



CABINET

30 July 2014

Subject Heading:

ESTATE MANAGEMENT TOPIC GROUP

Cabinet Member:

Councillor Damian White

CMT Lead:

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Policy context:

Estate Management Policy

Financial summary:

There is none associated with this report.

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this a Strategic Decision?

No

When should this matter be reviewed?

N/A

Reviewing OSC:

Towns & Communities

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

Ensuring a clean, safe and green borough	<input type="checkbox"/>
Championing education and learning for all	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing economic, social and cultural activity in thriving towns and villages	<input type="checkbox"/>
Valuing and enhancing the lives of our residents	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Delivering high customer satisfaction and a stable council tax	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

SUMMARY

This report contains the findings and recommendations that had emerged after the Topic Group scrutinised the subject selected by the Committee in July 2013.

The environmental, equalities & social inclusion, financial, legal and HR implications and risks are addressed within the Topic Group's report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

Note the Towns & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee Topic Group findings and recommendations

REPORT DETAIL

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 At its meeting on 4 July 2013, the Towns & Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to start a topic group to scrutinise the Council's Estate Management Services within Homes & Housing.
- 1.2 The membership of the Topic Group was open to all members of the Committee. The following Members participated in the review, Councillors Linda Hawthorn (Chairman), Wendy Brice-Thompson, June Alexander, Paul McGeary and Michael Deon Burton.
- 1.3 The Topic Group met on two occasions and carried out site visits with officers, including Peter Doherty, Housing Services Manager – Homes & Housing, to three council estates in the borough.

2.0 SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

- 2.1 At the initial scoping meeting, Members suggested that the Topic Group should consider the following:
 - To understand the role of a Tenant Liaison Officer or its equivalent.
 - To understand the various inspections that took place on Estates, any that does not take place and the reasons for this.
- 2.2 The following objectives were agreed for the review:
 1. Review of the role of Tenant Liaison Officer/Neighbourhood Officer
 2. To understand more fully the Property Inspection process including Garden Inspections
 3. Assistance for the elderly on garden maintenance
 4. To gain an appreciation of the Housing enforcement process
 5. To undertake a walkabout or site visit with officers

3.0 FINDINGS

- 3.1 At the request of the Committee, the Head of Homes & Housing attended the meeting and provided Members with an insight into the Estate Management Policy. The Committee was informed that the current Council Housing stock stood at about 9,734 tenancies of which 2,251 are leasehold properties.
- 3.2 That Homes & Housing staff main office remained in Chippenham Road and customers had access via the Contact Centre. There were currently 16 tenancy and neighbourhood management officers.
- 3.3 Peter Doherty - Housing Services Manager presented to members of the Topic Group on two sessions giving an insight to the Estate Management Service and staff structure.

Staff restructure in Homes and Housing relating to estate management.

- 3.4 The Topic Group was taken through the restructure in the Homes & Housing Service. It was explained that the rationale for the restructure gave particular emphasis to the changes affecting estates.
- 3.5 There were four managers reporting directly to Sue Witherspoon (Head of Homes and Housing). Of the four, three had a central role in managing the Council's estates; Kevin Hazlewood (Property Services), Peter Doherty (Housing Services) and Marina Crofts (Community Services).
- 3.6 From January 2014 the new role of Community Services Manager (Marina Crofts) would be responsible for managing the Caretaking and Cleaning Services. Peter Doherty would be responsible for managing the Neighbourhood Services Team, which would no longer be undertaking estate inspections. The Neighbourhood Officers would however be taking over responsibility for managing all aspects of anti-social behaviour which would result in the former Anti-Social Behaviour Team being deleted.
- 3.7 Estate Inspections would be undertaken by a new Estate Inspection Team (on one year fixed term contracts – pending the corporate review of Streetcare and Homes and Housing's Estates Services). The Estate Inspection Team was made up of four officers (including one senior officer) and would be responsible for monitoring the estate based contracts and service standards: caretaking and cleaning, grounds maintenance and maintenance (communal repairs). The team would also be responsible for developing a comprehensive estates improvement programme with residents and block representatives.
- 3.8 Given the above changes, the Estate Inspection Team was likely to develop a new approach which would aim to prioritise estate inspections and make better use of staffing resources.

