements and track record of delivery underpinned by an effective performance management framework

4.3 The Trust communicated the inspection process to a cross section of key stakeholders. A number of key stakeholders were supportive throughout the process and a particular note of thanks to the Council for their role and positive support.

4.4 The inspection built upon the previous progress made by the Trust in the delivery of the Service Improvement Plan (SIP) which was developed following the Baseline Service Review undertaken shortly after transfer in May 2006.

- 4.5 The original SIP detailed 679 weaknesses. Following a comprehensive review this number was reduced to 527. This was through removal of areas of duplication and one off items covered elsewhere. At 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 good progress has been made in meeting the targets in the SIP:
- All 88 short term wins have been achieved
  - 133 of 154 medium term wins identified have been achieved
  - 15 of the 47 long terms wins have been successfully achieved. The remainder of the long term wins are on target for completion by the end of August 2008
- 4.6 The headline feedback from the Inspection team has been:
- Recognition of real and substantial change across the organisation
  - A customer focused culture across our services – access to services, information for customers and the delivery processes
  - Enthusiastic, positive and committed staff
  - A number of positive messages on the leadership role of the Board and senior managers
- 4.7 The Trust has provided the Audit Commission with a good statement of our position and our plans for the future. The Inspection Team have commented upon the self awareness and honesty with which we approached the whole process.
- 4.8 The draft report and score is due to be issued during June 2008. The Trust then has 10 working days following receipt of the draft report to submit its formal response. The report is then finalised and shared with the Trust in July 2008. It is anticipated that the report will be published during August 2008.
- 4.9 As part of our ongoing approach to be a transparent and open organisation, the Trust will ensure the Council is kept fully updated as

the inspection process progresses. As a key partner, arrangements have also been made to ensure the Council receives a full copy of the inspection report prior to publication.

## **5 Corporate Plan**

5.1 The first Corporate Plan for the Trust focussed upon the first 2 years of the organisation. As this expires at the end of 2008 work has now commenced on the development of the Corporate Plan for 2009 onwards.

5.2 A Project Plan has been agreed by the Trust's Board. This includes a clear emphasis to enable the Plan to be developed with an increased emphasis upon wider consultation with a cross section of our customers and stakeholders.

5.3 The new Corporate Plan will focus on the role and remit of the Trust post the delivery of its investment programme.

## **6 Annual Review**

6.1 The Trust has just published its annual review for 2007/08. This is in the process of being circulated to all customers, key stakeholders and Councillors. This provides a useful summary of some of the key achievements by the Trust over the last year.

## **7 Housing Corporation Regulatory Compliance**

7.1 The Housing Corporation as Lead Regulator for Housing Associations is taking a keen interest in the development of the Trust. Since transfer the Trust has received regular regulatory visits to assess progress against the Regulatory Code.

- 7.2 The Housing Corporation is due to publish the Trust's second Housing Corporation Assessment in autumn 2008. This has been delayed to take account of the outcomes from the inspection by the Audit Commission.
- 7.3 The Trust has commissioned an external review of our Performance Information (PI) collection processes. This has ensured they are externally validated and provide confidence in the accuracy of the reported data.
- 7.4 The assessment measures the extent to which housing associations manage their business effectively across three main areas; these are whether the organisation is financially viable, properly governed and properly managed. An appropriate traffic light colour is then allocated. The Trust has previously been assessed as having three green traffic lights for all three areas.

## **8 Governance Update**

- 8.1 It is a requirement of the Trust's constitution that there is a regular review of the membership of the Board. The Board is made up of 5 customers, 5 independents and 5 nominees from the Local Authority.
- 8.2 At the next AGM in September 2008, 3 of the longest serving customer Board Members and 2 of the longest serving independent Board Members are required to retire from the Board. Both the election and recruitment processes are due to commence imminently. In addition the Trust will also be recruiting for 1 independent Board Member following a resignation earlier in the year.