- 3.9 A new Community Engagement Team had been established reporting to Marina Crofts. The team would be responsible for all aspects of resident involvement reflecting the changes made in this area in the new Community Engagement Strategy which replaced the former Resident Involvement Strategy.
- 3.10 The Topic Group was informed that the restructure came in to effect on 5 January 2014.

Estate Inspections' Methodology - Prior to Restructure

- 3.11 The Group was informed that inspection was currently being undertaken on an Ad-hoc basis with the new teams whilst the service established a new process that was envisaged to be in place in April / May 2014.
- 3.12 The estate inspections were presently undertaken by staff within two different teams; the estates service and the tenancy and neighbourhood service.
- 3.13 The Senior Caretakers carried out monthly inspections of internal communal areas and the tenancy and neighbourhood services officers undertook monthly inspections of the external communal areas.

Senior Caretakers

- 3.14 The Senior Caretakers made a manual record of their inspections which were taken back to the Macon Way office and loaded onto a spread sheet by the Administrative Assistant. The assistant raised any required works via the Contact Centre. In addition to checking on the repair condition of the internal areas, the Senior Caretaker checked on the standard of cleanliness and 'scored' this. Again, a manual record was kept of this.

Tenancy and Neighbourhood Services officers

- 3.15 The external communal areas were also 'scored' by the Tenancy and Neighbourhood Services officers during their inspections. They used a handheld device called a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA). The scores were from zero to three and any category scoring zero or one would be reported as a service standard failure needing to be remedied.
- 3.16 A programme was set up on the PDAs to allow staff to score each category of inspection such as grounds maintenance, repairs, lighting, litter, fly tips, abandoned vehicles or sheds. Currently staff had to enter individual blocks onto the PDA rather than just the Estate name. This was considered to be more time consuming than necessary. During an estate inspection they might need to make 20 to 30 separate entries that then needed to be scored for each category.
- 3.17 In addition, the Tenancy and Neighbourhood Services officers carried out monthly inspections of garages and play sites on Council estates. These were also programmed on the PDAs and the same scoring was used.

3.18 Following the estate inspections, the PDA information was down loaded by the officer who would also raise separate requests for repairs via the Contact centre.

Performance Measurement

3.19 There were performance indicators in place to measure the percentage of inspections carried out on time and also the percentage of inspections achieving the target score of one or two.

3.20 Overall, the process was in need of review as improved technology could make the process much more efficient. The new structure had created a dedicated team of inspectors to undertake the whole process. This team would also check the caretaking standards, making it a more independent process.

Topic Group Visits

3.21 The Topic Group visited the following council estates in company of officers from the Homes & Housing Service in order to understand the inspection regime.

1. Milan Square/Bader Way (Mungo Park Estate)
2. Macon Way/Waycross
3. Briar Road

Milan Square / Bader Way

3.22 Members commented positively on the presentation of the estate in particular the resurfacing of the car park that was being completed at the time of the visit and the installation of a new, secure cycle shed with capacity to store up to 25 cycles.

3.23 Members were also impressed with the recently installed play site on the green in the square. Members were informed that a minority of residents had raised objections prior to the facility being installed because they were concerned it might add to the anti-social behaviour that was being experienced in the area. However, following installation a majority of the same residents spoke very positively about the benefits that the play site had brought to the estate.

3.24 A Member enquired as to why all the estates could not have all the same facilities as on this estate. In effect each estate had its own requirements and it did not necessarily follow that all estates would want or would need, for example, a play site. Going forward the new Estate Inspection Team would be working with Block representatives and residents to identify estate improvements and to develop a new process for prioritising such works, funded from the estate improvement budget.

3.25 An internal inspection of the blocks highlighted a number of issues that needed to be addressed.

- Bicycles in the hallway (a Health & Safety concern)
- A mobility cycle parked in a hallway
- Encouraging the use of pram sheds as they seem not to be in use
- Effective use of the drying areas with consideration being given to their development potential

Briar Road

3.26 The Topic Group was very impressed with the new playground that was being installed on Boswell Fields and felt that this would be well received by residents particularly given the number of children living in the vicinity. Members commented more generally on the improvements to Briar Road and its improving reputation which owed much to the work of the Briar Road Action Group (BRAG).

3.27 Some concerns were raised about the parking issues on the estate resulting from the garage redevelopment programme and on the poor lighting of roads and communal areas throughout the estate. There were also a number of vandalised low level light columns on the estate. Members were informed that lighting was going to be part of the general upgrade to communal areas.

3.28 The inspection highlighted that weeding was an issue that particularly needed to be addressed.

Macon Way / Waycross

3.29 Members were impressed with the high standards of grounds maintenance and the cleanliness of the external environment and the internal blocks. A Member praised the caretaker / cleaner working on the estate.

3.30 Members of the Topic Group highlighted the lack of adequate parking spaces available for residents particularly in the evening and weekends. Concerns were also raised regarding access for emergency vehicles due to the parking situation.

3.31 The Topic Group also made comments about the large areas of hard surface that could potentially be used to alleviate the problem but noted that such works would be covered within the parking and garages project being sponsored by the Cabinet Member for Housing.

3.32 A Member also commented on the condition of the playsite, the Group was informed that this was being upgraded as part of this year's environmental improvements.

3.33 The Topic Group's inspection of this estate highlighted the following issues that need to be addressed:

- Two blocks appeared to have been overlooked as part of the internal redecoration programme that took place last year
- Poor drainage on some of the green space areas.

The Topic Group had found the entire review a worthy review to undertake as the exercise had provided them with an insight into the Estate Management Service. Members of the group wished to place on record their appreciation of the support and cooperation from the officers who contributed to the review.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Topic Group make the following recommendations to the Towns and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. That appropriate Homes & Housing officers attend a future meeting of the Committee to provide an update on the work of the new Estate Inspection Team and any other new initiatives.
2. That Homes & Housing undertakes a review of its large unused drying areas to establish whether they could be put to any alternative use e.g. redevelopment purposes.
3. That Homes & Housing addresses the health and safety risks posed by clutter, bikes and mobility scooters in its communal areas.
4. That the Committee be kept informed of progress on the project which is considering the potential areas for integrating Housing caretaking/estates services and Streetcare.
5. To consider whether the large areas of vacant land on some of the estates could be put to better use.

On 8 April the Towns and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee met to consider these recommendations and decided to note the Report of the Topic Group and refer their recommendations to Cabinet.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the course of its review, the Topic Group was supported by the following officers:

Peter Doherty – Housing Services Manager - Homes & Housing
Roy Ojelade – Estate Services Manager
Joan Macro – Housing Officer

REASONS AND OPTIONS

Reasons for the Decision

Under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, s. 122, Cabinet is required to consider and respond to a report of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee within two months of its agreement by

that Committee or at the earliest available opportunity. In this case, Cabinet is required to do this at its meeting on 30 July 2014. Cabinet is also required to give reasons for its decisions in relating to the report, particularly in instances where it decides not to adopt one or more of the recommendations contained within the report.

Alternative Options Considered

There are no alternative options.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial Implications and Risks:

This report makes recommendations that have no direct specific financial implications.

Recommendations 2 and 5 may have the effect of improving the use that specific pieces of land are put to.

Legal Implications and Risks:

There are no apparent legal implications in noting the Report and following the recommendations of the Topic Group.

Human Resources Implications and Risks:

There are no specific Human Resources implications.

Equalities and Social Inclusion Implications and Risks:

This report sets out the recommendations made by the Estate Management Topic Group to the Towns and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee following the completion of a scrutiny review into estate management.

If the recommendations are adopted by the Council, there are no negative equality or social inclusion implications or risks. Recommendation 3 will have a positive impact for disabled residents, as well as families who use prams for babies and young children. This is because it will improve access to communal areas.

The Council will need to have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty if any of the recommendations outlined in the report are adopted.