- 8.3 Customer Board Members are appointed through an election process (the customers retiring from the Board can stand for re-election). A leaflet is due to be sent to all our customers advising them of these opportunities and drop in sessions are being held at a variety of locations over the next few weeks so that customers can find out in more detail what being a Board Member actually involves.
- 8.4 Independent Board Members are selected by a recruitment process (the retiring Board Members can apply to come back on to the Board).
- 8.5 As part of the continued development of the Trust's governance arrangements, a skills analysis has been undertaken. The recruitment process will seek to ensure these skills gaps are filled.
- 8.6 The Board now has a well established Committee structure, which allows devolution of the more detailed governance reviews to a Customer Services Committee and a Resources Committee. Separately there is an Audit, Performance and Quality Committee, which receives reports from Internal and External Auditors.
- 8.7 One of the pre-transfer pledges agreed with customers prior to the Trust going live, was to establish two area committees. These were to consist of six customers, two elected members and two independents. These committees, which became known as Halton Housing Community Voice (HHCV), were set up as part of the Trust's wider commitment to customer involvement. They were aimed at providing customers with an opportunity to be involved in the management of services through participation in the development of new policies, consideration of requests for funding from community groups and in the review of performance information.



- 8.8 Further consultation with customers indicated that they wanted three committees to be set up to mirror the Trust's Area Housing teams. The first Committee was established in May 2006 in Widnes East. This Committee first met in May 2006. There have been five subsequent meetings, all of which have been poorly attended.
- 8.9 The Trust has tried on numerous occasions to recruit for the two remaining committees for Widnes West and Runcorn. This has utilised a variety of approaches including advertisements, posters, flyers, targeted recruitment letters to Tenants and Resident Associations, our Customer Panel and advertisements at our Customer Conference. Although this recruitment drive generated some limited interest we were unsuccessful in recruiting sufficient members to establish the two remaining committees.
- 8.10 In response, members of the Widnes East HHCV recommended that it be expanded to cover the whole of the borough. The Trust's Customer Services Committee approved this recommendation in January 2007. The recommendation also included that the venue for HHCV meetings be rotated around the borough. It also increased the membership of the one committee to nine customers, 3 elected members and 3 independents. Once again the Trust made determined efforts to recruit to the revamped Committee. Despite this, levels of customer attendance have continued to be low with no more than eight customers in attendance. Clearly this has meant that the HHCV model has not achieved the intended outcomes.
- 8.11 Clearly this was not a situation that could continue indefinitely. The structure and format of HHCV has been considered by the Trust's Governance Review Working Group. This Group includes two customer Board Members. A decision has been taken in consultation

with the existing HHCV members to replace HHCV with a customer steering group.

- 8.12 The intention is that this new group will hold a number of the same responsibilities as HHCV's including the consideration and approval of Tenant and Resident Association grant requests (from a budget of £2.5k), the monitoring of performance and the review of new policies. In addition the new steering group will have a budget of £10k for 2008/09 to be spent on environmental improvements. The composition of this new group will be comprised of Trust customers. The first meeting of this new steering group will take place in early June 2008.
- 8.13 The Trust's customers have been instrumental in shaping these new arrangements. This revised structure reflects their preferences for customer involvement at this level and forms a key part of the Trust's revised Customer Involvement Strategy approved by our Board in December 2007.
- 8.14 The possibility for Board Member remuneration is a relatively new option. Whilst it is left to the discretion of each Housing Association as to how it proceeds on this matter, the Housing Corporation expects that the issue is properly debated and considered by each organisation. Clearly if there are difficulties in recruiting or retaining skilled and experienced Board Members, there might be a case for introducing such payments. However, there can be a range of other factors which need to be considered.
- 8.15 Following an independent external review the Board has decided to defer remuneration until such a time when a business case can be made to remunerate the whole Board.

## **9 Access to Services**

- 9.1 In October 2007, the Trust began a customer profiling exercise alongside our STATUS Survey. As at April 2008 profiling information has been collected for 47% of our customer base (i.e. not just the named tenant).
- 9.2 A project plan has been developed to increase the profiling data to 85% of our customers by June 2008. We have already started to use this information to tailor the delivery of services to customers with particular needs and will be extending its use to ensure we have accurate representation in customer involvement activities and the decision-making process of the Trust.
- 9.3 Over the next 6 months the Trust will be using the customer profiling data to further develop and widen representation and involvement from a cross-section of our customer base. The overall purpose being to ensure that the type and subsequent delivery of services truly reflects our customers' needs
- 9.4 Our Customer Handbook, which is currently being hand delivered to every home provides useful information about all our services. The handbook has been devised in collaboration with customers and is supported by a suite of leaflets available at all of the Trust's access points and online. Our website has also been substantially overhauled and now provides a range of services and useful information
- 9.5 Office opening times have been changed in line with customer consultation. Further work is planned to ensure customers are still satisfied and to assess the demand for evening and weekend openings. Offices have improved facilities including toilets and play

facilities. All Trust offices are DDA compliant. Access is also available through the Halton Borough Council Direct Link offices.

- 9.6 Arrangements are in place to increase the face to face contact staff have with customers and to increase their presence on estates. This has included an increased use of home visits and participation on estate based events such as the arrears blitzes and the regular programme of estate walkabouts. Our Construction Services Team has been restructured around the three housing management areas. This has improved the sense of ownership in each area, improved performance levels and comparisons between teams, and reduced travelling time/ journeys.
- 9.7 Involvement opportunities are clearly communicated to customers. A series of leaflets are in place, which set out the opportunities to become involved. New customer visits are used to promote opportunities and to identify if people are willing to become involved. The newsletters clearly publicises the opportunities to become involved and to provide feedback.
- 9.8 Improvements have been made to improve access via the telephone system. Customers are provided with direct dial numbers for officers and their local office through any communication. Clear protocols are in place for the use of voicemail, with all staff trained on the system. Changes to the telephone system have been made in response to customer feedback. Customers highlighted the need to reduce the number of options available to them.
- 9.9 The Trust is due to use the customer profiling information to consult with our customers who currently under occupy our larger homes. The results from this will then be used to inform our longer term

regeneration and development plans, which are due to be considered by the Board in November 2008.

## **10 Environmental Issues**

10.1 The Trust recognises that to create and support vibrant and attractive communities it is essential to work in partnership with customers and key partners, providing neighbourhoods where people feel safe and where they want to contribute to the long term sustainability of their community. In each community a dedicated Housing Officer is supported by identified staff within the lettings, income recovery, estate services and construction services teams providing continuity, detailed local knowledge and a customer-centred approach.

10.2 Housing Officers hold regular scheduled estate walkabouts to ensure that any estate management issues can be picked up and resolved immediately. A standard inspection form is completed and all those present on the walkabout receive a copy of the completed pro-forma indicating what issues were identified, what action needs to be taken and who is responsible for delivery and by when. Improvements made include repairs to communal areas and improvements to communal entrances. A small budget has been made available for each Housing Officer from April 2008 to assist in addressing small scale environmental issues identified on these walkabouts, which will assist in addressing customers concerns and low level Anti Social behaviour (ASB) issues.

10.3 The Trust holds an Annual Clean Up Day involving staff at all levels from across the organisation. The aim has been for HHT to roll up its sleeves and focus its resources, in conjunction with customers, to make a real impact in specific neighbourhoods. Examples are: to clear litter, board up empty garages, paint out graffiti, remove weeds, plant

flower beds address fly tipping and renew fencing panels. The next Clean Up Day is scheduled for September 2008 and we are looking to coordinate this with the National Clean Up Campaign and any initiatives being run by Halton BC.

- 10.4 Local staff have worked closely with the Council and customers on alley gating schemes across the borough in order to design-out crime and reduce incidences of ASB. From 2008/09 the Trust has also introduced a locally devolved estate budget of £10,000. This will allow Housing Officers to draw on resources to target hot spot issues on their patch and address environmental issues such as tree pruning, bulb planting and minor gate repairs. The newly formed Customer Forum which replaces the HHCV's will have the final decision on how this money is spent.
- 10.5 The next stage of this process is to introduce mini Neighbourhood Action Plans. These will apply the learning from the Neighbourhood Management Pilots across the Borough
- 10.6 The Trust has also undertaken a number of initiatives with other partners. A recent example was the garage raids in conjunction with Cheshire Police. The operation involved searching around 180 garages and involved around 30 people. The Trust was keen to reassure the local community that positive action was being taken.
- 10.7 The garages were identified in consultation with the local housing associations and also via information received from the local community. The aim of the operation was to enter the garages either using keys or through forced entry in order to search and recover any items from inside that may have been unlawful or stored without authority. As a result of the searches a variety of property was recovered and seized

- 10.8 On 27th May 2008 to coincide with European Neighbours' Day the Trust launched a number of awards for customers who have made a positive contribution to their community. The awards also recognise "good neighbours" who have acted in a positive way to help other groups and individuals within their community.
- 10.9 Trust customers are currently being urged to nominate their neighbours for the awards, as long as they meet the specified criteria in each category. The deadline for nominations is 1st November 2008 and there is a £100 prize as an incentive.
- 10.10 The Neighbourhood Awards are a positive way of increasing a sense of local pride amongst our customers, whilst also helping to improve neighbourhoods at the same time. Not only do these awards promote good neighbourhood relations and community cohesion but they also encourage our customers to become good neighbours all year round.
- 10.11 The Awards are divided into four categories - Good Neighbour Award, Community Award, Youth Award and Taking a Stand Award. In order to nominate a good neighbour, customers must first ensure that they meet all the specified criteria in each category.
- 10.12 Estate management is delivered through an enhanced landscaping contract, which the Trust currently has with the council. This service is currently being reviewed will be subject to a competitive procurement process in October 2008.
- 10.13 Groundwork Merseyside has been commissioned to complete a series of Environmental Estate Action Plans in our neighbourhoods, consulting with customers about environmental improvements they would like to see for their areas. In some areas some 'quick wins'

works have been undertaken in response to the findings, such as at Clapgate Crescent.

10.14 Our estate services team provides a dedicated cleaning and caretaking service to the communal areas of our blocks of flats. In conjunction with Construction Services, this enables the Trust to respond quickly to any issues of concern. The recent acquisition of our new van fleet has also enabled the Trust to increase the visibility of our on site repairs and estate services teams.

10.15 In response to one of the issues raised at the last Executive Board Monitoring Report, the Trust has been developing a range of increasingly environmentally sensitive working practices across all aspects of our work. These include a dedicated recycling facility at Foundry Lane; Clean Up Days; reduced paper and printing working practices; and a full independent assessment of the Trust's carbon footprint by The Carbon Trust.

## **11 Community Investment**

11.1 The Trust has established an annual budget to support/sponsor local community/sports projects.

11.2 This funding enables the Trust to have contact with groups in the local community with whom it would not normally have a relationship with. However a number of these provide support and offer services of the benefit of Trust customers. For example, the sponsorship of a local sports group which in turn enables the Trust to embrace and involve customers including harder to reach groups i.e. young people.

11.3 During 2006/07 and 2007/08 an annual budget of £3,000 was made available for this purpose. Recognising the increasing demand for the



community fund the Trust has increased the annual budget to £4,000 for 2008/09.

- 11.4 In addition the Trust's funders Lloyds TSB agreed as part of the long term financing agreement that they would donate £100,000 to the Trust. The Board agreed that the £100k would be split over four years with an annual allocation of £25k.

## **12 Enquiries, Complaints and Compliments Process**

- 12.1 This process was introduced at the point of transfer. Its purpose is to ensure that there is transparency and consistency in the way that complaints are dealt with.

- 12.2 Although the system has worked well there is always room for improvement and so the Trust undertook a review of the process in 2007. The changes introduced were to ensure the system is easy to access and that the Trust resolves concerns raised at the earliest available opportunity.

- 12.3 The revised policy and procedures were launched with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2008. The main changes include:

- Establishment of a dedicated Enquiries, Complaints and Compliments Officer (Cath Owens)
- Mandatory home visit for each complaint
- In line with guidelines issued by the Housing Ombudsman the Trust will not consider complaints where our customers are aware of the issue for over 12 months
- Only in exceptional circumstances will an appeal be accepted where this has been submitted outside the 28 day deadline

- Any complainants whose behaviour or actions are not in accordance with the Trust's Customer Code of Conduct will be deemed to be unacceptable and may be excluded or conditions placed on the complaint being pursued through the complaint process. This decision will be made by or in consultation with the Chief Executive or a Director.
- If at any stage the Trust feels our complaints process has been exhausted, we will refer our customers to the Housing Ombudsman
- The Chief Executive or Director may use discretion to fast track a complaint to any stage of the complaints procedure, if the particular circumstances of a complaint are deemed to merit this action

12.4 Improvements have been made to the internal processes to capture and share the learning outcomes from complaints received. The Trust has also recently launched a customer suggestion scheme and customer and employee recognition schemes to encourage and increase the availability and use of informal feedback mechanisms.

12.5 A series of further enhancements are scheduled from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2008. The Trust is currently evaluating the feasibility of developing the Customer Service Module (CSM) for the Academy system. A detailed project plan has been developed to take into account the work involved and the intensive training requirement in advance of the launch of this new system. Furthermore the launch will coincide with the amendment of the Policy to take account of any feedback arising from the recent housing inspection.

### **13 Joint Working**

13.1 The Trust continues to develop its strategic role across Halton. We contribute to the borough's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and

actively contribute to the work of the LSP Board. In practical terms we contribute to local initiatives on homelessness, crime and disorder, health and employment and to the Neighbourhood Management pilot schemes. We also chair the Halton Housing Partnership Board, help to deliver the Council's Housing Strategy and ensure there is a housing input and gain from other key decision-making groups.

13.2 The Trust continues to be an active member of various strategic bodies working across Halton on matters related to more vulnerable members of the community. Examples include the Children and Young People's Alliance Board, the Equalities and Cohesion Group, Youth Inclusion Support Panel and the Safer Halton Partnership Board

13.3 The Trust has taken a lead strategic responsibility for the development of a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Scheme within the Borough. The move towards a CBL Scheme enhances the level of choice that can be achieved, can lead to increased stability of communities and longer term cohesion. It is anticipated that CBL will be introduced with effect from April 2009.

## **14 Priorities for 2008/09**

14.1 The Corporate Plan and the Corporate Priorities that flow from this are the primary basis against which the Trust allocates resources – both financial and staffing. The Corporate Priorities are set at the same time as the budget and business planning process to ensure these are the primary basis against which resources are determined

14.2 To underpin the practical delivery of the Corporate Plan, each year the Trust agrees a series of Corporate Priorities. These ensure the Plan and the Themes are reflective and responsive to real time challenges facing the organisation. In order to achieve this, 6 core priorities have

been agreed for 2008-09. These are included as Appendix 1 to this report.

## **15 Homelessness**

15.1 The Trust has continued to work with the Council to look at ways to improve the accessibility and quality of homelessness services. This has included an increased emphasis upon preventative initiatives.

15.2 The process review undertaken by the Trust at the Council's request prompted a more fundamental review and internal challenge of the homelessness service provided by the Trust under contract to the Council.

15.3 The review led to the Trust agreeing to transfer the homelessness service and the management of Grangeway Court back to the Council. This is currently in progress with transitional arrangements in place to safeguard existing service levels and is anticipated to be completed by late summer 2008.

15.4 The Trust will continue to manage the nominations and Council's waiting list under contract.

## **16 Adaptations**

16.1 The Trust has been a strong advocate of the approach adopted by the Council in developing an increasingly strategic approach to the delivery of adaptations across the borough. This underpins over £1m invested by the Trust in adaptations for its customers since transfer.

16.2 There is a clear commitment from the Trust to continue to work in close partnership with the Council to ensure we deliver further enhancements

and value for money across this key service area. The Trust also recognises the significant capital allocation the Council has made within its budget for 2008/09 for RSL adaptations. This will make a significant impact upon the existing backlogs and address some of the issues identified within the Housing Needs Survey.

## **17 Accommodation**

17.1 In January 2008 the Trust successfully completed the relocation of Construction Services from Lowerhouse Lane to their new base at Foundry Lane. This signalled the completion of the review of our accommodation and working requirements.

17.2 The next stage is to develop an increasingly mobile approach to the delivery of our services. This will include a heavy emphasis on taking services out to the communities in which our customers live and work. The Trust in conjunction with the Council has already had some early thoughts and discussion on how multi agency services could be delivered using increasingly mobile solutions and facilities.

## **18 Customer First**

18.1 The Trust has invested £250k in an extensive Customer First Programme. This Programme spans 20 months and involves all members of the Trust's staff, Board and key partners.

18.2 The programme is split into three interrelated streams: equality and diversity; customer service; and management development. By adopting an inclusive approach, the Trust can ensure that everyone is aware of the expected standard of delivery of services to its customers. In addition, customers have been consulted on the content of various aspects of the programme and its subsequent procurement to ensure

that it fully reflects customer views and opinions. This also fully takes account of the findings of the Baseline Service Review completed in May 2006.

## **19 Forthcoming Events**

19.1 The Trust has a number of forthcoming events. These include:

- Employee Attitude Survey – May 2008
- Launch of Good Neighbour Awards – May 2008
- Completion of Job Evaluation process – July 2008
- Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey – July 2008
- Clean Up Day – September 2008
- Employee Conference – September 2008
- AGM – 16<sup>th</sup> September 2008
- Customer Roadshow Conferences – late summer/ early autumn 2008
- Veka Bus Roadshows – through out the year

## **20 Service Level Agreements**

20.1 The Trust has continued to review its Service Level Agreements held with the council since the point of transfer. There is a clear expectation upon the Trust to demonstrate value for money in all its procurement decisions.

20.2 The Grounds Maintenance SLA has been extended from December 2007 to October 2008 to allow time for a comprehensive value for money assessment to be undertaken. The Trust is also exploring the potential to jointly procure this service with a number of other RSL's working in the Halton area.

## **21 Environmental Improvement Programme**

- 21.1 The Trust has commissioned Groundwork Merseyside to undertake a series of consultation exercises. This will include all of our customers to enable an informed Environmental Improvement Programme to be developed and delivered. This applies the learning from the approach adopted in devising the Investment Programme and the way in which customers set the Halton Standard, rather than just relying on the Decent Homes Standard. The objective is for Groundwork Merseyside to work with Housing Officers, partners and customers to identify the key environmental improvements that are required for each area.
- 21.2 To ensure every area receives some improvement works it is intended the areas that have not received any improvements to date will benefit from the first phase of environmental works.
- 21.3 The initial process involves consultation at a very local level utilising a variety of methods from door knocking, letter drops and the use of mobile caravans/ road shows. The process also includes the Area Forums.
- 21.4 The borough has been split into four distinct areas and each area will be consulted with in turn until the full exercise is completed. At the end of each phase of consultation an Area Improvement Action Plan is produced. This summarises the views of customers and identifying practical and budgeted delivery proposals. A copy of the consultation programme and associated timescales is included at Appendix 2
- 21.5 The first and second phase of the consultation has been completed. Estate action plans have been developed for each of these phases. Both action plans have identified a number of key issues that

customers were concerned about in relation to the estate environment.

These included:

- Youth nuisance
- Anti social behaviour
- Fly tipping
- Landscaping
- Community Facilities

21.6 In addition customers generally want to see the following issues addressed:

- Fencing, boundary walls & gates
- Off street parking & driveways
- On street parking provision.

21.7 In order for the Trust to address these issues due to the costs associated with these types of works, it will need to explore all options available. This will include those relating to procurement, budgetary provision and delivery.

21.8 Work has commenced on addressing some of the issues that have been identified specifically at the following locations:

- Clapgate Crescent
- Coronation House and Centenary House
- Montgomery Road
- Stewards Avenue

21.9 To date £270,500 has been committed from the environmental improvement budget for the above schemes.

21.10 A commitment was made within the Offer Document to invest £6.7 million up to 2015 carrying out major environmental works and



improvements. Allowing for inflation, this commitment has been increased to £7.7 million. The priorities for individual schemes will be identified following consultation with customers.

21.11 The Trust is also pursuing the potential for match funding opportunities that Groundwork Merseyside maybe able to tap into as the process develops. This will ensure we are able to meet the commitment made to invest £6.7 million up to 2015 carrying out major environmental works and improvements in the Offer Document to our customers.

21.12 Clearly there will be some areas and issues that are identified, which are not the responsibility of the Trust to undertake. In such circumstances we will be working with other agencies and organisations to ensure there is an agreed process to address any priorities identified by our customers.

## **22 Development**

22.1 The Trust has appointed PLUS Housing Group as its development partner. PLUS have completed a review of the fifteen potential development sites identified by the Trust. The results of this review were reported to the Trust's Board in May 2008.

22.2 No firm decisions have been taken as to what and where the Trust should develop. A further report will be considered by the Trust's Board in November 2008 following some initial exploratory work into land suitability and demand issues. The Trust is also utilising its customer profiling data to undertake some targeted consultation with customers who currently under occupy their existing home to establish their future preferred housing needs.

## 23 Right to Buy Receipts & Trends

23.1 In reflecting a similar position across the region Right to Buy (RTB) sales have continued to slow down. This has led to the Trust reviewing the sales assumptions contained within its business plan.

23.2 The table below shows the position to date :

Year	Completions	Average Valuation	Average Discount	Average Proceeds
2005/6 (part)	18	£76,756	£24,786	£51,970
2006/7	79	£80,896	£24,826	£56,070
2007/8	35	£82,093	£26,000	£56,093
2008/9 (projected)	27	£86,963	£26,000	£60,963

23.3 During April 2008 the Trust repaid £1.3M of RTB sale proceeds to the Council as per the RTB Sharing Agreement. This is in addition to a previous payment of £2.7M made during April 2007.

## 24 Summary

24.1 The Trust has continued to make strong progress in delivering the promises made prior to transfer. The focus over the first 2½ years has been on establishing the foundations for the organisation.

24.2 As we continue to make improvements to our primary business areas and improving core performance the emphasis is now shifting towards considering our longer term new business growth and development opportunities. This will be underpinned through the continued



development of a stronger customer orientated culture throughout the business.

## 25 Contact

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